

Metho-huh? Week 3: Free Will

Scripture

Ephesians 1: 3-14

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Matthew 11:25-29

At that time Jesus said, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Questions:

1. In the Ephesians passage, Paul gives a metaphor of adoption into God's family. He said that "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will..."

Who does Paul mean by "we"? What does Paul mean by "destined?"

2. Pastor Sandy gave an example from the film Lawrence of Arabia. After a journey across the desert, he realized one of his men was missing. The Bedouin guides attributed it to the will of Allah. It was God's will that the missing person die in the desert.

Where do we see in our society leaving people to die in the desert?

Sandy spelled out the logic into the following two questions:

Is God all powerful and all knowing? If so, does that mean everything is "predestined" from God's will?

Or do human beings have the free will to influence and change the direction of the future?

3. In the Matthew passage, Jesus makes it clear that everyone is invited to the party. Does this mean that Jesus is at odds with Paul's writing in Ephesians? Or is the Ephesians passage misinterpreted concerning who gets in on Jesus' party?
4. George Whitfield, a talented preacher, was friends with John Wesley back in the days of the Oxford Holy Club. They would debate over predestination versus free will. Whitfield traveled to America many times and was one of the leaders of the Great Awakening. While apart, our man Wesley wrote some passionate arguments against predestination, which Whitfield believed, and called it blasphemy. "If God has predestined some and not others, then He has done the Devil's work for Him".

How can predestination be "the Devil's work", especially if many of our Christian brothers and sisters believe in it?

5. Calvinists believe that "irresistible grace" is grace for those for whom God has chosen already. Those whom God have chosen cannot resist this grace, and therefore choice for that person is irrelevant.

In the Wesleyan tradition, we believe in "prevenient grace". Grace is every all the time available for everybody. What are the pros and cons of both versions of grace?

6. Free Will is also dangerous. If we are aware of God's love, then we have a responsibility in joining God's plan of love for the world. We have the privilege of influence change for the

better. 'If your dreams do not scare you, they are not big enough.'—Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Nobel Peace Prize winner 2011.

When you hear this, how does it make you feel?

Closing Prayer: God, your grace surrounds all creatures at all times. Help us to become more open to your love. Keep us grounded in your love available to all, and help us to spread it to others. Give us courage to dream out loud. In your name, Amen.