

FREE GRACE OR FREE WILL?

God's Free Salvation Plan

....written to Christians by a Christian

Jim Rooney

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Note: All scripture used is from the New King James Version (NKJV).

Amazing Grace

John Newton

(1725-1807 / England)

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound!)
That sav'd a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears reliev'd;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis'd good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease;
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

This earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who call'd me here below,
Will be for ever mine.

(PoemHunter.com)

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¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power... (Eph. 1:17-19)

The Apostle Paul

Introduction

This book is written to Christians by a Christian. It deals with one of the most important topics facing believers in Jesus Christ. It involves a controversy within our Lord's church that has been going on for centuries. This issue is important as it deals with the biblical truth of why we are saved and how we are saved. It is extremely important that we, as Christians, know the answers to those two key questions so that we can correctly teach others this truth and properly glorify our Lord for the special grace He has given to us who believe.

Since this is a sensitive subject, I have tried to handle it with great care. Therefore, I will not mention any individuals, religious organizations, churches, or denominations. There will be no labeling of groups of people on either side of this issue as there are many different definitions regarding such labels which are oftentimes offensive and unfair. This book is not about counting noses. Godly men and women have been on both sides of this issue. I have tried to be kind in the choice of words used. A Christian has the right and the responsibility to study this issue and then decide what is correct according to the Scriptures. Therefore the main reference source used in this book is the Holy Bible.

I would ask several things of the reader. First, please give this book an honest review. Try to have an open mind as you go through these pages to see if it is the truth of God or not. Test it against the Holy Scriptures. Before judging or rejecting it, make sure you have read it in its entirety. In the end, you may disagree with what has been written, but you will have had the courage to be exposed to something different than what you believe. Second, challenge your own belief system against the Word of God. This is always difficult to do. I had to do this myself, and I asked why other Christians believe differently than I did on this topic. I was willing to study this issue with an open mind, and, when I did, I realized I had been mistaken in my beliefs on

this very important matter. Third, start at the beginning of this book and resist the temptation to skip around so that you can have the best reading experience and be fair in your analysis of what is written. Fourth, pray during the reading of this book that the Lord would reveal to you His truth regarding this subject. Finally, as Christians, let us study this issue together with respect for each other, regardless of which view we hold. As I said previously, there are godly men and women on both sides of this issue. I have kept that in mind as I have written this book.

I take the writing of this book and the discussion of this topic very seriously. One day I will be held accountable to my Lord for every word that I have written here. Therefore, I can assure you I have taken great care to make sure this book is based on the truth of His Word. Since I have been on both sides of this issue, I feel qualified to write this book. Many things that I will share here are among some of the best kept secrets in Christianity.

Why was I searching for the truth about this issue years ago? Why did I change my long held beliefs regarding what is being discussed in this book? I firmly believe it was by the grace of God who showed me for the first time how truly amazing His grace is. It is my hope and prayer that the Sovereign God of the universe will use this book to reveal His amazing free grace to others as He did to me.

Chapter 1

Common Ground

As I start this book, I want to emphasize what the proponents of both free grace and free will share. There are so many differences among Christians. Some are of more importance than others. Some groups baptize differently, some understand the Lord's Supper to mean different things, and some worship in a traditional style while others in a more modern or contemporary way. The differences are many. The issue of this book is one topic that is debated among Christians. However, those who believe in free grace salvation and those who believe in free will salvation share some of the most important beliefs in Christianity.

Within mainstream Christianity, both groups share the belief that our salvation rests on our repentance of sin and on faith in the glorious Son of God, Jesus Christ. Both groups believe that the unsaved man is lost in his sins and in need of a Savior. They agree that this salvation does not come about by our good works but by our faith in Jesus which should then produce good works.

There is agreement on the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless perfection, His miracles, the inerrancy of His Word, His redemption on the cross for our sins, His resurrection, His ascension to heaven, His return one day in power and glory, the resurrection of all mankind, and the judgment. In addition, both groups believe in eternal life and happiness in heaven for believers in Christ and in hell, the tortuous place designed for unbelievers who must endure everlasting punishment for their sins. With so many points of agreement then, what is the problem?

The problem is subtle and seems unimportant at first. Some would say as long as we are saved that is the most important thing. True. However, as Christians, it is imperative that we know the truth about

our salvation, why we are saved and how we are saved. If our understanding on these key questions is flawed, how can we properly fulfill the Great Commission and teach family, friends, and others the truth about salvation? Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6) He wants us to know the truth on all matters He reveals in Scripture, especially about His free salvation plan. Let me be clear about this free salvation plan. While His salvation to us is free, it cost the Son of God dearly in His life on earth.

Perhaps the most important reason to delve into this area is to make sure we give the complete honor, glory, and eternal thanks to God who so freely saved us. We must know why we should be so thankful. We must understand that we should give Him one hundred percent of the credit in our salvation, because we are saved totally by His grace without any help or assistance from ourselves. If our belief system gives any credit or glory to the unsaved sinner in his salvation, however unintentional, then that same amount of credit and glory is taken away from God. We must not let that happen. That is not God-honoring to Him who died for us and brought us to Himself by giving us our faith.

