

Eternal Security ~ Part 7

God's Sovereignty and Free Will

In my last post, we dug deeper into Hebrews 6:4-6 with some experts that have a different take on what the author of Hebrews may have meant when he wrote this passage. In this post, we will explore a different, but I think related issue ~ **God's Sovereignty and Free Will**.

In our American culture, we are raised to value our individual freedoms. The first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, known as the "Bill of Rights," literally scream freedom and free will. As a matter of fact, the Tenth Amendment specifically states that "*powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, or prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people*" (emphasis added). In short, we are free to do whatever we want to do as long as we accept those consequences for doing something we are legally not entitled to do. Clearly, I have the absolute right and free will to arm myself under the Second Amendment and the freedom to not exercise that right.

The concept of **free will** appears extensively in the writings of the Tanakh, but generally in relation to the "free will offerings" outlined in Leviticus 7:16;22:18, 21, 23; 23:38. The concept is not as prevalent in the Brit Hadashah. Yeshua stated, "**No one takes it** [His life] **away from me; on the contrary, I lay it down of my own free will. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again. This is what my Father commanded me to do.**" ~ John 10:18. Again, in relation to an offering, Sha'ul writes, "**I tell you they have not merely given according to their means, but of their own free will they have given beyond their means.**" ~ 2 Corinthians 8:3. And in his letter to Philemon, Sha'ul writes, "**but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.**" ~ Philemon 1:14 (NASB)

In "Rightly Dividing the Word," Rev. Clarence Larkin ¹ wrote:

"There is no question but that the "Doctrine of Election" is taught in the Scriptures, and that it applies not only to "service," but to "salvation." It is equally true that the "Doctrine of the Freedom of the Will" under certain conditions is also taught. We may not be able to reconcile the "Sovereign Will of God," with the "Free-will of Man," but that is no proof that they are not reconcilable. They are the corresponding halves of the Doctrine of Salvation, "Election" is the Godward side, and "Free-will" the manward side."

I take from this statement that we have the free will to accept God's gracious gift of salvation through faith in Yeshua and the free will to reject that offer.

A.W. Tozer ² has this to say on the topic of free will in "The Attributes of God – Volume 1: A Journey into the Father's Heart:"

"God is good toward all who accept His goodness. And for those who reject His goodness, there's nothing that even the Almighty God can do if He's going to allow man his free will—and I believe in free will. Free will was given as a gift of God—He's given us a little provisional sovereignty out of His absolute sovereignty. He has said, "I'll allow you, within a little framework, to be your own boss and to choose to go to heaven or to hell." If a man will not take God's goodness, then he must have God's

¹ Rev. Clarence Larkin (1850–1924) was an American Baptist pastor, Bible teacher and author whose writings on Dispensationalism had a great impact on conservative Protestant visual culture in the 20th century. His intricate and influential charts provided readers with a visual strategy for mapping God's action in history and for interpreting complex biblical prophecies.

² Aiden Wilson Tozer (April 21, 1897 – May 12, 1963) was an American Christian pastor, preacher, author, magazine editor, and spiritual mentor. For his work, he received two honorary doctoral degrees.

severity toward all who continue in moral revolt against the throne of God and in rebellion against the virtuous laws of God."

In "The Attributes of God – Volume 2: Deeper into the Father's Heart," Tozer expands on his doctrine of **God's Sovereignty and Free Will** which in the interest of space, I only quote in part.

"The matter of man's free will versus God's sovereignty can be explained in this way: God's sovereignty means that He is in control of everything, that He planned everything from the beginning. Man's free will means that he can, anytime he wants, make most any choice he pleases (within his human limitations, of course). Man's free will can apparently defy the purposes of God and will against the will of God. Now how do we resolve this seeming contradiction?

Down through the years, two divisions of the church have attempted to resolve this dilemma in different ways. One division emphasizes the sovereignty of God, believing that God planned everything from the beginning, that God ordered that some would be saved and some lost, that Christ died for those who would be saved, but He didn't die for the others who would not be saved. That is actually what followers of John Calvin believe.

On the other side, there are those who say that Christ died for all and that man is free to make his choice. But those who teach the sovereignty of God in this exclusive way say that if man is free to make a choice, then God isn't sovereign. Because if a man can make a choice that God doesn't like, then God does not have His way.

God's sovereignty means absolute freedom, doesn't it? God is absolutely free to do anything He wants or wills to do—anywhere, anytime, forever. And man's free will means that man can make any choice he wants to make, even if he makes a choice against the will of God. There is where the theologians lock horns like two deer out in the woods and wallow around until they die. I refuse to get caught on either horn of that dilemma! Here is what I see: God Almighty is sovereign, free to do as He pleases. Among the things He is pleased to do is give me freedom to do what I please. And when I do what I please, I am fulfilling the will of God, not contorting it, for God in His sovereignty has sovereignly given me freedom to make a free choice.

And when I make a choice, I'm fulfilling His sovereignty, in that He sovereignly wills that I should be free to make a choice. If I choose to go to hell, it's not what His love would have chosen, but it does not controvert nor cancel out His sovereignty. Therefore, I can take John Calvin in one hand and Jacob Arminius in the other and walk down the street. (Neither of them would walk with me, I'm sure, because Calvin would say I was too Arminian and Arminius would say I was too Calvinistic!)

But I'm happy in the middle. I believe in the sovereignty of God and in the freedom of man. I believe that God is free to do as He pleases and I believe that, in a limited sense, He has made man free to do as he pleases—within a certain framework, but not a very big one. After all, you're not free to do very many things. You're free to make moral choices. You're free to do a few things, but not that many. But the things you are free to do are gifts from the God who is utterly free. Therefore, anytime I make a choice, I'm fulfilling the freedom God gave me and therefore I'm fulfilling God's sovereignty and carrying it out.

God has said that those who follow Jesus Christ and believe in Him shall be saved, and those who refuse shall be damned. That's settled—eternally, sovereignly settled. But you and I have freedom in the meantime, to do anything we want to do. And though most people think very little about it, we're going to answer for that someday, according to the sovereign will of God.

God has certain plans that He is going to carry out. "***The LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet***" (Nahum 1:3^{KJV}). When God is carrying on

His plans, He is moving in a certain direction. When the enemy comes along (exercising the little freedom God has given him to be an enemy of God) and intersects the will and purpose of God, then there's trouble. As long as we move in the will of God, everything goes smoothly. But when we get out of the will of God, then we have trouble on our hands."

It's hard for me to argue with Tozer. I'm beginning to think I might be a Calvi-minian. In my next post or two or three, I will explore **Calvinism** followed by **Arminianism**.