

# Free Will vs. Ownership

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# Chapter One

## Free Will and God's Sovereignty

I believe this booklet will be helpful in understanding the sovereignty of God and the entire question of free will. Every Christian, it seems, believes that God is sovereign in the universe. On the other hand, man's theology also seems to deny His sovereignty when we question them on the details. God is sovereign, they tell us, yet for whatever reason, God has chosen to relinquish His sovereignty, or His control over His creation, in order to give man a free will.

To complicate matters further, many believe that one of God's top angels decided—by his own free will of course—to overthrow God. This Lucifer, or the devil (according to the commonly held view) was also endowed with a free will, and he convinced other disgruntled angels who were jealous of God or angry with God, for reasons unclear, to join the rebellion. The bottom line is that it is commonly believed that both men and angels have a free will and can sin or not sin by their own decision.

We do see in the Bible that man is told to choose what is right and to shun that which is wrong. Deut. 30:19 says,

**<sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.**

Again, in Joshua 24:15, we read,

**<sup>15</sup> And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**

Man does have a will; there is no question about that. By his will, he is called to make choices. The real question, however, is whether God's will has any influence upon man's will, other than through persuasion.

It is commonly believed that if man has a will at all, then it must be totally free. The problem is that this seems to conflict with what we are told in John 6:44 that no man is able to come to the Father except the Father drag him. Strong's Concordance says that the Greek *helkuo* means "to drag" It is translated in the King James as "draw." John 6:44 says,

**<sup>44</sup> No man can come to me, unless the Father who sent me draws him: and I will raise him up on the last day.**

You will find this same word used in other parts of the Bible, such as John 21:6,

**<sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat, and you will find a catch." They cast therefore, and then they were not able to haul [*helkuo*] it in because of the great number of fish.**

The same idea is expressed when fishermen drag their nets. There are fish in the net, and the fish do not have a whole lot of free will to escape once they are caught in the net. The fish do not know this, but we of higher intelligence know it. You also find this same word in James 2:6,

**<sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you, and personally drag [*helkuo*] you into court?**

Do the rich and powerful oppressors come knocking on your door and say, "You have a choice here. We would like you to come down to our court because we want to sue you." I do not think they give anyone the "free will" option to decline. They put the handcuffs on you and drag you into court. That is the theme in James 2 – it means "to drag." To drag implies that they do not have much free will in the matter. They may fight and scream all they want, but it is not their decision to make. Someone of a higher authority has already made the decision for them, and they are forced to comply. John 12:32 says,

**<sup>32</sup> And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw [*helkuo*] all men unto myself.**

Here, Jesus uses that same word *helkuo*, which means to drag. It does not sound like men have much to say in the matter. In other words, if the expression “to drag” implies the rich and powerful are dragging you into court or the net is dragging fish into the boat, then the ones being dragged are having their “free will” overruled by a higher will. Therefore we can say that if Jesus was lifted up, that is on the cross – which He was – He will drag all men unto Himself just as He said He would do.

So the question is how this relates to the idea of free will. The word “drag” really does not allow much free will. Is there a way to reconcile these statements of God’s sovereign will with those other passages that tell us to choose? We cannot say that the Scriptures conflict. There must be a way to reconcile seemingly contradictory passages such as these.

The position of this book is that man has a will, but that will is not “free” in the accepted sense. Its freedom is subordinate to God’s will. Man’s will has God-given authority, but not sovereignty. The sovereign will of God is more powerful than man’s will. Man’s will is easily manipulated by thousands of factors outside of his control, beginning with the simple fact that he had no choice in being born or into what family, race, nation, or religious view. After that, he is taught by the will of others—his parents in particular. Parental guidance and teaching manipulates the will of the child and shapes it according to the will of the parent.

After this, the child goes to school, where his will is manipulated by teachers and fellow students. Over and beyond all this, there is the coercive will of government who know how to manipulate children to conform to their standard of behavior. The point is that our “free will” is actually the sum total of perhaps millions of manipulations that have lodged in the subconscious mind. These then determine our ability to discern and make decisions throughout life. What we think is “free will” is suddenly not quite as free as we would like to think.

Men’s manipulations are one thing, but what about God’s will in all of this? Does God manipulate us in any manner, or does He remain aloof while men and women do all of the manipulation?

We know that God teaches us and leads us by His Spirit. There are too many examples in the Bible to deny this. When He disciplines us as children, is He not manipulating our will to conform to His will? If the law threatens judgment for disobedience, is this not coercion? Is such coercion not a limitation on the “free will” of man?

If we make decisions based upon limited knowledge, can God not alter our decisions by revelation or a word of knowledge? Saul intended to persecute Christians in Damascus (Acts 9), but then God intervened and gave him knowledge of Himself. This altered his will, and Saul was converted to Christ. God was not aloof that day. He was not helpless in the face of Saul’s “free will.” This raises a serious question: If God could change the heart of Saul by an act of His sovereign will, then why does He not do so with all men? Could He not convert all men to Himself by such a revelation process? After all, the only reason men do not love Jesus Christ is because they do not yet know Him.

It is obvious that God does not reveal Himself to all men as He did with Saul. It is not for us to question God in this, but to try to understand why He reveals Himself to some but not to all. John 6:37 says,

<sup>37</sup> **All that the Father gives Me shall come to me, and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out.**

Whoever the Father has given to Christ will come to Him. How do we know this? Because the will of God is backed up by His power. He is able to do His will in the earth. He is not helpless in the face of man’s will. He is still more powerful, more intelligent, and more sovereign than any man on earth or any spiritual being. His reasons for not revealing Himself to all men in this present age are beyond the scope of this book, but the fact remains that His sovereign will is not at all hampered or hindered by the will of man—not even in the matter of his personal salvation. God could immediately cause all men to be saved by appearing to all men and revealing Himself.

Those who decide to come to Christ by their own “free will” are the people whom the Father has revealed Himself. He reveals Himself to those who have been given to Jesus Christ by the prior will of God. “*All that the Father gives Me shall come to me.*” There is Someone behind the scenes Who has called these people and revealed Himself to them. Therefore their response is, “I want to come to Christ.” They think it is all by their own free will, but yet God has played a hidden role in the background, choosing to remain anonymous.

This does not bypass man's will. It does, however, keep man's will subordinate to the will of God. When God reveals Himself to man, he finds that God is irresistible. He *wants* to believe in such a God, and he then does so by his own human will. His will is not exactly free, but it does exist, and it is a factor.

To use a contrary example, if a man in a remote part of the world has never heard of God, and God does not reveal Himself to that man, it can hardly be said that he rejected God of his own free will. It can be said, however, that God chose not to reveal Himself to that man in this present age. As we have shown in other writings, God will reveal Himself to all men in due time. He has not chosen to burn the majority of men in hell forever, as a hard-core Calvinist would teach. Calvin had some revelation on God's sovereignty, but he did not have the revelation of the restoration of all things. Thus, his teaching was unbalanced and portrayed God as a hard-hearted monster.

Whom God has chosen to reveal Himself, these will in turn choose Him by their own will. God directs their paths so that they will indeed come to Him sooner or later.

Because God does not directly supercede our human will, it is easy for men to think that their will is free. We hold this illusion of free will in our immaturity. Once we begin to grow up and understand who God is, we see that He really is the Sovereign of the universe. Then we begin to understand that our will is merely a response to His will. The more we come to know Him, the more sovereign He seems to become, and the less free our will seems to be.

## **The Theology of Free Will**

So the question becomes, why do men feel the need to question God's sovereignty and establish the idea of their own free will? What is behind this need to question God's sovereignty? What is the motive behind it that is so strong that people feel absolutely obligated to maintain free will, and without it their entire universe falls apart? There are three basic motives for the maintenance of free will among men.

### **Pride**

The first element is human pride and man's need to do something in himself in order to be saved. Man wants God to think that he (man) has come to Him on his own initiative, so that God will be pleased with man's decision. In other words, he says, "*I have some participation in my salvation. It is a cooperative effort between God and me. God can do nothing without me, as much as I can do nothing without God.*"

We hear much about this cooperative effort. Certainly, our will ought to be in agreement with His will. My question is: *Who is it that implanted the idea within our heart to make us cooperate with God?* Could we have done this without some prior act of God? Could we come to God apart from the leading and drawing of the Holy Spirit? I do not believe we could do so. Yet the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to give us the revelation by which our will may "cooperate" with God.

And so, Christian believers have no reason to be *proud* of their decision which they made to follow Christ. Rather, they should have an attitude of *gratefulness* that the Holy Spirit called them. Nor should they be offended if God should call others in the age to come.

