

The Simple Truth Series #3

Free-will



When the Lord created us, He didn't put us in a cage, blindfold us, cover our mouth, tie our hands, or bind our feet. He let us go free, completely free. We can go anywhere we want, do anything we want, and say anything we want, and He will not stop us, because, He will never normally interfere with our Free-will.

Brother Kevin
www.therescueshop.org

'And expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.' Acts 18:26.

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1.

The freedom to choose

When the Lord created us, He didn't put us in a cage, blindfold us, cover our mouth, tie our hands, or bind our feet. He let us go free, completely free. We can go anywhere we want to go, do anything we want to do, and say anything we want to say, and He will not stop us; because, He will never normally interfere with our Free-will. Free-will simply means, ***Having the freedom to choose your own destiny.*** Each one of us have the God given freedom to choose our own destiny.

Free-will is a very simple subject, and yet it's terribly misunderstood. Some people believe we are only puppets on a string, and as we go through life, we are merely fulfilling what the Lord has already foreordained to happen. But this doesn't take into account Free-will. Psalm 37:23 tells us, ***'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.'*** That's true, but we have the freedom to *choose* whether we walk in those footsteps or not.

There are others who believe, if we accept Calvary we are saved, but if we reject it we are lost. This makes Salvation into salvation by our own works, and it doesn't take into account predestination. But there is a bigger picture which encompasses both sides, and the truth lies somewhere in the middle of the road, between the two extremes.

When the Lord was alone in Eternity, before creation began, He had the desire to create some other beings to share Eternity with Him. He wanted beings whom He could relate to, and beings who could relate to Him. And because He is love, He wanted these beings to be able to express love to Him, the way He would express it to them, not because they would be rewarded if they did, or punished if they didn't, but beings who would choose to love Him because they could.

So, in order for these beings to be able to choose to love Him freely from their hearts, He had to create them with the freedom to choose to spend their lives ignoring Him, if they chose to, or even spend their lives fighting against Him, if they chose to do that. Only then could they have the freedom to love Him from their hearts, by choice, with no strings attached. So when the Lord created us, He gave us Free-will, and set us free.

I could choose to become a doctor and save hundreds of lives, and the Lord would not stop me from doing that, because having Free-will allows me to make that choice. I could also choose to become a Serial Killer, and murder hundreds of innocent people, and the Lord would not stop me from doing that either, because having Free-will allows me to make that choice as well.

When the Lord said "Free," He meant FREE. He doesn't say, "Go free," then close the door in our face, and He doesn't stop us from doing something He doesn't approve of. He allows us to sin, He allows us to make mistakes, and He allows us to make wrong

choices, because He gave each one of us the freedom to do that.

The Oxford dictionary defines Free-will as, '*The power of acting without the constraint of necessity, or fate. The ability to act at one's own discretion.*' A constraint is something that hinders, or stops us, from doing something which we would otherwise do. So, having Free-will, is being able to act free from necessity or fate being involved in our decisions, because necessity and fate both hinder us from exercising Free-will, by putting us in subjection to the will of others. So, Free-will which is constrained by necessity or fate is no longer Free-will.

There are three shades of Free-will. There is *Free-will* itself, there is *Free-will being constrained by necessity*, and there is *Free-will being constrained by fate*. So, we are going to look at examples of each of these, beginning with *Free-will* itself.

2.

Free-will

I wake up one beautiful sunny morning and I decide that I'm going to town today, and I'm just going to walk around and window shop. I don't feel like driving, so I think "I'll get chauffeured," so, I'm going to catch a bus. I walk to the bus stop, get on the bus, and sit down. Someone else gets on behind me and sits across from me. I turn to see who it is, and it's a woman. I don't know her, but her name is Mary. We look at each other and smile, then we both get off the bus in town and go our separate ways.

At 10:00 I decide it's time for a coffee, so I go to Wendy's Café, order a coffee, and sit down to wait for it. Someone else orders one as well and sits down, I turn to see who it is, and it's Mary again. We look at each other and smile, then get our coffees and go off in different directions.

At 12:30 I'm feeling hungry, so I go to Frank's Burger Bar, order a burger, and sit down to wait for it. Someone else orders one, and sits down too. I turn to see who it is, and it's Mary again. We look at each other and smile. Because we've been in the same places at the same times three times today, I feel that we must be destined to meet. So, I go over to her and I say, "I think we were destined to meet, because we've been in the same places at the same times three times today."

She looks me up and down, but she smells a rat, so she replies, "No, I think we were *doomed* to meet." Then we get our burgers, walk out of there, and I never see her again.

It was Free-will which caused that. We both independently chose, to do the same things, in the same places, at the same times. That's no different than two guys arriving at the same Taxi-cab at the same time, and they both try to push into it. "I was here first!" yells one. "No, I was!" screams the other. "No, I was!" demands the first. "No, I

was, it's my Taxi!" yells the other. That's no different than myself and Mary, except there are no hearts and flowers and dizzy feelings, just a lot of swearing, and bad tempers.

