



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume X
Issue 243

The Myth of Free Will

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

I was raised in the “free will” doctrine and taught it myself diligently for many years as a pastor. We all do have a will: the “problem” is that it isn’t free. “Free will” is simply a myth.



We did not choose our race, our nationality, our sex, our eye or hair color, our birth date, or even who our parents were. No “free will” there at all, and that is just for “starters.”

“Free-will” is “influenced” by our culture, our society, our peers, our sex, our upbringing, our parents, by our spouses, etc. “Free will” is simply an illusion. Everything about us is a composite of influences around us, in circumstances over which we have no control or choice whatsoever. We did not even choose to be here.

Something as basic as weather conditions restrain our so-called “free will.” For instance, we use our “free will” to “choose” to go hiking – then a strong thunderstorm settles in and changes our “free will” plans.

My mother had no “free will” in getting cancer. My father had no “free will” in dying from it. Jenny had no “free will” in her husband abandoning her and her children. Bob had no “free will” in the loss of his job. Jerry had no “free will” in the drunk driver that paralyzed him and killed his son.

Aashish had no “free will” being born, and then living and dying without ever even having heard of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ – not even once, let alone the gospel of what He had done for him.

We all have a “will,” but whatever are its characteristics, “free” is definitely not one of them. Even our belief in “free will” is not of our own “choosing” – it was

thrust upon mankind by the religious system. It makes for good theology, but it just isn’t true. Paul warned us of religion’s “will worship” (Colossians 2:23); and if we listen closely we can hear this worship of human “free will” in the language of its believers:

“I believed in the gospel.”

“I came to Christ.”

“I chose to place my faith in Christ.”

“I decided to live for God.”

The disciples may have thought that they chose to follow the Lord, but Jesus set the record straight:

You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you (John 15:16).

This is why John wrote that the work in Israel was not “of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).

We all make choices every day, none of which are “free” from some kind of influence. For every effect there is a cause. Ultimately God is behind them all, in them all, and through them all. He *alone* is the great Cause. We, as the clay, cannot also be the Potter. From the human viewpoint man appears to have “free will,” but from the divine viewpoint, God,

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

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MYTH (continued from page 2285)

Works all things after the counsel of His Own will (Ephesians 1:11).

Therefore God's will is free, and man's will is not – it is limited.

Currently all creation is subjected to a temporary "vanity" as a part of God's operation to be All in all.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him Who has subjected the same in hope (Romans 8:20).

Those who do not now believe, just as Paul spoke of Israel, are temporarily *locked up* in unbelief.

*God did **SHUT UP** together the whole to unbelief (Romans 11:32, Young's).*

*God **LOCKS UP** all together in stubbornness (Romans 11:32, CLNT).*

One day this will all change. For now, God is working in those whom He has chosen; and even His work in us is His Own will and doing.

For it is God Who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

If God works in the believer to "will," then our will is hardly "free."

As parents we love our children, and they love us "back." They respond to our unconditional love of them. They do not love us out of "free will" – they did not pick us out and "choose" to love us – they were influenced in their "decision" to love us only because we loved them first. They were "set-up!" So it is with God in His relationship with us. We learn this from John's simple words.

We love Him, because He first loved us (I John 4:19).

There is no "free will." The reason that we love Him is completely *OUTSIDE* of ourselves. His love is the *first cause* from which our love springs. Paul wrote of this love being manifested through the Lord Jesus Christ to us:

For the love of Christ constrains us (II Corinthians 5:14).

His love is not just available, or a potential love, nor an offer of love; but it is a *constraining* love. "Constrain" is a strong word. The Greek word from which it is translated is *sunecho*. James Strong defines it as "to arrest (a prisoner)." The word is so strong that it is used in the Scriptures of being *overtaken* by a disease (Matthew 4:24; Luke 4:38; Acts 28:8).