### **The Adamic Self-Life**

The second motive behind the idea of free will is that the Adamic *self-life* is still very much alive. The *self-life* wants to maintain itself and survive. It does not want to die. It is the carnal mind, and it uses man's ego to focus upon man. It makes man's will the originator of all his decisions. Man becomes the measure of all things, as philosophers have said. Essentially, at its core it is a humanistic view of the world.

The carnal mind that we received from Adam has a strong sense of self-preservation. It does not want to be crucified with Christ. It wants to live so that it may exercise its will in our lives. The human will is the primary expression of the "old man" (Rom. 6:6). Those who are strongly attached to the idea of "free will" probably do not realize that it is the "old man" that is fighting for its survival. Thus, to deny freedom of expression for the will of man is unthinkable. Yet in reality, such a mindset is a characteristic of carnality, not spirituality.

### **Justifying God in an Evil World**

Thirdly, and perhaps most important for our purposes, the reason for the free will idea is the need to explain the existence of evil in the world in a way that does not make God liable for it. In other words, if God is sovereign (we are asked), then why does He allow all this human suffering to take place? People always bring up all of the terrible

events that happen and continue to happen. If God really were sovereign, then why does He not do something about the world's problems? Surely He cannot be held responsible! Evil men are responsible, not God.

Christian theologians and philosophers have proposed two main solutions to this third question. One group says that they do not really understand God's purpose for evil, but they know that God will work all things out for good (Romans 8:28). In other words, God creates evil (Is. 45:7; Amos 3:6) but always for a good purpose in the end.

The other solution is that God is not really responsible, that it is all caused by mankind and/or the devil who inspires them. This preserves the sovereignty of men or of devils and makes God an observer and helper of mankind when they ask for help.

### **Man's Will Responds to God's Will**

Whoever initiates the action has the greater will. If man must initiate the action and God can only respond to man's prayers, then man's will is greater than God's will. In effect, man manipulates God, and God complies with the will of man. This really comes down to a question of who is God? Is man God? Or is the Creator still God?

But if God initiates the action, and man responds by his human will, then God is still God. But if God is the responder, then man is his own god, and the Creator is his powerful but obedient servant.

Jeremiah had something to say about this: Jeremiah 31:18 says in The Interlinear Bible,

**<sup>18</sup> I have surely heard Ephraim moaning over himself, saying, "You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bull not broken in. Turn me, and I shall be turned, for You are Jehovah my God."**

By the Spirit, Jeremiah compares Ephraim to a bullock plowing a field, as if praying to his master to turn him in another direction. To turn means to repent, to go in another direction. But the bull cannot turn unless the master turns him. In other words, the farmer is the one responsible to turn the bull in the right direction as it is plowing the field. This particular "bull" is the tribe of Ephraim (Deut. 33:17).

God is clearly shown to be "at the reins," so to speak. He is the One in control of the bullock. So Jeremiah is showing that God has to initiate everything – otherwise it will not be accomplished. The bullock, then, by his own will responds to the will of his master.

Jeremiah 17:14 also tells us,

**<sup>14</sup> Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me, and I will be saved: for Thou art my praise.**

Once again the prophet shows us that God initiates the action. None of us will be saved unless God has done something first to initiate man's response. No man can come to the Father, except the Father drag him. If God has ordained some event from the beginning (call it "predestination" if you want – the "P" word); if He has determined something and ordained it, then it is going to happen, BUT it will seem as if it happened naturally or by the will of man.

Again, *who* is the cause and *what* is the effect? Man's flesh cannot initiate any good thing. In my flesh is no good thing (Rom. 7:18). James 1:17 says, "*Every good and perfect gift is from above.*" One of the greatest gifts God can give us is the gift of repentance. Romans 2:4 that "*the kindness of God leads you to repentance.*" If God leads us to repent and begins to drag us to the Father, then we should stop giving our human will so much credit for repenting. We should praise and thank God for giving us this good and perfect gift.

If God does not turn us – which causes us to respond by turning to Him – there is no way that we will even want to believe in Him. Thus, the very fact that you have a desire in your heart to know God is proof that God has already done something in your heart. There is no need to doubt or wonder if God has really called you. Of course He has called you. Otherwise, you would have no interest in knowing God—or even in reading a book like this.

If God drags you to Himself and reveals Himself to you, causing you to turn to Him, is this response done by your "free will"? Man would always like to take credit for his turning to God, his acceptance of Jesus Christ as his Savior, as if his salvation is based upon his own free will decision. To many theologians this is the only thing that gives salvation any legitimacy. They believe that if God exercises His will or interferes in any way with man's decision to come to God, then somehow this goes against the nature of God. But that theology is only a philosophy of man, for there is no Scripture that teaches this. The term "free will" does not even appear in Scripture. It is only a tradition of men.

1 John 1:11-12 says,

**<sup>11</sup> He came unto his own, and his own received him not. <sup>12</sup> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:**

Thus far it sounds like man has free will. But then John continues in verse 13,

**<sup>13</sup> Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**

It is not the will of the flesh; it is not the will of man; it is not blood lineage. It is done only by the will of God. Of all the gospel writers, John makes the clearest case for God's sovereignty. Was John unaware of the debate over free will? No, for this issue was debated just as hotly in his day as it is in ours.

There were three Judean schools of thought in those days. The Essenes believed that God was totally sovereign. The Sadducees believed that man had total free will. The Pharisees were in the middle, believing that God "helps" people to do good. These same schools of thought have come down to us today, and the debate has continued in every seminary.

God does all things by the counsel of His own will. Eph. 1:11 says,

**<sup>11</sup> In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.**

To absolve God of any responsibility for evil in the world, many Christian theologians today feel the need to take back most of God's sovereignty. First they attribute the sovereignty to God, and then they take it all back and give most of it to the devil and to man. Free will, when taken to its logical conclusion, removes all sovereignty from God leaving Him totally impotent to do anything but stand on the sidelines and threaten people with ever-increasing punishment. He stands there and hopes and hopes and hopes that somebody will listen, but He is impotent to actually *do* anything. Little wonder, then, that so many Christians live in fear of the devil, rather than by faith in God. While they express faith in God with their lips, they go home believing that God is in serious need of help to accomplish His goals on earth.

I think that most people agree that God did not *have* to do it this way, if He had so chosen at the beginning. But, most of them say that God *did* do it this way, because, for some mysterious reason *not explained in the Bible*, He had to preserve man's free will. Some go so far as to insist that God had to preserve the free will of angels also. Remember we are taught often that the devil sinned by his own free will. So with fallen angels exercising their free will in the spirit, and men exercising their free will in the world, God is largely shut out of His own universe.

It would be incredible to me if God had to stand on the sidelines wringing His hands, hoping that people would turn to Him. He stands there in despair when things do not go His way—**but the devil has no such constraints**. "The devil *made* me do it," because (they say) the devil is not a gentleman, but God is. God set the rules limiting Himself and His own will in the affairs of men, so He cannot do anything about our decisions. However, the devil has free will, they say, even if God does not. The devil has not set any rules for himself, so he is free to impose his will upon everyone.

When the Spirit of God inhabits your body, you still sin because of your own free will, right? But when the devil inhabits your body and you still sin, then you have no free will – the devil made you do it. Why is this? We are told that the devil can override your free will, but God cannot. Is there not something wrong with that belief? Is it any wonder that in the end the devil wins at least 99% of humanity?

### **Who is Really Sovereign Here on Earth?**

Has the devil taken sovereignty, and has God abdicated? Is that the kind of God we serve? When you stop and think about it, to leave free will intact in man creates a very scary situation in the world, because if God is on the sidelines and cannot override man's free will, then how can God prophesy anything? There are books out there today that even agree with that premise. They say, "That's right, even God does not know what is going to happen yet because man has not decided, and the devil has not decided." God has no control over the situation, they say, and therefore, God does not know everything.

Well, perhaps their gods *do* not know everything, but my God does. We do not serve the same God.

We might ask ourselves, how much free will did the Apostle Paul have when he was converted? A light came and threw him on his back, the light shined in his eyes, and a voice out of heaven spoke to him. Put yourself in his shoes. Would you have said “no”? Paul called himself the chief of sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15. God saved the chief of sinners by throwing him down on the ground, conscripting him, and saying, “You will follow Me from now on,” totally overruling Paul’s free will. This may be treated like an exception to the rule. But ask yourself one thing: what if God did that to every human being in the world? How many non-Christians would the world have today?

