

Scriptures and Doctrine :: There Are Only Two Religions in the Whole World!

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There Are Only Two Religions in the Whole World!

by John G. Reisinger

There are basically only two religions in the world. One says, "If you will do such and such, God will graciously bestow His blessing upon you." The thousand and one varieties of this religion differ only on what the "such and such" is that you must be willing to do. One variety says bathe in a sacred river, another bids you kiss the sacred rock located in the holy city, still another says be baptized or some similar rite, and in distinctly evangelical circles this religion emphasizes, "If you will open your heart, then God..."

Notice carefully the three key words IF YOU WILL.

- (1) God's forgiveness is possible IF
- (2) God's forgiveness is possible if YOU...
- (3) God's forgiveness is possible if you WILL....

The ultimate success or failure of this religion is determined solely by the will of man. Everything depends on an "if," and on "you," and on "your willingness" to do your part. Redemption is always conditional since it depends on man's cooperation for success. The great work of salvation is not actually accomplished until God can find someone who is willing to "cooperate with Him." Our forefathers called this "if you will" system the "religion of works." It was also called "Arminianism" and "semi-Pelagianism" since these were the men who originally caused division in the church by introducing this error of free will. Regardless of the name attached to it by friend or foe, the distinguishing marks are always the same—the IF, the YOU, and YOUR WILL are the decisive factors that make the plan of salvation work. This religion offers a wonderful plan of salvation that is able to do mighty things if you will only let it. The God of this free will religion can only desire and offer to save sinners. He is helpless to secure, by His own power, what He longs to do. The goal of redemption cannot be reached unless man, of his own free will, chooses to permit God to accomplish His purposes.

The false religion of free will, or works, is based upon several unbiblical doctrines. The most basic of these is the universal and indiscriminate redemptive love of God. God is said to love all men in the same way and to the same degree. He loved Judas the same as Peter, Esau like Jacob, and the goats as much as the sheep. Since His love is universal then the greatest gift of His love, Jesus Christ His Son, must have been given to provide a universal atonement, meaning for every individual without exception, in His death. The objects of the Son's atonement must be equal to the objects of the Father's love, so both must include every man. If the Father loves all men equally, and the Son redeemed every man without exception, it follows that the Holy Spirit must convict every man or else the Trinity is not working together toward the same end in the task of redeeming lost men.

FALLACY OF FREE-WILL

The fallacy of this religion is revealed when we ask a simple and obvious question: "Why are not all men saved?" It is not the Father's fault for He loves all men in the same way. It cannot be because Christ did not pay for their sins since in the system of free will, Christ has redeemed (but did not save?) all men. The Holy Spirit cannot be blamed since He convicts all for whom Christ died; that is, every man without exception. Some may say, "I do not believe that last statement about the convicting work of the Holy Spirit." If you reject this then you must reject the other two points also. You cannot believe in a universal love of the Father and a universal atonement by the Son, and then upset it all with a "limited" conviction by the Spirit. No, no; it is either universalism or particularism. You cannot have it both ways. As I mentioned, here is the fallacy. A "plan of salvation" that has God the Father's love behind it, God the Son's atonement for its foundation, and God the Holy Spirit's power applying it should certainly succeed, but, alas, the plan of redemption is foiled by man's mighty free will every time a soul goes to hell! We repeat our question, "Why does it fail? Why do some men perish?" The re

ligion of free will answers, "It fails only because man is not willing to do his part." Those who perish do so only because they will not accept what the Father's love longs to give them, what the Son's agonizing death bought for them, and what the Holy Spirit's mighty power tirelessly tries to persuade them to accept. If you will only do your part" is the message we must preach. If you will just furnish the faith! If you will just take the first step in response to God's offer! If you will only cooperate and give God a chance to make His plan work! If you will then God! This is the earnest, but none less pathetic, cry of the preachers of the religion of free will.