It is interesting that Paul used this word, for he knew firsthand of Christ's constraining love. It arrested him on the road to Damascus. Paul (Saul) was not seeking Christ. He did not "choose" Him. Paul met the resurrected Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, and there called Him "Lord" (Acts 9:6). This was all the grand, abrupt, course-altering, sovereign work of God in reaching Paul.

Paul was on his way to Damascus to do harm to the saints there. He did not change his mind by his own "free will." Rather, it was the dramatic "Damascus Road experience" that transformed his will. Paul met with spectacular interference to his "free will." He met the resurrected Christ! One day, those who have not trusted Christ during this life will be resurrected and brought into the presence of the Son of God, and will with Paul call Him "Lord."

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10).

Oh, the extent to which God will go to reach man! Isn't it odd how Christendom limits God's ability, and yet makes man's will free. God is not limited at all, and in due course He will pull out all the stops in reaching mankind with His love.

Paul did not choose to be an Apostle by his "free will," he was "an Apostle by the WILL OF GOD" (I Corinthians 1:1; II Corinthians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; II Timothy 1:1).

There are two "wills" in the universe: the Creator's and the creatures. God's will is FREE, the creatures' is not. God "*will have all men to be saved*" (I Timothy

(see **MYTH**, page 2291)

His Ability, Not Ours

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

When Moses was chosen and called by God to deliver His people out of Egyptian bondage, he was overwhelmed. Moses focused on what he didn't have. He looked at his inability. It made him a man of excuses. However,

“... it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he doesn't have” (II Corinthians 8:12).

Let's listen in on the conversation (Exodus 4:1-5):

God: “What's in your hand?”

Moses: “A rod.”

God: “Throw it on the ground.”

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a serpent. Moses ran away.

God: “Reach out and pick it up by its tail.”

Moses did what God said and it became a rod in his hand again.

God would use this as a sign that He had appeared to Moses.

God's call of Moses was not about Moses, it was about God. It was about God's ability and purposes. It was about what God would do with what Moses had, not what he didn't have.

We must always remember that God can use anything to do His work and bring Him glory. Thus, Paul could write,

For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he doesn't have (II Corinthians 8:12).

Do not be discouraged about your shortcomings, and your inability, failures, inadequacies, lack of

talents and your weaknesses. God is the Master of them all.

For you see your calling, brothers, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, yes, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

Look at the things that God specializes in using.

God has chosen to use “foolish things,” “weak things,” “base things,” “things which are despised,” and even the “things which are not.”

Can you identify with any of these? Do you sometimes feel stupid, or meager, or low class, or without value? No problem. These are the very things God has predetermined to use in carrying out His work.

Look carefully at the passage and you will see that He even specializes in the use of nothing – “and the things which are not.” Do you ever feel worthless, even to the point that you feel like nothing? Then you qualify for the use of God!

By way of illustration: every day as God asks of you, “What is in your hand?” (so to speak), open up your hand and let Him have His way with you and what you have. Rest in who God has made you! Rest in the place where God has you at this time in your life. Rest in His resources. Rest in His ability. Rest in His faithfulness.

You may not have any confidence in yourself. That's o.k. – it is all about Him. Have full confidence in Him. ►

The Epistles of Christ

by – J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

Forasmuch as you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart (II Corinthians 3:3).

Many have written on the “Life of Jesus,” setting forth the beauty, the grace, the wisdom, the gentleness and the power of Him Who was the Chief among ten thousand, the altogether Lovely One. Yet Paul tells us that, in every Christian’s life, the life of Jesus is to be written,

That the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh (II Corinthians 4:9).

It is these *lives of Christ*, written in men’s daily lives, which are needed in the world.

How is the life of Jesus to be manifested? It is not enough to merely *talk* about Him. There are those who, with silver tongue, can speak of Jesus eloquently and winsomely, in whom it cannot be said that *His life is manifested in them*. In this sense it is not more *preaching* which is needed today – it is more *gospels* in the lives of Christians.