If the rules of free will have been established from the beginning, then apparently God set aside those rules when it came to the Apostle Paul. This is not fair. How can anyone believe that God really does want to save all mankind, and yet He reveals Himself to only a few? If He really loved all mankind, would He not do with all men as He did with Paul? Of course. And He will do just that in due time, as I explained in my book, Creation’s Jubilee.

The fact of the matter is that if God wanted to save everybody on this very day, He could do so very easily. All He would have to do is to repeat what He did to the Apostle Paul. Throw everyone down and say, “I am Jesus, the One that you are persecuting.” Who would argue with Him? In fact, look at some lesser situations. Every time there is a genuine revival meeting, where the Holy Spirit moves in power, you see them turning to Him and repenting. Why does God not do this all of the time? We would not have the situation in the world today if He did, but He has chosen not to do so.

When the world comes along and says that it does not believe in a God who would allow all of these evil things to happen, they may have a point because God could stop it at any point that He so chose. But the church does not like that solution. Their solution is that God is not responsible because God is basically helpless. Be assured: *God is not helpless*; God is sovereign, and He can change the effects of evil any time He wants. The world is often more justified than the Church, because they at least assume that God must really be sovereign if He is God at all. The Church often wants to water down His sovereignty to the point where God is totally impotent, a helpless giant in the sky.

The question is not resolved by removing sovereignty from God; the question is resolved by understanding *why* God does things the way He does. That takes more study and work and knowing who God is in order to understand the real solution to the world’s problems.

The Bible teaches quite clearly that all men will be saved, but each in his own order (1 Cor. 15:22-28). I do not know why God chose me in this present age to turn to Him, while He waits for the age to come before causing others to turn to Him. That is a matter of God’s will alone. But Scripture reveals many times that all mankind will be reconciled in the end, and that the purpose of His judgment is to correct men, not to punish them forever. Where it appears that God teaches “eternal” judgment, the word is *aionian*, “pertaining to an age.” It does not mean never-ending. For further evidence of this, see my book, The Judgments of the Divine Law.

### **Sin is Reckoned as a Debt**

We know that all sin is reckoned as a debt. When we sin, we obtain a debt to the law. The law has set up its liability laws so that if you sin against your neighbors, you owe them restitution. Therefore, it is reckoned as a debt. This is why Jesus taught the disciples to pray, “*Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*” (Matthew 6:12). Luke’s version of it says, “*Forgive us our SINS; for we also forgive every one that is INDEBTED to us.*” God reckons sin in terms of debt.

In man’s way of thinking debt continues forever and ever. It is always eternal punishment. But God’s laws are not that way. (And man has the nerve to say that the Old Testament God was merciless and unloving!) We are like the man in Matthew 18 who owed ten thousand talents, a huge debt that he could not pay. So the man, his wife, his children, *and all that he had*, were sold for payment.

**<sup>23</sup> For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. <sup>24</sup> And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children, and all that he had, and repayment to be made.**

Think about this. Adam was given a wife, children, and dominion over all the earth. This represented “all that he had” – the whole earth. When he sinned, all that he had was sold to sin, and sin held the debt note until Christ paid that debt. Because Christ paid our debt note, we have now become His servants (Rom. 6:18) just as Paul described himself in Romans 1:1,

<sup>1</sup> **Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.**

The debtor in the parable above was given grace when he asked for forgiveness. He lost it by refusing to forgive other men's debts, because as we judge others, we will be judged by the same standard of measure (Matt. 7:1, 2). Believers will be "saved yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). Jesus said that some of His servants would be judged with "few stripes" and some by "many stripes" depending upon their knowledge of His will (Luke 12:45-48). This does not mean they will lose their salvation, but that they will be held accountable to some extent at the Great White Throne judgment, when all the dead are raised—some to life, and some to judgment (John 5:28, 29).

The parable above is thus incomplete, because the point of the parable was to warn believers that they should forgive their neighbors who trespass against them, even as God has forgiven them for trespassing against Him.

**The Jubilee Ends All Debt**

How long was the debt to last for the man in the parable of Matthew 18? There is a year of Jubilee that limits all liability for debt. This is God's law. We do not have the authority or the sovereignty that would allow us to sell ourselves into debt so far that the year of Jubilee could not free us. We do not have that right; nor did we ever have that right or authority, because *we* do not own *us*. You do not own yourself. You have limited authority over yourself, and when you marry, you relinquish to your spouse even more of your authority.

Ownership is ultimately from God. God owns; we have only limited authority. When we talk about ownership – such as when we say that we own our land or we own our house – we must recognize that in the eyes of God we do not really own the property. God owns all the land (Lev. 25:23). We have authority over it that is always limited by God's sovereignty and His law. God has laws that limit our liability for debt. When we go into debt, there is a time in which to pay the debt. But there is a Jubilee year that limits the liability for all debt.

That is done out of God's sovereignty. It is a comfort to me to know that when all the evil is happening out there in the world, and all this debt to sin is being incurred by so many people, it makes no difference if they owe a trillion dollars or six dollars. The Jubilee can handle all of it. There is no amount of debt where the law of Jubilee no longer applies to you. The Jubilee will cancel a six-dollar debt and a trillion-dollar debt equally well with one stroke of the pen. It is called God's law, and His law is so merciful.

So we raise the question: Could God save every man by the same method that He saved Paul? Or, were the rules of free will set aside in the case of Paul? Did Paul receive preferential treatment? If God demonstrated His ability to turn the chief of sinners and cause him to repent, why does He not do it more often? So if God does not exercise His sovereignty and save everyone now as He did Paul, who is *liable* for lost souls?

## Chapter Two

# Ownership and Liability

I want to shift this whole issue of free will to what I believe is the real issue. The question of free will is a side issue. The real issue is not free will, but ownership. It is not about the right of man to exercise free will; it is about God's right as Creator to exercise *His* free will. We will go through the Scriptures and the law to show you this. Gen. 1:1 says,

**<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.**

This is always a good place to start – the beginning. Do we all believe that God was the Creator? Or, do some people believe that the devil created the earth? The ancient Greeks believed that the devil was the one responsible for the creation of matter (material things) because they believed that matter was inherently evil. They could not see how a good God would create evil matter. Their basic premise was incorrect. Physical matter was created and pronounced “good” at every stage of creation (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).

Thus, the most important and basic premise of understanding the truth is that God is the Creator, and that He pronounced it good.

As Christians, we believe that the God of the Bible is the One who created. He is a good God, not a bad God, and that this God of the Old Testament is not different from the God of the New Testament.

God created all things, including man. In Chapter 2, verse 7, we read the following:

**<sup>7</sup>And the LORD God [Yahweh Elohim] formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.**

Note here that man was formed of the dust of the ground. This ground, or this earth from which man was formed, was something that God had created in Genesis 1:1. So, the devil did not create; God created the earth and then formed and shaped man out of this material that He had created (Gen. 2:7). That is why it is “dust to dust, ashes to ashes.” When we die, our bodies return to dust. They return to the elements of the ground from which our bodies were originally created. Turn to Leviticus 25:23-24,

**<sup>23</sup>The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.**

**<sup>24</sup>And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land.**

These are God's land laws. The land must always be redeemed. This is God's law. On what basis does God have land laws? Remember when Israel went into the land of Canaan, Joshua divided up all the land among the citizens of Israel – first among the tribes and then to each family. They all had a land inheritance. Yet even though they inherited the land, they were not given absolute sovereignty over their land. They were tenants on God's land. There were conditions to which they were subjected. Man had authority over the land, but God retained sovereignty.

Today, we call it “eminent domain.” The government claims eminent domain over your land so that if it wants to build a highway, it can come in and “condemn” your land. Basically, they come in and buy it. You are subject to them, and you do not have a whole lot of choice in the matter. Ultimately the government claims eminent domain over your land.

In the same way God claims eminent domain over your land as well. You were made of the dust of the ground—material that God created. Your body is your land inheritance. But because you did not create yourself, you do not own yourself. God owns you by right of creation. His Sovereignty, then, is based upon His rights of ownership over Creation. Though man has been given a level of authority over his land inheritance, he does not actually *own* it. God owns it.

So when God gave Israel the land of Canaan as their inheritance, they were not given sovereignty as creators. They were given only limited *authority* over that land. The Greek New Testament uses two different words to describe sovereign power and authority. *Dunamis* is power (Acts 1:16). *Exousia* is authority (Matt. 8:9). These terms are relative. A man under authority looks up to a higher “power.” But that same man may have people under

him who look to him as a higher “power.” Thus, a man may have “power” over men, but at the same time is under “authority” given by a higher power.