It should be amply clear that this religion of works, or free will, based on a universal love and universal atonement, makes God's whole scheme of redemption depend on man for its success. God's love will prevail if man will let it. Christ's atonement will actually redeem only if man will let it. The Holy Spirit will apply redemption's purchased benefits if man will allow Him. No wonder C. H. Spurgeon, that great soul winner, called free will "utter nonsense," and universal atonement a "monstrous doctrine akin to blasphemy."

Now the second religion is the message of the Bible. It is the gospel of FREE GRACE. It does not look to God for the provision and then turn to man for the power, but it boldly proclaims that the same sovereign grace that planned salvation for or helpless sinners also furnishes them with the ability to desire and receive it. This second religion not only starts at a different place, it works on a different principle, and moves toward a different goal. In short, it is a totally different religion. The religion based on free will (Arminianism - If you will ...), and that based on free grace (Calvinism—God makes us will ing ...) are two very distinct and opposite religions that differ on every theological point at which they meet. Any individual who piously says, "It is really not important, it is merely a question of emphasis," is either deliberately dishonest or completely ignorant of Bible doctrine in church history. The Synod of Dort and the Council of Trent clarified forever the vital importance of the issue once and for all time. I challenge any man to read Dr. J. I. Packer's introduction to the Death of Deity in the Death of Christ by John Owen, and then talk about emphasis. Packer clearly shows that free will and free grace are totally different religions, and furthermore, that they are irreconcilable enemies.

The difficulty in our present generation is with the so-called "Cal-minian." He thinks a Calvinist is a person who believes in eternal security, and an Arminian is a person who believes you can be saved and lost. The Cal-minian is totally unaware that the issue in church history, as well as in the Scriptures, involves the will of man and the application of salvation not the will of God and the duration of salvation. The great gulf between Arminianism (free will) and Calvinism (free grace) is not whether you can be saved and then lost. That is a very minor point compared to the issue as understood by the Puritans and Reformers. The center of the issue is, "Who actually effects redemption?" It is not just a question of who finishes it once it has been started, but whose power applies the gospel at the beginning of conversion as well as who carries it on to the end. The Bible asserts that a sinner's need is far greater before conversion—he is unable to obey, repent, or believe. Cal-minianism says, "No, the sinner has all the power he needs to become a Christian, but only God's power can keep him after he has 'decided to accept Christ' and become a Christian." The sinner has the will power to get up of the grave yard of sin and come to Christ, but only God can keep him from falling after he has "taken the first step." See "That First Step" on page 7

WHO WEARS THE CROWN?

As you can see, the real battle ground is the nature of man, and the prize to be won is the Crown of Credit for making redemption's plan actually work. Is free grace, given sovereignly by the Father, the decisive factor that causes the elect to believe in the first place, or is man's will, exercised sovereignly by the individual, the decisive factor that causes God to choose these whom He "foresees" are willing to believe? Who wins the right to wear the crown of glory, God or man? And by what power was that right won—free will or free grace?

The basic difference between these two opposing religions can also be summed up by asking another question, a question vitally related to the first one. Instead of asking how any man can perish, and being told that, "the man would not do his part which was to simply believe," we now ask, "Why are some men saved?" How is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit's work able to succeed in some cases but not in others? The religion of free will humbly (?) answers that "man made it all possible by being willing to open his heart and give God a chance!" It does not matter if we are speaking of those who perish or those who are saved, we always come back to that if you will. Actually, the gospel based on free will can never be more than a gospel of mere possibility. It is a plan of redemption that cannot truly redeem by its own power, but can only effect real salvation when it finds someone who make themselves willing to do "their part." It is not a question of whether a man must, or does, become willing before he can be saved, we all believe that, but who and what power makes the sinner willing? Does man, of himself, choose to become willing, or does God, by His sovereign power, make His elect will

ling "in the day of His power" (Ps. 110:3)? It seems both logical and judicially necessary to crown with glory the individual who made the plan of salvation actually work, and the free willer does not hesitate to reach for the crown and place it on the head of the sovereign and free will of man.