What was the secret of the life of Christ? You have read your New Testament and have been charmed

Being confident of this very thing, that He Who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6).

Here Paul clearly answers his own question of dilemma from some years earlier. As we have already seen, he wrote to the Romans, “... **for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not**” (Romans 7:18); but now how clearly he writes the answer to the Philippians, “... **that He Who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ**” (Philippians 1:6).

What you cannot “perform” in and of yourself, God

by the matchless beauty of that *life* which is portrayed in the gospels. His great central feature was **love** – love full of compassion; love serving even to the humblest needs and at the greatest cost; love which was patient, forgiving, thoughtful, gentle; love unto the uttermost – which went to a cross to save sinners!

Every page reveals some new beauty in the character of Jesus, and uncovers some new depth of His love – and the qualities of that blessed life are to shine in *our life*! His disposition, His spirit, His compassion, His patience, His meekness, His peace, His joy, His humility – these are to reappear in us!

Let us again and again remind ourselves that to *preach* about these gracious things in Jesus, to *talk* about them, to extol them in our hymns is not enough – **they must be manifested in our lives!** The story of Jesus must be repeated in our own dispositions and lives!

Living Without Worry

“will perform.” You are His work. He started you. He will finish you. Therefore, we can rest in Paul’s wonderful words:

For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not (II Corinthians 8:12).

God is placing His in-working “will” in you, to use you – as you are, where you are, with what you have – and all for His glory alone.

That no flesh should glory in His presence (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

The Measure of True Success

by – Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God (I Corinthians 4:5).

Success can be a relative thing. It really all depends upon who is measuring it. Even the world about us has different standards for determining success; but, ultimately, all true success will be determined at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

There are many activities and ventures which, by social and religious standards, appear to be successful. These are honored, respected and celebrated – but all that glitters is not gold.

The Bema

What is successful and of true value will be determined at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The Judgment Seat of Christ is what old-timers often called “the Bema.” They did so because *bema* is the Greek word used to translate “judgment seat.”

*But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set aside your brother? For we shall all stand before **the Judgment Seat** of Christ (Romans 14:10).*

*For we must all appear before the **Judgment Seat** of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it is good or bad (II Corinthians 5:10).*

The Meaning of Bema

The bema in New Testament times was a raised platform at the Olympic Games, where the chief of the games stood and placed awards (*stephanos*) around the neck of all the winners!

For the believer, the Bema is a recognition of what is real and of true value in life. It is about “bringing home the gold.” It is the genuine measure of the success of this life. This success is represented by the lasting quality of gold, silver and precious stones (as opposed to wood, hay and stubble).

Now if any man builds upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble (I Corinthians 3:12).

Gold, silver and precious stones represent a way of measuring what has real and lasting value. Often, in difficult economic times, men will use these as the standards of true wealth. At the *Bema* God will reveal what was of real value in this life. The outcome may be surprising to many.

Love Is Paramount

God has made it very clear what is valuable in life, and love is at the apex of this value. Paul, the apostle, makes the divine case for love as:

a more excellent way (I Corinthians 12:31).

the greatest of these (I Corinthians 13:13).

above all these things (Colossians 3:14).

the bond of perfectness (Colossians 3:14).

Since love is the preeminent value with God, it should be the object of our lives. We will not be disappointed with love: it truly is a sure thing – it never fails.

Love never fails (I Corinthians 13:8).

Love Is ...

The means whereby faith works.

... faith which works by love (Galatians 5:6).

How we are rooted and grounded.

... rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17).

How members of the Body of Christ edify each other.

... edifying of itself in love (Ephesians 4:16).

The Exhortation to Love

We are therefore exhorted, by Paul:

Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love (Romans 12:10).

Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies (I Corinthians 8:1).

Though I ... have not love, I am nothing (I Corinthians 13:2).

Though I ... have not love, it profits me nothing (I Corinthians 13:3).