We often speak of a king being a “sovereign” or having sovereignty over the citizens of the nation he rules. Yet at the same time that same king is subject to the King of Kings. Thus, the earthly king has *authority* under God to execute the will of God. Kings are not supposed to act according to their own “free will.” If they rule by their own will, God will hold them accountable.

It is the great deception of kings that God gave them absolute power, even to overrule the will of God and His laws by their own free will.

God retained sovereignty; man was given authority that was subordinate to His sovereignty. Everyone needs to know that distinction. Authority is always limited by the will of the one who is sovereign.

### **Not a Question of Free Will but of Ownership**

God created man out of the dust of the ground. If God owns all the land by right of creation, and we are made of the dust of the ground, God owns you and God owns me. It is not a question of whether or not *you* have a free will; it is a question of whether or not *God* has a free will. Who owns you? Can anyone deny that God owns the dust of the ground from which man was created? Does anyone deny that God created all things? *If God created all things, then He owns all things, and there is where we find the crux of the whole matter.*

We can argue all day long, back and forth, about whether or not man has free will. That debate makes for good mental gymnastics, but the whole issue is really beside the point. The point is, *who owns all things?*

Why do we say that?

Turn to Exodus 21. When you begin to look at the laws of liability, then ownership becomes very, very important. Keep in mind that the reason men debate the question of free will is really to establish liability for evil and sin in the earth. The underlying purpose for believing in free will is to make man responsible for evil and to absolve God of any liability. Man’s free will seems to do that.

The main problem with the idea of free will is that the cumulative effect of billions of free wills on earth, combined with the free will of the devil and his angels tends to limit God’s ability to resolve the evil that we see running rampant in the earth. God tends to become a helpless giant with hands tied by the free will of man. He stands at the sidelines pleading helplessly, while the devil overrides the free of man by making them do bad things.

Thus, when men attempt to relieve God of liability by attributing free will to all men, they do so only at the expense of His sovereignty. I believe that there is a better and more accurate solution to this dilemma that is revealed in the biblical laws of liability.

### **God's Liability Laws**

God’s liability laws are based upon ownership, not upon free will. To prove this, let us look at some of God’s laws of liability and ownership. Exodus 21:33-34 says,

**<sup>33</sup> And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein; <sup>34</sup> the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his.**

The liability here is based upon ownership. If a man digs a pit and does not take the necessary steps to cover it and an ox comes along and falls in by his own “free will” or by his own stupidity, who is liable according to God’s law? *It is the creator/owner of the pit who is liable, and he must then buy the dead ox for himself.* The owner has to pay for it as though it were a live ox, and the dead ox is his.

Back in the Garden of Eden, God in effect dug a “pit” by planting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The devil did not plant this tree. God did it, and God owned the tree. This tree provided the occasion by which Adam and Eve could “fall” into sin. It was a “pit” insofar as the law was concerned.

Further, God did not cover up this pit. That is, God did not put a fence around the tree to make it impossible for man to eat of it. His warning to them in Gen. 2:17 was like putting up a sign next to a pit saying, “Keep Out.” Yet because Adam and Eve were perhaps too naïve and inexperienced, they disobeyed and “fell” into that great bottomless pit, the abyss.

God did not cover the pit to prevent Adam's fall. Man fell because God did not take the proper precautions that would have been necessary to prevent man from sinning. Because Adam had been given authority ("dominion") in the earth in Gen. 1:26, he was most certainly liable to the extent of his authority. However, this does not absolve God of His liability as well—by His own law, which is a reflection of His righteous character.

Could God have prevented man from sinning? Of course He could have. He did not have to plant the tree in the first place, or if He did, He did not have to omit the fence. Even then, He did not have to create a tempter and allow him entrance into the garden. Did the tempter come in without God's knowledge? Did God turn off the security alarms and somehow the devil entered the garden without God's knowledge? Did God say "oops!"? Is God really so ignorant?

The fact is that God knew the end from the beginning. He was not taken by surprise. He dug that pit and left it uncovered because He had a plan, and the plan called for man to fall. And so he did. By God's own liability laws, then, He is responsible. So what did God do about it? He sent His only begotten Son who was lifted up on the cross in order to drag *all* men to Himself. He paid for the sin of the whole world because all of creation became subject to death through Adam's fall. *He bought the dead ox. The ox is now His.*

Do you realize what this means? He bought all who fell, and they are now His. Has *anyone* escaped falling? At the present time it may not look like all mankind is His, but the fact is that God created them and therefore, by His own liability laws, He purchased the world. In doing so, He fulfilled the law perfectly. This is why Paul wrote in Rom. 5:18, 19,

**<sup>18</sup> So then as through one transgression [Adam's sin] there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of [Christ's] righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.<sup>19</sup> For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.**

### **Liability for Adam's Sin**

Adam was the given authority (under God) over all of creation. Thus, when he sinned, he incurred a debt that he could not pay, and his family and property was "sold" in payment on the debt (Matt. 18:25). Not only Adam, but his children and the entire estate now groans in travail, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:23). They are waiting to be redeemed from the bondage into which Adam's debt has placed them.

The good news is that a near kinsman was born in the earth, who had the resources to pay this great debt. He did not take upon Himself the nature of angels, but of human flesh (Heb. 2:14-16), in order that He might be a near kinsman with the right of redemption. A near kinsman cannot be denied his lawful right to redeem, as long as he is willing to pay the full price of redemption. And so Jesus came in human flesh and paid the full price of redemption for all that was lost by Adam's sin.

Paul could thus say confidently that "*there resulted justification of life to ALL MEN.*" This is also why Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:22, 23,

**<sup>22</sup> For as in Adam ALL die, so also in Christ ALL shall be made alive.<sup>23</sup> But each in his own order. . .**

This is the Good News of the New Testament. His blood was sufficient and worth enough to pay for the sin of the whole world. 1 John 2:2 says,

**<sup>2</sup> And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.**

This is how seriously God took His responsibility for Adam's fall. He opened the pit, knowing fully that Adam would fall, and that it would affect the whole world by the law of headship. His plan was to use that same law of headship through Jesus Christ, the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Christ's righteous act upon the cross would affect all men to the same extent that the sin of Adam affected all men.

Because Christ was given authority over the whole earth as well as heaven, He was in a position to be the savior of all men (1 Tim. 4:10). Though He will always respect the will of man and not force Himself upon them, even so, He will exercise His free will and His lawful right of redemption in order to save all men in the end of time.

John saw in vision the end of the matter in Rev. 4-5, where the four living creatures, representing all of creation, give glory to God. The twenty-four elders cast their crowns before Him, saying in 4:11,

**<sup>11</sup> “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”**

In other words, the twenty-four elders knew that their authority was subordinate to the sovereignty of God and to His will. Why? Because He was the Creator, and they owed their very existence to *His* will, not to their own will or power. They did not create themselves. They came into existence through the will of God.

John then records in Rev. 5:13, 14 the implications of this:

**<sup>13</sup> And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion for the ages of the ages.” <sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.**

In The Expositor’s Bible, Vol. 6, p. 854, published by Eerdman’s Publishing Co., Rev. William Milligan, D.D. explains this as follows:

“What a sublime conception have we here before us! The whole universe, from its remotest star to the things around us, and beneath our feet, is one—one in feeling, in emotion, in expression; one in heart and voice. Nothing is said of evil. Nor is it thought of. It is in the hands of God, who will work out His sovereign purposes in His own good time and way. We have only to listen to the universal harmony, and to see that it moves us to corresponding praise (v. 14).

“The redeemed creation is once more singled out for special mention. At chap. iv. 8, 10, they began the song; now we return to them that they may close it. All creation, man included, cries, Amen. The glorified Church has her heart too full to speak. She can only fall down and worship.”

The only way to absolve God of His sovereign liability in the matter of Adam’s sin, the only way to clear His name, is for God to reverse the effects of Adam’s sin completely. Paul makes it clear that He will do so—and has already begun that process through the cross of Christ. It is only a matter of time before the vision that John saw becomes a full reality in the earth. He saw the success of the cross, for the cross was the means to this end. Without paying the redemption price, the redemption of all creation could not have occurred. The power of the cross is fully established by John’s vision, where all creation and all men come into full agreement and harmony with God’s free and sovereign will.

### **Judgment for Man’s Authority**

True free will requires not only sovereignty, which his omnipotence, but also omniscience (knowing all). Jesus tells us in Luke 12:47, 48 that liability is measured in part by knowledge:

**<sup>47</sup> And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes. <sup>48</sup> but the one who did not know it and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. . .**

The rest of verse 48 establishes the fact that liability is also measured in part by one’s level of authority:

**<sup>48</sup> . . . And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.**

Because God has both omnipotence and omniscience, He requires the most of Himself. Is He capable of rising to the occasion? We believe that He is well able. Man’s will cannot stop God’s plan.