Some folks may feel we are laboring this point to an extreme, but actually this is the heart of the matter. Who really deserves all the glory for man's salvation? It cannot be both God and man, nor can it be, as many would imply, half and half. Either God saves sinners by "making them willing in the day of His power," or they save themselves by making themselves willing in the "day of their free will decision."

Let me demonstrate quickly how sharp and clear the contrast is and how obviously either God or man gets the glory at each point.

(A) FREE WILL - God chooses those whom He foreknows will, of their own free will, decide to accept Him. (B) FREE GRACE - God gives faith to those whom He has sovereignly chosen.

(A) FREE WILL - Christ's blood has redeemed every man, but only those willing to "accept" what Christ accomplished are saved. It is actually our faith that saves us. (B) FREE GRACE - Christ saves every person whom He redeemed with His blood.

(A) FREE WILL - Those who are willing to believe enable the Holy Spirit to regenerate them, or give them a new heart. (B) FREE GRACE - The Holy Spirit regenerates the elect, or gives a new heart, and enables sinners to believe.

Perhaps someone else is thinking, "But does all this really matter as long as we just preach the simple gospel? Are not these theological problems that have no practical implications and only cause arguments and divisions between Christians and are therefore better left alone?" Our Lord and His Apostles thought these things were vitally important. The Puritans and Reformers believed the preaching of free will was the root error. In their minds to preach free will was to overthrow the gospel itself. They felt it was their duty to God and His church to do all in their power to refute the false idea of free will. It should be added that Rome felt exactly the opposite. She instructed her missionaries going into Protestant countries to "begin to overthrow these diabolical doctrines by reasserting the free will of man." The Jesuits saw free grace as the real enemy to their system of works, or rather, their system of free will. These are historical facts! Let those who believe it is only an emphasis at least read what men like Martin Luther had to say in his monumental work *The Bondage of the Will*. History has branded the word "error" across the doctrine of free will, and marked those who preach it as enemies, even if unwittingly so, of both the gospel and the souls of men.

Now I am aware that many have lost their taste for historic confirmation of the message they declare, but this is only because they do not like the company they are forced to keep as they walk back into time. Men today like to feel they are in the tradition of Knox, Luther, Whitfield, Spurgeon, etc., but when history, the creeds and confessions, and the Reformers and Puritans are seen as united in their outspoken condemnation of free will, then men exclaim, "We believe the Bible not Creeds. We believe what God says, not what men say." Far too often this defensive cry really means, "We believe our own creeds as opposed to those formulated in history. We accept what our leaders say today and reject what men said yesterday." J. C. Ryle, in his introduction to *Holiness*, has answered this attitude better than I ever could. Ryle is not discussing the same point of doctrine (He is discussing Romans seven) that we are, but he is discussing the same type of person mentioned above. He shows that the pious attitude that will not look at history and the creeds under the guise of exalting the Bible as our only rule is often in reality only a dodge to keep from facing the issues.

The commentators who do not take this view have been...the Romanist, the Socinians, and the Arminians. Against them is arrayed the judgement of almost all the Reformers, almost all the Puritans...I shall be told, of course, that no man is infallible, that the Reformers, Puritans...may have been entirely mistaken, and the Romanist, Socinians, and Arminians may have been quite right! Our Lord has taught us, no doubt, to "call no man master." But while I ask no man to call the Reformers and Puritans "masters," I do ask people to read what they say..., and answer their arguments, if they can. This has not been done yet! To say, as some do, that they do not want human "dogmas" and "doctrines," is no reply at all. The whole point at issue is, "What is the meaning of...Scripture...What is the true sense of its words?" At any rate let us remember that there is a great fact which cannot be got over. On one side stand the opinions and interpretations of Romanist, Socinians, and Arminians. Let that be distinctly understood. From: *Holiness*, by J. C. Ryle, page xii

We add to Ryle's words, believe and preach free will if you dare, but be honest enough to admit you are not even a tenth cousin to the Reformers. Tell people you would have been forced to oppose Knox, Spurgeon, Edwards, and Whitfield on the Doctrines of Grace had you lived in their day.