Some might say that we shouldn't even discuss such a topic as this because they say it has nothing to do with the way we live our Christian lives. I would disagree with that conclusion. Doctrine, which is what we believe, does affect how we live our lives. What we believe on this issue impacts how we serve the Lord. It may cause us to try to use pressure tactics to bend the minds or wills of some to become believers. It has caused some pastors to blame Christians for the damnation of others because these pastors say these believers didn't witness as they should have. It can become a gospel of guilt rather than a gospel of grace.

So, the issue described in this book seems to be insignificant and subtle to some Christians. However, it is very important. We must believe the truth about our salvation, teach its truth, and give all the

glory and honor to our God who freely gave us eternal life. This is why I wanted to write this book.

Let's us rejoice and be united in our common ground. However, let us search the Scriptures to make sure we understand the truth concerning the freedom or the bondage of the human will in our salvation.

Chapter 2

“Let’s Start At The Very Beginning”

In the movie, The Sound of Music, Maria sang the song, “Do Re Mi” as she taught the children in her care how to sing. One of her first lines in the song was “Let’s start at the very beginning.” So, in discussing this important subject before us, it is necessary for us to start at the very beginning, to the moment of creation.

The Entrance of Sin: Satan and the Fallen Angels

We know from Scripture that, in addition to creating man, God created angels. The purpose of these angels is to worship and serve God. The Lord created them with wills with which they could freely choose to follow God in obedience or rebel against Him in disobedience. They had free will. That is to say, they had the innate ability or power to freely choose to do good or evil, right or wrong. What is important to note here is that they did not have any predisposition to sin against God. They were created without a sin nature. Sin, which is disobedience to God, had not entered the picture at their creation, so it could not adversely affect any of their decisions.

Let me graphically describe free will to you. Think of the blindfolded lady holding the scale of justice. A decision as to guilt or innocence is made without any undue or external influences. The symbol of the blindfold shows there is no predisposition to choose one way or the other. The plates of the scale of justice start out being perfectly balanced and level. There is nothing tugging downward on either side of the scale. The evidence mounts to either guilt or innocence and the scale tips one way or the other. There is no external force causing the scale to move. It’s only about the evidence which leads to a free decision.

This description fits well with what the angels possessed before sin came into being. They had this free will ability or power because they had no sin nature. As we read in Scripture, Lucifer, in his pride, wanted to be more than just an angel. He wanted to be God. Let's see from Scripture what took place.

¹² *"How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! ¹³For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High."* (Isa. 14:12-14)

Lucifer freely made a choice to rebel against God. He had no outside force compelling him to make that choice; he did it freely in his pride. He then apparently led many angels to follow him in this rebellion against God. They too freely made the choice to rebel against God. God expelled Lucifer, also called Satan, and these fallen angels from heaven.

Jesus said: ¹⁸ *"...I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."* (Luke 10:18)

"And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴ His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born." (Rev. 12:3-4)

So, we see here the entrance of sin into creation. The root cause was pride. However, these created beings did not possess a sin nature so they were able to exercise their free will to sin or not to sin. These fallen angels are the demons we read about in Scripture.

The Fall of Man and His Free Will

What about mankind? As we see in Genesis chapters 1 through 3, Adam and Eve were created by God in perfect innocence. They too were created with free wills. They had no sin nature or predisposition to sin. However, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned against Him by eating of the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They did this after Satan, that old serpent, tempted Eve to disobey God.

Now sin entered the world of mankind. Sin had reared its ugly head and entrapped many of the angelic host and now also the only two humans on earth. The consequences of Adam and Eve's sin brought judgment from God on them. They were removed from the Garden of Eden which was a paradise on earth. Man must now work hard for his sustenance. Women must suffer pain in childbirth and be under the authority of their husbands. In addition, all mankind must experience death. We will all die physically unless the Lord returns first. We also are spiritually dead until we come to faith in the promised redeemer, Jesus Christ, who bruised the head of the serpent.

¹⁵ "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Gen. 3:15)

Something else happened to us humans after the fall. We became separated from God because of our new sin nature. Sin had tainted us terribly. Now, the desire to sin became overpowering. The lusts of the flesh and the pride of life exert great pressure on us to sin against God and His holy Word.

"For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world." (1 John 2:16)

This sin nature is passed on from generation to generation from Adam and Eve. The Scripture says we are conceived in sin.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5)

The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. (Psalm 58:3)

If you don't think infants possess a sin nature, just watch them. They will take the toys of other children, throw temper tantrums if they don't get their way, and willingly disobey their parents. This evil all comes naturally to them because of their sin nature.

Those who are unsaved have no defense against their sin nature. They seek to please themselves. However, even those of us who are saved still have this sin nature. We have the help of the Holy Spirit and can deal with this disease called sin much better than the unsaved because we are spiritually alive not spiritually dead, but we still are in bondage to it.