One cannot separate man’s will from his authority. Man has authority; therefore, he has a will by which that authority is executed. Man is also judged according to the decisions of his will. This accountability to the will of God means that God is coercing man’s will, putting pressure on him, as it were, to conform to the divine will. The question is, whose will is stronger? Whose will shall prevail in the end? Will God get His way, or will man get his own way?

I believe that God’s plan will be fulfilled to the letter. What John saw will become the actual fact in the end of time and history. I accept this by faith in His word, because at present it looks as though man’s will is more powerful than God’s will. The world can be very evil at different times and places. But God will judge all things, because, as Creator, the responsibility ultimately falls upon His shoulders to right all wrongs and to bring good out of evil. If this were man’s responsibility, most of creation would be lost. But we can be thankful that man does not have total free will to destroy God’s creation or at least make the outcome uncertain.

Man will be judged according to his level of authority, but because authority is always subordinate to God's sovereignty, Jesus will work to save all mankind until the job is completed in the ages to come. One of the primary purposes of resurrection is to bring men into judgment and accountability to His "fiery law" (Deut. 33:2), that they might "learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9). In other words, the purpose of divine judgment in the "lake of fire" is to correct them, not to destroy them. It is to teach them the character of God, who is like "a consuming fire" (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). It consumes "the flesh."

So here are the contrasting views:

1. God cannot be liable in any way for Adam's sin or any subsequent sin or evil in the world. Therefore, man must have a free will in order to make man totally liable for all the evil in the world. God then gives man the opportunity to be saved but cannot do anything to infringe upon his free will in making such a decision. If he does not accept Christ, then he is fully liable for his sins and must be judged—some say by annihilation, others say by eternal torment.

2. God is liable on His level of sovereignty for allowing Adam to sin when He could have prevented it. As His justice dictates, He holds men liable only according to the level of their authority. Likewise, He planned from the beginning to take upon Himself (in the person of Jesus Christ) the liability for the sin of the whole world. His purpose, as planned from the beginning, was to allow all men to fall, and then save all men through Christ—but each in his own order. The term "eternal" in the Bible is *aionian*, which means "pertaining to an eon, or an age." Judgment is age-abiding, not "eternal" as such, and this is verified by checking Young's Literal Translation of the Bible, by Dr. Robert Young, the author of Young's Concordance.

For a more complete study of this subject, see my book, Creation's Jubilee or the shorter book, The Judgments of the Divine Law.

### **More on God's Liability Laws**

Let us first take a closer look at the law regarding the ox in the pit. It is obvious that under normal circumstances, an ox may fall into a pit simply by not seeing the pit or by getting too close to it and then slipping into it. At any rate, one might say that the ox fell into the pit by his own free will or by his own blindness or stupidity. Surely one cannot blame the owner of the pit in such cases. Yet the law clearly says that the one who dug the pit (its "owner") is liable.

But suppose I had pushed the neighbor's ox into this pit. Would that make any legal difference? Well, it does not say anything about that, because that point is legally irrelevant. If a man were to push the ox into the pit deliberately, he would owe the owner five oxen (Ex. 22:1). But if the ox fell by accident, the owner of the pit would be liable to pay for only one ox.

The owner of the pit is liable *just because he owns the pit*. The issue is not whether the ox (that is, Adam) fell by his own free will. This law does not address the responsibility of the ox to stay out of the pit. This law asks only: Who owns the pit? Who was responsible to cover it to prevent the ox from falling into it?

Let us look at another liability law that came from the mind of God. Deut. 22:8 says,

**<sup>8</sup> When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet [railing] for your roof, that you may not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it.**

In those days the people built houses with flat roofs, because they liked to fellowship in the cool of the evenings on the top of the house. Because of this, God required them to put a railing around the roof, so that people would not accidentally fall. If there were no railing, and if someone were to fall off the roof, who is liable?

If a man pushed his neighbor off the roof, of course, he would be held liable for murder. But our issue is not whether he fell by accident or if someone pushed him deliberately. There is liability either way, and the only difference is the *degree* of liability. Our issue is whether or not the man could have prevented the death of his neighbor by building a railing around the roof of the house. The fact is that if you own the house, you are responsible for putting those safety precautions into place. If you do not do so, "it was an accident" does not remove all liability from your door.

God's house is the whole heavens and the earth. His abode is in the heavens now, but He is making His home in the earth, and that is why He came and is coming again – it is to make His home here. The problem is that when He

built this house, man fell off the “roof.” Who is liable? We agree that God did not PUSH Adam off the “roof.” One cannot blame God for murder. Yet we cannot simply blame the devil for tempting man. We cannot merely claim that man was careless and fell off by his own free will. To say it was totally man’s fault is not a lawful answer. Ownership of the house makes God liable by His own liability laws.

There is another liability law that should help us understand this issue. Ex. 22:5 says,

**<sup>5</sup> If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.**

What happens if an ox tears down a fence by his own free will, plods into another field, and eats his neighbor’s grass? Who is liable to pay for the grass? The owner of the ox, of course. The law is clear. The owner may perhaps whip the ox or imprison it, but this does not change the fact that the owner must pay for the neighbor’s grass.

Suppose the owner of the ox opens the fence, pushes the ox into the neighbor’s field, and pushes the ox’s nose to the ground, saying, “Eat this grass, or I will beat you to death.” The ox is forced to eat the grass and has no free will in the matter. Who is liable? The owner of the ox. The only difference in penalty is that if the offense is deliberate, the owner would have to pay at least double restitution for theft of the grass (Ex. 22:4).

If the ox committed the offense by his own “free will,” the owner has *reduced liability*. But he is still liable either way. To insist upon putting the entire blame upon the ox does not solve the problem of ownership. Whether that ox got in there by his own free will or whether the ox was pushed to go in against his free will, does not free the owner of liability itself. *Ownership itself brings liability*.

The theologian’s insistence upon man having a free will may reduce the problem of God’s liability, but it can never eliminate it altogether. This reminds us of the theory of evolution. The evolutionists insist that life came into existence by random particles coming together in the ocean at the same time. Yet they can never answer the question of how matter came to exist in the first place.

Likewise, the ancient Greeks attempted to reduce God’s liability for creating “evil” physical things by postulating a lesser evil god who created evil matter. They called him the Demiurge (sort of a “devil” figure). But this did not solve their problem either, for they could never figure out how a good God could create the evil Demiurge! By making the Demiurge to be the creator of evil matter, they only succeeded in reducing God’s liability and hoping no one would notice that God was still liable for creating the Demiurge.

Ownership is the only relevant, legal issue. Can you see that? This is why the question of free will is not the primary issue, *because putting free will upon man or the devil does not fully absolve God of liability according to His own law*. Look at Exodus 22:6,

**<sup>6</sup> If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.**

What if I light a fire and deliberately do so in order to burn another man’s field of grain? What would be the penalty? Obviously, I may have to pay double restitution for the field, because I stole his grain and burned it. But what if I *accidentally* burned the neighbor’s crop? Does this absolve me of liability? Absolutely not. If I lit the fire, I own the fire. It all boils down once again to a question of ownership. The liability laws show that man’s intent (i.e., “free will”) has to do with the *extent* of liability, not the *fact* of liability itself.

That is why I say that free will is a side issue for philosophers to debate. From a legal standpoint dealing with liability, declaring man’s “free will” does not do what they say it is supposed to do. The idea of free will was developed primarily to absolve God of liability for man and his actions. It is inadequate to the task. The most relevant issues are these: Did God create man? Does God own man? Could He have created man in such a way that would prevent him from falling into sin? The answer is “yes” on all counts. This makes God liable by His own concept of liability, as stated in His own law.

So free will is not the central issue, ownership is. All through the law, and the New Testament as well, God claims ownership of all that He has created. On that basis God takes responsibility for all that He owns. He wrote the laws on liability, so that we would have the revelation to understand that He legally obligated Himself to purchase the whole world. That is why He paid for the sins of the whole world and not just for the sins of two percent of humanity. The Bible never, never says that He only paid for the sins of a few. He paid for the sin of the whole world, and when He did so, He absolved and justified Himself as Creator and Owner of the Universe.

## It All Works Together for Good

God has created this whole situation, and for whatever reason, it was His will to create vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. We may not understand this, and if we do not understand, then, as Paul says in Romans 9:20, we are not to question God. Shall the clay say to the potter, why have you made me thus? That is enough of an explanation for those who cannot understand these in-depth things. But ultimately, as we come to know the mind of God, we ought to begin to understand why He created man the way He did – and why evil was allowed to invade the earth.