Before concluding this editorial, I would point out a few current problems that owe their birth, nurture, and present growth to the Arminian doctrine of free will. I am not insinuating that every one who believes free will is guilty of these specific practices. I am saying that each of these practices is the direct and logical result of believing and preaching free will over a period of time.

One: It Puts the Wrong Person on Trial.

Christ is pictured as on trial before men. God's great love has given His Son into our hands and we must "do something with Jesus." Now this ignores and contradicts two important Biblical facts upon which the true gospel is built. First, all men have already done something with Jesus, and it was the greatest crime we every committed. Second, God has done something with Jesus, and what God did is our only hope of salvation.

It is true that God put His Son within the reach of human hands, but when He did, we all showed the hatred in our hearts and cried, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" And furthermore, Romans 8:7,8 teaches us that if the opportunity were given to us again, we would still despise Him and declare 'We will not have this man to rule over us.' Luke 19:14 records what we decided to do with Jesus.

Now God the Father has also done something with His Son. He raised Him from the dead and gave Him all power, or authority, of all flesh. This "all power" (Mt. 28:18; Rom. 1:4) is total authority over every single person. Christ alone has the authority to Judge all men (Acts 17:31). He also power to save some men (John 17:2). At this very moment Jesus Christ is every man's Lord. Regardless of color or creed, all men, without a single exception, are in His hands to either damn or save. Only Christ has the power to either save or damn anyone, and He must do one or the other with each individual person. The question is not, What are you going to do with Jesus?, but rather, What is Jesus, Who has been declared to be the Lord, going to do with you? Read Acts 2:32-36 and ask yourself what the "therefores" mean. Peter is declaring that the marvelous exhibition of power at Pentecost was not due to the influence of wine, but a demonstration of the ascended Christ's power over all flesh. Peter was not trying to get sinners to do something with Jesus by "deciding for Him," he was reminding them of what they had already done—crucified the Lord of Glory and Prince of Life. The Apostle further declares what God has done—put Jesus upon an eternal throne with the keys of life and death and then gave Him the exclusive authority to use those keys to open and shut heavens door for "whom He will." It was this power, not the power of the crowd's so-called free will, that made the men cry out, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

You see, the religion of free will makes faith and repentance a display of man's power of choice, but the Scriptures make them to be a display of Christ's ascended power to make dead men live. To the free will Arminian, faith and repentance are the sinner's contribution to the plan of salvation. He presents these as gifts to God to show that he has "decided to accept Christ," or rather, he has decided to "give Christ a chance." However, the Bible makes it clear that faith and repentance are gifts of the ascended Lord which He purchased for His sheep. Regeneration is not the Spirit's response to our faith, but is the effectual call of the Shepherd that enables His sheep to hear His voice, turn from their wandering, and savingly embrace the gospel promise of forgiveness.

Two: The Wrong Person Gets the Credit

When someone "accepts" Jesus, that person is congratulated for his courage and determination in "stepping out for Christ," the evangelist is extolled for his powerful preaching, and the people who gave the money and prayed for the campaign are praised for making it all possible. The glory of election and the grace of effectual calling are not only not mentioned, they are deliberately denied. The reports go out next day that "We had twenty first time decisions last night." Read the biographies of Bonar, McChesney, Edwards, Whitfield, Spurgeon, or any other giant of the past and you will never once hear such God dis-honoring and man exalting language. I dare you to read of David Brainerd and try to imagine that Godly man saying, "I had six decisions last night." The very idea is an insult to that godly man's memory.