³⁴ *"Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." (John 8:34)*

In other words, if our wills commit sin, our wills are the slaves of sin. Where is the freedom of our will if our natural inclination or predisposition is to sin?

The Bible describes how corrupt our wills are because of this sin nature.

¹¹ *"There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.*

¹² *They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one."*

¹³ *"Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit." "The poison of asps is under their lips."*

¹⁴ *"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." ¹⁵ "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ destruction and misery are in their ways; ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Rom. 3:11-18)*

This is not a pretty picture of the willful acts of unsaved men. So it is clear that after the fall of man due to sin, we lost the ability of free will. Before we make any choices, the scales are already being pulled down on one side by our sin nature making us want to choose to do

evil. This is true whether we are saved or not saved. Our wills are in bondage to sin.

Do the Saved Have Free Will?

To prove that even the wills of the saved are in the grips of sin and don't possess free will, let me give you two proofs. One is from practical experience and one is from Scripture.

First, let me ask you a question as a believer. Have you ever gone one day in your life without committing a sin in deed, word, or thought? Perhaps you may have gone one day without sin, but that would be very rare, if ever. In reality, we usually sin every day in our lives in some way and usually multiple times each day. Why? What is wrong with our free will that we can't even go such a short time without sinning as a Christian? How many times each day have you committed sin? How many times have you said to yourself that you were not going to lose your temper, say something hurtful, unkind, or evil, not think bad or immoral thoughts, not covet something, not be envious, not have bad feelings toward others, not be prideful, not worry, and not be fearful? Yet it happens repeatedly, day after day. How many times have you thought things that you were shocked you could think? The answer is that our wills are not free but are enslaved to sin. (John 8:34) It is because, even as Christians, this sin nature constantly tempts us and compels us to sin. It grieves us. This everyday actual experience all of us Christians have proves our wills are not free to keep from sinning. Our natural desire is to sin.

Now let me share with you the proof from Scripture. Who do you think was the greatest Christian who ever lived besides Jesus Christ? You would probably say one of the apostles. My guess would be the Apostle Paul. He actually addressed this very issue in Scripture as to whether he had free will as a Christian. Here is what he had to say:

¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. ¹⁶ If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. ¹⁷ But now, it is no

longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. ¹⁸ For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ¹⁹ For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ²⁰ Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

²¹ I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.” (Rom. 7:14-25)

Here is the translation: Paul was saying that his will wanted to do right, but it was defective and would do what was wrong. Why was it defective and not free to choose to do right? It was the sin that dwelt within him (vs. 20). His sin nature caused him to have a predisposition to choose sin rather than choose to do right. Paul, perhaps the most holy Christian who ever lived besides Christ, referred to himself as a “wretched man” (vs. 24). He was deeply afflicted and distressed over his inability to control his will to freely choose to do good or right.

The main point of this book is to address the issue of the unsaved man and his spiritual inability to use a free will to come to salvation. I only mentioned how even the saved do not have a free will spiritual ability to show how even more depraved the unsaved man is. He is totally lost and defenseless against sin without the help of the Holy Spirit which we as believers possess.

How Are We Free?

Let me say, however, that in one sense we all have free will or free choice. What I mean by that is we all do whatever we want to do. We are free agents in this sense. When it comes to the everyday normal choices we make, we freely make those choices to do what we want to

do. Although we are free beings and we freely choose to do what we want to do, we are not free spiritual beings. This is a very important distinction. When it comes to making decisions about God and the things of the Spirit, the unsaved do not have the free will spiritual ability to make those decisions. We are dead spiritually, as mentioned previously, which means we are dead or incapable of making free decisions of any spiritual good toward our Creator or our salvation. That ability has been totally corrupted by our sin nature. Sin destroyed our freedom of will to do right, and now we serve the lusts of our sinful flesh. At the fall of man, what was it that fell? It was the free will ability to equally choose good or evil with a view to pleasing God. Now we are left with an overwhelming predisposition and desire by our wills to do evil and sin against our Creator.

"There is none who does good, no, not one." (Rom. 3:12)

The good news is that as Christians we have the Holy Spirit convicting us not to sin and to confess our sins once we do commit transgressions. The unsaved person does not have this Helper and Comforter.

So here is the truth of Scripture. Since the fall of man, there is no such thing as a free will spiritual ability or power to equally choose good or evil. Man's inclination is to choose evil. Read again Paul's comments in Rom. 7:14-25. Man's will is corrupted and in slavery to sin (John 8:34). The unsaved individual does not understand the things of God and will not seek God with his spiritually dead will. The Scriptures are clear on this point. (Rom. 3:11-12)

Without a sin nature, we can have this free will spiritual ability. However, with a sin nature the power of free will does not exist. We will not shed this sin nature as long as we live unless the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth before we die. The free will belief system has caused Christians to think they are saved ultimately by their own will and not by the will of God. Although the free will approach seems plausible, fair, appealing, and is the most popular view within Christianity, it has to stand the scrutiny of Scripture. Please stay with me as we examine free will more in depth scripturally and see how this belief system has replaced the biblical view of salvation.

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