We do know that all things are going to work out for good – and that the sufferings of this present age are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come (Rom. 8:18). That we know. I do not have an explanation for each piece of evil in the earth. I do not understand it all, but I do know one thing. My faith is in God. I know that He created. I know that He is sovereign. And I know that He will work it out for good. It may not be much of a solution today as people are going through problems and going through the horrendous things in their lives. But I know that on the last day we will look back on all that has happened and we all will be able to say that God is justified in all that He has done. That much I know, and that is a matter of faith.

I have faith that God knows what He is doing, and I have faith that God is a good God. Every injustice that is in the world, He will rectify. He will make it good. He will turn it into a good thing. How He will accomplish this, I do not know, but that is where my faith lies. I believe in a sovereign God who knows what He is doing. He has not relinquished any control over the creation, even though He has indeed given man authority. We have authority over our land, but we do not have sovereignty. Our authority is limited. As we have shown before in the land laws, there is always to be a redemption allowed for the land. But even if redemption does not take place in the time of redemption, all will be set free in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:54). That is a law that God has established, and no man can thwart that ultimately.

## Chapter Three How to Avoid Fatalism

### God's Sovereign Vow

When the Israelites believed the evil report of the ten spies and refused to go into the Promised Land, it created a situation where God clearly manifested His sovereignty. God threatened to dispose of those people and use Moses' family to accomplish His will (Num. 14:12). Moses interceded for Israel, saying in Numbers 14:15, 16,

**<sup>15</sup> Now if Thou dost slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Thy fame will say,  
<sup>16</sup> Because the Lord could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.**

The issue was the sovereignty of God. In view of man's will—that is, Israel's choice to remain in the wilderness—was God UNABLE to bring them into the Promised Land? Everyone knows that God had the *power* to force them to do His bidding, but the issue was whether or not He could do so in a practical sense.

Was God really so limited by the will of man that His sovereignty was reduced or limited by man's authority? No, God's sovereignty is never reduced or hampered. In fact, *God raises up His own opposition in order to postpone the fulfillment of His will to the proper time.* It was in God's plan that Israel enter the Promised Land after spending 40 years in the wilderness—and that is why it happened that way.

Getting back to the discussion between God and Moses in Numbers 14, Moses brought up the point that the nations would say that God was unable to fulfill His purpose if He could not bring Israel into the Promised Land. God's forceful and overwhelming response to Moses is found in verses 20 and 21,

**<sup>20</sup> So the Lord said, I have pardoned them according to your word, <sup>21</sup> but indeed, AS I LIVE, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.**

The phrase “as I live” is an oath, which God swore by His own life. God does not make oaths lightly. Everything that God says will be fulfilled, because God cannot lie. However, when He makes an oath, it is so important that it deserves special emphasis. The only word of God that is even more emphatic is a Covenant.

Not only will God fill Israel with His glory, but *He vowed to fill the entire earth with His glory*. God was not only capable of bringing the tiny nation of Israel into the Promised Land, but was also perfectly capable of filling the whole world with His glory! The true Promised Land, we know, is not to enter into some piece of real estate, but to enter into His glory. The glorified body is the real Promised Land. It is that which was lost in Adam, and it is being restored in Christ. Israel was the pattern nation on a small scale, but the ultimate plan was to include the whole world in this glory.

The question, though, is HOW God could make such a vow, if His sovereignty could be so limited by man's authority? Or, to put it more bluntly, how could God vow to fill all men with His glory in view of the fact that only a few people actually choose to follow Jesus Christ? Do not the choices of men determine their eternal fate? Can men not reject Christ? Are such people not lost forever by their own choosing?

For that matter, how can every knee bow and every tongue swear allegiance to Christ, as we read in Isaiah 45:23 and Phil. 2:10, 11? How can Jesus Christ draw all men to Himself by His death, as He says in John 12:32? Does this not elevate God's sovereign will over man's authority to choose?

The quick answer is that *man's authority ends where God's sovereignty begins*. Man has the authority to reject God for a time, but ultimately, God's sovereign will is going to be fulfilled. Man can reject God and receive judgment, but God's judgment itself will correct his fleshly disposition so that in the end he genuinely submits to Jesus Christ.

Man has authority over his own "land" that God has given him as his inheritance; but God yet retains sovereignty over him by right of creation. The authority that God has given man is limited. Man does not have the ability to sell himself to the devil, or to the flesh, or to sin for ever. He can do so only within the parameters of time. The biblical laws on which this truth is based are discussed in my booklet [If God Could Save Everyone—Would He?](#)

## The Pattern of Joseph

Look also at the case of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph's brothers maliciously sold him as a slave, and he was taken to Egypt. One might argue that Judah—by his own free will—came up with the idea of selling Joseph. The rest of the brothers then exercised their free will by agreeing to this plan. The only one who appeared to have no free will in this was Joseph himself.

In Egypt, Joseph was soon falsely accused by his master and thrown into prison by his master, Potiphar, who did this by his own free will. Finally, however, he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and was elevated to the highest position in the land under Pharaoh. Eventually, he was reunited with his family and invited them to live in the best part of Egypt. Seventeen years later their father died, and Joseph's brothers became afraid that Joseph would now take vengeance upon them for mistreating him according to their own free will. Genesis 49:19-21 gives his response:

**<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? <sup>20</sup> And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. <sup>21</sup> So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones. So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.**

Joseph recognized that events had occurred on two levels—by man's authority and by God's sovereignty. The brothers acted according to their will, thinking it was *their own idea* to sell Joseph as a slave in Egypt. Joseph certainly recognized the will of his brothers on that lower level, and saw that God had worked in their hearts, judging them and correcting them until they repented of their deed. Yet the brothers were responsible only as far as they had authority.

Joseph also clearly showed that God was *ultimately* responsible for it. That is, God had exercised His sovereign will to influence Joseph's brothers to sell him to slave traders. No one is responsible beyond his level of authority or sovereignty. If God was ultimately responsible for the actions of Joseph's brothers, then this proves that God has not relinquished any of His sovereignty.

The story of Joseph is a good illustration of how God's sovereignty does not contradict man's authority. Both concepts are true. But we must know the difference between sovereignty and authority, and how authority is limited in its power, for therein lies the key to understanding the real issue.

## How Free is Satan's Will?

Some object to this on the grounds that God only does good things, and the devil does all the evil things, but the issue is not that simple. It is more accurate to say that the evil that God does is always for a good purpose (ultimately), while the devil does nothing for the good of man. What the devil does may seem “good” in man’s eyes for a time. For example, a man may make a pact with the devil for riches and fame in this life time, in exchange for his soul’s ultimate welfare. But the temporary “good” for a few years is not in any man’s ultimate best interest.

By contrast, God may bring His children through many hardships and heart aches in order to humble them and to teach them the art of forgiveness. The children of God often feel abused because of this and struggle with this for years, not knowing that being an overcomer requires the opportunity to overcome. Most come to believe that the devil is doing these bad things to them, and they spend a great deal of time “fighting the devil.” A few—like Joseph—come to understand that it is really God who is behind their troubles, and that He works all things out for their good (Rom. 8:28).

The devil certainly plays a role in this as God’s servant. Job shows us that Satan needs God’s permission to act. If God chooses to use a devil to scourge his children, we must understand that the devil has no ability to do more than what God allows or mandates. The devil’s will is not above God’s sovereignty any more than man’s will is. A friend of mine calls him “middle management.” Those who spend their lives fighting the devil instead of dealing with God should understand that if you want to get anything done, go to the top. Don’t deal with middle management.

The book of Job shows us that Satan is subject to the sovereignty of God as much as man is. God is pictured as bragging to Satan about Job. Satan counters that Job was a follower of God only because God had been so good to him. You see, it is easy to believe in God (Jesus Christ) when everything is going well. But what about when things go wrong? Satan thought that Job would then curse God. In Job 1:12 we read,

**<sup>12</sup> Then the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.**

We read then how the Sabeans attacked Job’s servants, killing them. The clear implication is that Satan had influenced the will of the Sabeans to do this, because God had allowed it. And, of course, the law principle is that if a person allows or gives permission to another person to do such things, he himself is liable as an accessory to the deed (Ex. 22:5; James 4:17). Hence, the story is written in such a way as to show that God holds himself liable for this supposedly “evil” thing.