Now why did all these men of God, men I should mention who had experienced true Holy Spirit revival under their preaching like our generation has never seen, report the dealings of God with their own souls and that of the souls influenced under their ministry in an entirely different manner than men today? They knew that every conversion was a display of the Father's election, the Son's specific atonement, and the Holy Spirit's effectual call. It was only natural for them to attribute the glory and praise to the source that had caused the effect. They praised the Triune God because He was responsible for the power they saw manifested each time a soul was born again. Since our generation is Arminian, that is, believes in free will, it just as naturally gives the credit to those it feels are responsible for the work accomplished. The sinner, whose "decision" displays both his good judgment and the power of his will to carry it out, must be congratulated. It would be both unkind and unfair to exclude from our praise the evangelist who "won" the person to Christ by persuading him to make the right choice, and we must also mention all the people who "made it all possible" with money and prayers.

Three: The True Nature of Sin and Guilt is Denied

Sinners are told they are guilty of unbelief, but this unbelief is pictured as merely a tragic mistake that the man is making. This mistake consists in the sinner's unwillingness to "accept" the many wonderful benefits that God longs to give him. His unbelief is really no more than a rather foolish mistake that deprives him of some blessings. Men are treated as "neutral" in respect to the character of God and His rights as our Creator are never mentioned. Our job as witnesses is to merely persuade sinners to carefully consider all they are missing by refusing to "accept Christ's offer." Now the Apostles did not view sin in general, nor the sin of unbelief in particular, in such a light. Those inspired preachers considered unbelief a vile crime against God, His law, and His kingdom. Men were not asked to make up their minds and decide for Jesus; they were told in no uncertain terms to change their minds and cease in their fixed rebellion—or else! Of course the Apostles spoke of mercy for sinners but they also demanded repentance and evidence that it was genuine. Again, I would urge you to read Packer's introduction to *Death of Death* for a clear contrast between the message of the "old gospel" as preached by the Apostles, Reformers, and Puritans and the "new gospel" as preached by most evangelicals and fundamentalist today.

Four: It Tells the Sinner to Look in the Wrong Direction

The most drastic error in free will religion lies at the very heart of its message. At the point where a helpless sinner needs God's help and power the most, the sinner is deliberately and dogmatically pointed away from God and told to look to himself. Arminianism tells men that God will not, yea, He cannot, do any more than He has already done. Read C. H. Spurgeon's article, 'Should We Preach Total Depravity?', on page 7, and see how he emphasized the need to "throw sinners down in utter helplessness." Free will informs the sinner that he is not helpless at the beginning of conversion; in fact this error boldly declares that it is only the sinner's power that can do the job at this point. God waits for the man to furnish the power—the will power. The poor sinner is told, "God has done all He can do, it is now all up to you." Instead of throwing sinners down, this is exalting them. Instead of forcing them to look up to God in utter helplessness to find grace and strength, free will throws God down in helplessness and exalts man as the only one with the ability to win the day!

Thank God His great salvation is not merely a possibility based on an if you will ... then God can ..., but it is based on a certainty. It is an absolute certainty because God ...!

Must the sinner be willing to come to Christ before he can be saved? Of course he must, but that is not the question. Is man able to make himself willing to come? Absolutely not. Is God's whole scheme of grace to fail because of the inability and stubbornness of man? No, my friend, the Bible assures us that the God of grace is also the God of power. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power..." (Ps. 110:3) in a sure promise! Were those who believed the gospel in Acts 13:48 willing to be saved? Did Lydia in Acts 16:14 willingly open her heart to Christ as Paul preached to her? Were the men in Acts chapter two willing to seek mercy? The answer is obvious, of course they were willing—in all three cases. The real question is this: "Who and what made them willing?" Read each instance and see if it was the power of free will or the power sovereign grace. The real question is this: "How can a dead sinner with a carnal mind actively opposed to God and righteousness be so changed as to be willing and sincerely desirous of being saved unto holiness?" Exactly how God accomplishes this grand and glorious "mystery" (John 3:8) is beyond me, but I know He does it, and I also know it is ALL His doing.

I know not how this saving faith

To me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word
Wrought peace within my heart.
I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus through the Word,
Creating faith in Him.

But I Know WHOM I Have Believed!