Follow after love (I Corinthians 14:1).

... By love serve one another (Galatians 5:13).

... The fruit of the Spirit is love ... (Galatians 5:22).

... Forbearing one another in love (Ephesians 4:2).

But speaking the truth in love ... (Ephesians 4:15).

... Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us ... (Ephesians 5:2).

... Abound in love ... (I Thessalonians 3:12).

Love is what is real! God says that it is lasting, edifying, perfecting and profitable. Without this single ingredient of the divine life, we are reduced to nothing. This is why Paul so aptly penned,

And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness (Colossians 3:14). ■

MYTH (continued from page 2287)

2:4), and He Who “works all things after the counsel of His Own will” (Ephesians 1:11) will “reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:20), making Him “the Savior of all men” (I Timothy 4:10).

When my children were young we lived on a busy street with no fence around our house. I would not allow them to play in or near the street. They had no “free will.” I constrained them with my love.

We are not the masters of our own fate. We are not the lords of our own lives. We are the creatures, not the Creator. “He is Lord of ALL” (Acts 10:36), “in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28), and our response to His love is all a matter of timing, “but every man in his own order” (I Corinthians 15:23).

None of us had any “free will” in being included in the disobedience of Adam. It was forced upon us.

Neither do any of us have any “free will” about the undoing of Adam in the obedience of Christ.

Therefore as by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon ALL MEN to condemnation; **even so** by the righteousness of One [Christ] the free gift came UPON ALL men unto justification of life (Romans 5:18).

Not even our faith to believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is a matter of our own choosing.

For by grace are you saved, through faith, and that **not of yourselves**: it is **the gift of God** ... (Ephesians 2:8-9).

THIS is the good news, believe it or not.

If we believe not, yet He abides faithful: He cannot deny Himself (II Timothy 2:13). ■

Did Jesus Come to Change God's Mind About Us, or Our Minds About God?

by – Steve McVey

Since Adam sinned in The Garden, man has had a distorted understanding of who our Father is, thinking Him to be a harsh Judge instead of a loving Father. Yet sin didn't change God: it changed man. Jesus came to set the record straight and help us get our minds right about the Father. He didn't come to change what God the Father thinks about us, but came to change what we think about Him.

Hebrews 1:3 says, "The Son is the **radiance** of God's **glory**." The word "radiance" is the Greek word *apaugasma* and literally means "out-ricing" as in the way the rays of the sun shine out from its surface. The word "glory" is the Greek word *doxa* and means "opinion." (For example, when we sing "The Doxology," we are singing a word (Logos) about our opinion (doxa) of God.)

So the Bible tells us that Jesus is the out-ricing of God's opinion. Opinion about what or whom? About us and what He thinks of us! Jesus came to be the exact expression of the Father's opinion of you. Everything we claim to know about God our

Father needs to be centered in Christ Jesus and what He has revealed to us about the Father.

Don't let anything other than Jesus Himself be your source for understanding Who the Father is:

*God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things ...** (Hebrews 1:1-2).*

Jesus came to show us the Father and what He has shown us perfectly and clearly is that our Father is Love. That's it. Nothing more. Nothing less. Every other doctrine or viewpoint we may develop must be grounded in that reality. Whether it's His justice or His mercy, His wrath or His patience, His strong sovereignty or His still small voice ... you name it. It all must be understood in the light of the fact that He is Love or we will inadvertently stray away from a biblical theology into the smog of a human wisdom polluted by religion. ■

Let Christ Be First

Let Christ be first and Christ be last and Christ fill all between. Let us not look back and vaunt ourselves with "I prayed, I repented, I was baptized," but let us rather shout with the Apostle, "No longer I, but Christ." If I had a hand in my salvation it must needs contain a flaw, for I find failure fills everything I do. But if Christ alone deserves the crown, then all like Him is perfect and immutable.

A.E. Knoch (1874-1965),
Unsearchable Riches, vol.10, p.275