The final lesson that Job—and all of us—had to learn was that we ought not to be so full of pride that we think we can tell God how to run the universe. When we blame God for doing (or “allowing”) bad things to happen to us, we show that we do not really have total faith in God’s love and justice. Like Job, we normally do not know the extent of this unbelief within our hearts until we are put under stress. It is easy to say, “I believe in a God of love.” It is harder to do so when God removes His hand of protection from us and allows Satan to test that belief.

The book of Job makes it clear that Satan is bound by the word and law of God. If the will of God stands above Satan’s will, then we should see biblical evidence that God takes the credit for the “evil” things that happen. We should also see biblical evidence that God will hold Himself responsible for all that He does on His level. This is precisely what He does.

If we continually blame men for all the wickedness in the world, or if we blame the devil, or both, we will never really understand God or His plan. Certainly, all men will be held accountable on their own level, and that is why there is a judgment at the Great White Throne at the end of time. But God also holds Himself accountable on the highest level, and for this reason He has bound Himself by oath to fill the whole earth with His glory (Num. 14:21).

God could have created a world without the possibility of sin, and He did not have to create Satan with the ability to go against His will. But He did. He created His own adversary. But He did not give His adversary power anywhere near equal to His own power. There is no God beside Him (Isaiah 45:5). All other “gods” are under Him. They are subordinate to His sovereignty, including Satan and man himself.

A “god” by Hebrew definition is a subjector, that is, one who has authority over another. This is why even the Hebrew judges were called “gods” (Exodus 22:28). It is because they were men who exercised authority over others.

He has bound Himself by oath to rectify all things and fill all things by His Spirit. This does not mean that God is the only responsible party in the world. He is *ultimately* responsible and *most* responsible, but not the *only* one responsible. He is responsible because He is sovereign and could have prevented anything that He wanted to prevent. But man is also responsible because he has been given some authority. All judgment for sin is based upon the level of knowledge and authority given to him (Luke 12:47, 48).

By man's authority, he can *postpone* his salvation, missing the first and even the second resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6, 12). But the final restoration of all things and the salvation of all men is something that has been decreed by the sovereign will of God, apart from man's will.

To postpone one's salvation simply means that he will be judged in the "lake of fire" until he is set free by the creation jubilee at the end of all things. God's law of Jubilee sets limits on man's ability to put himself into debt, or bondage to sin.

## God's Will and God's Plan

The New Testament uses two different words that are translated "will." They are not the same, but because the translators did not understand their difference, they have obscured a vital truth in understanding the relationship between man's will and God's sovereignty.

The will of God is that we do not sin. It is primarily expressed in the law that says, "Thou shalt not. . ." It is God's will that we not steal, commit murder, adultery, etc. The best verse illustrating His WILL is found in Romans 2:17, 18, which says,

**<sup>17</sup> But if you bear the name Jew, and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, <sup>18</sup> and know His WILL [Greek: *thelema*, "will"], and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law . . .**

We see here that one can know God's will by "*being instructed out of the Law.*" Those who violate the Law are violating the WILL of God. The Greek word is *thelema*, and it appears many times in the New Testament.

The second Greek word usually translated "will" is *boulema*. Paul uses this word in Romans 9, where he discusses the case of Pharaoh and how God told him to "let My people go" and then hardened his heart so that he would NOT let them go. Verse 19 says,

**<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, Why does He still find fault? For who resists His WILL [Greek: *boulema*, "plan, or higher intention"]?**

In other words, how can God hold Pharaoh accountable for refusing to allow Israel to leave Egypt, since God took credit for hardening Pharaoh's heart? After all, who can resist God's *boulema*? Certainly not Pharaoh. Thus, this seems to create a problem of divine justice. In reality, it is only a problem if God does not set Pharaoh free in the end. If God were to hold Pharaoh fully accountable for resisting God, with no end of judgment in sight, then yes, God would have done Pharaoh an injustice. But this is not the case.

When God told Pharaoh through Moses, "Let My people go," He was defining His will. Pharaoh was able to resist God's will. But when God hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he would NOT let Israel go (for a while), Pharaoh was unable to resist God's PLAN. God's plan called for Pharaoh to resist the will of God until the tenth plague had come upon Egypt's firstborn. God told Moses the plan in Exodus 7:2-5,

**<sup>2</sup> You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land. <sup>3</sup> But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. <sup>4</sup> When Pharaoh will not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt, and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments. <sup>5</sup> And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.**

Here God lays out the plan before Moses, so that he would know ahead of time what God intended to do. There is no indication by the wording that God merely "knew" ahead of time what Pharaoh would do, and that God was merely taking that into account. The statement, "*But I will harden Pharaoh's heart,*" leaves no room for leaving God out of the equation. And so, when Moses and Aaron had their little contest with Pharaoh's magicians, Pharaoh hardened his heart, as we read in Exodus 7:13, 14,

<sup>13</sup> **Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.** <sup>14</sup> **Then the Lord said to Moses, Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go.**

The phrase, "*Pharaoh's heart was hardened*" says nothing about the cause or origin of the problem, but we are simply referred back to the Lord's revealed plan by the qualifier, "*as the Lord had said*." In other words, we are being told that Pharaoh's heart was hardened because God had hardened it by His own sovereignty. After the plague of frogs had come and gone, we read of Pharaoh's reaction in Exodus 8:15,

<sup>15</sup> **But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.**

In the next plagues, the wording in the Bible alternates. In the first few plagues it appears that Pharaoh hardened his own heart, but once again, we are led to believe that Pharaoh's will was only a reaction to God's work in hardening his heart. This is consistent with Proverbs 21:1, which says,

<sup>1</sup> **The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.**

Hence, Pharaoh's heart was in the Lord's hands to do as He wished. Pharaoh did not realize this, of course, because he did not know God. But Pharaoh's knowledge of God had nothing to do with it. In the later plagues it says bluntly that God hardened his heart. After the sixth plague (boils), we read in Exodus 9:12,

<sup>12</sup> **And the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the Lord had spoken to Moses.**

After the seventh plague (hail), Pharaoh tried to repent. Exodus 9:27, 28 says,

<sup>27</sup> **Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, I have sinned this time; the Lord is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones.** <sup>28</sup> **Make supplication to the Lord, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail; and I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.**

So Moses prayed for the hail and thunder to cease. When it did, Pharaoh's heart was hardened again. This time the account is most interesting. Exodus 9:34, 35 and 10:1,

<sup>34</sup> **But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.** <sup>35</sup> **And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the Lord had spoken through Moses.** <sup>1</sup> **Then the Lord said to Moses, Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them.**

This tells us when the Word states that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, or that Pharaoh hardened his heart, it does not negate the fact that God did it. In fact, God took credit for hardening Pharaoh's heart—and Pharaoh's response was to harden his own heart. Pharaoh did not know what was happening. He thought he was hardening his own heart by the exercise of his own "free will." But Moses and Aaron knew the plan of God, so they knew who was doing this to Pharaoh behind the scenes. Hence, Pharaoh did it on his own level, but God did it on a higher level. Each is therefore responsible in his own way and on his own level.

In fact, this lays down an important principle of divine judgment. God's purpose for hardening Pharaoh's heart is stated in Exodus 7:5,

<sup>5</sup> **And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the sons of Israel from their midst.**

Does this not foreshadow a greater judgment to come at the Great White Throne? God's purpose of judgment is not to destroy them, but that they might know that He is the true God! Only a remnant will attain to the first resurrection and rule with Christ during the thousand-year Sabbath Day (Rev. 20:4-6). The rest of the believers will receive their reward at the end of the thousand years when they stand before God alongside of the unbelievers (Luke 12:46; John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15). But the rest of creation—the vast majority of mankind—will be judged in order to be corrected and held accountable for their actions in the earth. The purpose of the "lake of fire" is not to torture them, but to bring them under the judgments of the divine law—the "fiery law" of Deut. 33:2.

In such a plan *God does not judge mankind beyond his level of accountability*. And God also fulfills His own obligation according to His own sovereignty. This was the plan from the beginning, and the final restoration of all things was only postponed by the factor that we call “time.”

So Pharaoh Himself and all the Egyptians that were judged in Moses’ day were not judged only that they might be destroyed. They were judged that they would know God. This is the good purpose of God and the key to knowing how God could harden Pharaoh’s heart without doing him an injustice. Instead of trying to explain away the clear biblical statements where God takes responsibility for hardening Pharaoh’s heart, let us instead agree with God, knowing that it was done for a good purpose.

It is because most people do not know that good purpose that God’s actions appear to be evil. This is what causes men to doubt that God would do such a thing. And so the alternate “solution” to this dilemma is to reduce God’s sovereignty and make it subject to man’s authority (will). While this may seem to resolve the problem of God’s justice, it does so only at the expense of his sovereignty.

It is, therefore, imperative that we understand the ultimate plan of God to save all mankind, including Pharaoh. Without such an understanding, it is nearly impossible to view God as a God of love and justice. In fact, we would be left with the Calvinist position that makes God totally sovereign at the expense of His justice. Calvin taught that God chooses only a tiny remnant to be saved, and the rest He chooses to be tortured forever in a fiery hell. Not many have the stomach to dispense with the basic principle of justice in this way. The simple solution is to see that God’s sovereignty mandates that He save all of His creation in order to remain totally just as well as all-powerful.

### **God’s Will Plus Time Equals the Plan**

The relationship between God’s will and God’s plan is this: God’s will is always going to be fulfilled—but not until certain things have happened. God’s will has to do with the deeds of men in history, that is, historic facts. On the other hand, God’s plan factors in TIME. Time is what slows things down. Without time, all historic events would happen at the same moment. God Himself stands above time and views all things as if they occurred at the same time. That is why He speaks of future things in the past tense. However, we ourselves are bound and limited by time and space, and therefore we must cope with the divine plan as well as His will.

The will of God given to Pharaoh was indeed fulfilled as a historic event. Pharaoh did let Israel go. However, God ensured that Pharaoh would not do so until the proper moment in time. So when Pharaoh first decided to let Israel go, God hardened his heart, so that he would NOT let Israel go until later.

When Pharaoh released Israel, he fulfilled God’s “will,” but he did so according to the divine “plan” by doing it after the ten plagues had been fulfilled. Likewise, it is God’s “will” that all men be saved, as 1 Timothy 2:4 says,

**<sup>4</sup> who desires [Greek verb: *thele*, “wills”] all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.**

But it is God’s “plan” that most of them would be saved through divine judgment and correction. Egypt represents the world of unbelievers; Israel represents the believers. It is a parable of history that portrays the mind of God as He brings all of creation into subjection under the feet of Christ (1 Cor. 15:27). Ultimately, every knee will bow to the glory of God, for God has vowed this in Isaiah 45:23-25,

**<sup>23</sup> I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. <sup>24</sup> They will say of Me, “Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength.” Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him shall be put to shame. <sup>25</sup> In the Lord will all the offspring of Israel be justified and will glory.**

Yes, God has sworn by His own sovereign ability that He will bring all men to the place where they will confess Him to be righteous. Though they were angry at Him for seeming to allow all the evil in the earth, they will come to realize that the divine plan was very good. They will come to see Him as a God of love and wisdom as well as a God of power and justice. All men will bow; every tongue will swear allegiance to Him.

But Hebrews 2:8, says, “*But now we do not yet see all things subjected to Him.*” That is because the plan calls for most men’s hearts to be hardened while He saves His sons. It is only in the end of time that this full plan will come to fruition and all will understand the mind of God.

Can we comprehend such a plan? Even Paul had difficulty understanding it, for he testifies in Romans 11:32-36,

<sup>32</sup> For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. <sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup> For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? <sup>35</sup> Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? <sup>36</sup> For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

## How NOT to be a Fatalist

A fatalist is one who sees God as sovereign without understanding the authority that God gave man. With such an unbalanced view, the fatalist can always blame God for everything and take no responsibility upon himself for his actions. He can always justify any sin that he does by saying, “Well, God is sovereign; therefore, I had no choice but to do it.”

Fatalists do not really understand that there is a judgment to come, where every man will be judged according to his works (Rom. 2:6; Rev. 20:12, 13). Fatalists make God totally sovereign and totally responsible for all that happens in the earth—without recognizing that God also holds man accountable for his level of authority.

To keep from being a fatalist, one must clearly understand the difference between the will (*thelema*) and the plan (*boulema*) of God. This is best illustrated by the real-life example of Pharaoh, who could and did resist the will of God by his authority, but could not resist the sovereign plan of God. Secondly, we have the example of Israel being held accountable for refusing to enter the Promised Land, even though God had withheld from them a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear (Deut. 29:4). In that case, the judgment was limited to 40 years—the extent of their authority.

Seeing this distinction will keep us in balance, so that we do not justify sin and claim that it was God’s “will.” Sin is NEVER God’s will (*thelema*), even though it is ALWAYS part of the plan (*boulema*).

The *plan* of God is in His hands alone, apart from the will of man. That is God’s level, not ours. Our daily lives should consist in striving to know and do the *will* of God. That means being obedient to the divine law and the leading of the Spirit. When we do wrong, we ought to admit it and repent of it.

If we live lawlessly and refuse to be held accountable for our own actions, we merely prove to all that we are not part of God’s “barley” remnant. If we refuse to be obedient and submit to the divine will, we prove that we will not receive immortality in the first resurrection, but must await a later resurrection.

It really comes down to the old adage of “which came first, the chicken or the egg?” Is a man lawless because God blinded his eyes? Or did God blind his eyes because he was lawless? Men may debate the issue, but in the end, it does not matter. If your eyes are blinded, and if you refuse to submit to Christ and His law, then it is self-evident that you are not one of the remnant that will inherit the first resurrection.

Is this the reward that you desire? Then so be it. Be it far from me to try to change your heart. I am not the Holy Spirit and cannot do His job. But if it is in your heart to be an overcomer of the remnant company, the barley company, then He will put it in your heart to be obedient. The tree is known by its fruit (Matt. 7:20).

Thus, in a practical sense, your actions are a manifestation of your heart. If God has given you eyes to see and ears to hear, then it will be evident in your actions, because “hearing” and “obedience” come from the same Hebrew word, *shema*. If God has truly given you ears to hear, then it will be reflected in your obedience to His voice. If God has called you to be an overcomer, then act like one. An overcomer is NOT one who merely professes to be one, but a person whose actions reflect his words (James 2:18).

Fatalism is an unbalanced view of God’s sovereignty. The main symptom of fatalism is using God’s sovereignty as an excuse for sin or for doing nothing at all. Don’t make excuses for bad behavior. Blaming God’s sovereign will for your sins will not reduce your liability at the great white throne.

A good example of this is found in 2 Samuel 24,

<sup>1</sup> Now again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and it incited David against them to say, “Go, number Israel and Judah.”

In 1 Chron. 21:1, which records the same story, it says,

<sup>1</sup> Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel.

Well, who did it, God or Satan? Both. This is not a contradiction. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave to Egypt, but Joseph gave the credit to God. This is not a contradiction. Both are true on different levels. So it is with the above illustration. God did it, but He used Satan as the executioner of His law. Israel had sinned, and so God judged Israel, using Satan to do it, for that is his job.

Numbering the people took nine months and twenty days to accomplish (2 Sam. 24:8). Then God's judgment struck Israel, and only then did David seem to discover that he had sinned by not collecting the half-shekel ransom prescribed in the law (Ex. 30:12,

**<sup>12</sup> When you take a census of the sons of Israel to number them, then each one of them shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them.**

In effect, God intended to judge Israel, so He told David to number the people. That in itself was not a sin. But God knew that David was ignorant of (or had forgotten) the Mosaic law of the census. When it was done with no half-shekel ransom, the people were uncovered, making them vulnerable to the "plague."

Thus, 70,000 men died in the plague (2 Sam. 24:15).

Now put yourself in David's shoes. You discover that you have violated the law, but you know that God has intended to judge Israel. You know that God caused you to number the people. Will you say, "God made me do it"? Will you say, "The devil made me do it"? Or will you repent?

Will you use God's sovereignty as an excuse to sin? Will you see no need to repent? Look at what happened in 2 Sam. 24:10,

**<sup>10</sup> Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have acted very foolishly."**

David took responsibility upon himself and did not use the sovereignty of God as an excuse for his sin. The Bible clearly tells us that God caused this to happen, and it tells us why. God intended to judge Israel for their national sin. As I showed in my book, *Secrets of Time*, the people had not kept their rest years and Jubilees since entering Canaan, and they now owed God 70 years. So God judged them, and 70,000 men died—a thousand for every rest year owed.

But this did not prevent David from repenting. David was not a fatalist. He took responsibility for his own level of authority.

Likewise, God has already taken responsibility on His level by ensuring the salvation of all men at the final Jubilee. But this does not mean that there is no need for men to repent. God is calling all men to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Recognize God's sovereignty, but take responsibility for your actions according to your level of authority. Recognize that your authority is limited, and that you can do little to change your heart, but pray that God will lead you into whatever circumstances are necessary to show you truth, to overthrow every idol in your heart, and to teach you the art of obedience. Then be vigilant to respond to all that the Lord brings your way. This is the path of life.