It was Free-will that caused that, we all had the freedom to choose, and we all chose to do the same things, in the same places, at the same times, as others, it's what we call coincidence.

3.

Constrained by necessity

Then we have ***Free-will being constrained by necessity***. I'm the driver of the Route 36 bus. I go along Main St at 7:30 in the morning, past the Office buildings and the Industrial area. It's all terribly boring, grey concrete buildings and tar-seal, then I come to the roundabout. If I turn right there, I can go down Wild Street, that's my favourite place, it winds its way down to the waterfall, and the biggest swimming hole in the district where I swam every weekend as a boy. That place is so full of memories for me. I could go that way if I wanted to, the steering wheel, yes, it will turn that way, but I choose not to go down there today for necessities sake, because I know there are people on the bus who are on their way to work, and people who will catch the transfer to the Airport. I will go down Wild Street another time, maybe on Saturday, but not today, because others are counting on me.

So, I choose to keep my job and see that everyone else on the bus get to their appointments on time. I subject my own Free-will to the Free-will of others, for necessities sake, it's necessary. Each one of us have to do that in different ways every day of our lives. Our Free-will is constrained by necessity.

4.

Constrained by fate

Then we have ***Free-will being constrained by Fate***, which means, the Lord has fore-ordained a certain event to happen today.

Our Free-will is sacred to the Lord, but the Will of God is more sacred. So, if the Lord has fore-ordained a certain event to happen today, our Free-will is constrained by fate, and made subject to the Will of God. A good example of this in Scripture is found in Acts 16:6-9. Paul and Silas had chosen to go to Bithynia, but the Lord stopped them from going there, because He had Divine Appointments for them with Lydia, and the Philippian Jailer in Macedonia, and the appointments resulted in the conversion of them both, which was more important than what would have happened in Bithynia.

But back to myself and Mary. The Lord knows that we could get along perfectly

together, if He could just put us in the same place, at the same time, so we could meet. So, He decides to open a door between us, by taking us to the Bus stop, the Café, and the Burger Bar, at the same times. He has made it our Destiny to meet today. He also knows that it could be beautiful, or it could be a fizzer. We could admire each other from a distance, and both be too nervous to say anything to the other.

So, at the Burger Bar I feel that we are destined to meet, and I go over to Mary and say, "I think we were destined to meet, because we've been in the same place at the same times three times today."

I feel that talking to this complete stranger, is the bravest thing I've ever done in my life, and it makes me feel like Sir Lancelot. Mary looks at me all starry-eyed, and she says, "Yes, I think we were too." She holds out her hand and says, "I'm Mary." So we shake hands, and I say, "I'm um...um.....ah?" But my heart is beating so hard, and I'm so nervous, that my mind has gone blank, and I can't even remember my own name.

But Mary doesn't care that I'm acting like the Village idiot, because she thinks I'm Sir Lancelot too. So we ride off into the sunset, in the bus, and live happily ever after.

That was not Free-will, because our definition of Free-will was, '***The ability to act at one's own discretion,***' meaning without anything else causing the outcome, we *decide* the outcome. That was fate, because neither of us chose to catch *that* bus, neither of us chose to go to *that* Café, and neither of us chose to go to *that* Burger Bar. The Lord chose it for us, and He took us there, like moving pawns on a chess board.

I could have chosen to go to my favourite Café for my coffee, but the Lord would have over-ruled my choice and taken me to the one He chose, because, the events of that day were a part of the Will and Plan of God, and the Plan of God is always more important than the Plan of Kevin, or the Plan of anyone else. My Free-will was constrained by fate, so the Plan of God would be fulfilled. But even though the lord chose for us to meet, both of us had the choice to say yes, or no, Free-will gave us that choice. The only time the Lord will ever over-rule our Free-will, is when it will clash with the Will of God.

5.

Free, but not really free

When we put restraints on people, to stop them using their Free-will, things go wrong, because it dooms us to slavery. A lady from Malaysia told me the children over there will never touch anything in a shop, and never speak unless spoken to. We have a word that was given to us in the 17th century via the Portuguese, 'Amauco,' from the Malay word 'Amok.' It's a noun, denoting a Malay in a homicidal frenzy. These people have been controlled, and denied Free-will for so long, that inside a desire is festering, to break out and do something without the world's permission. Something, that is against

everything they've ever been allowed to do. Eventually, they 'run amok,' go on a homicidal rampage. They kill their family, then kill others. Why? Because, we weren't made to be controlled like that.

When we put restraints on others, it takes away their Free-will. We weren't made to be told, "This is how you dress," and, "This is what you can do." The only people who can be told that are slaves, and prisoners, because, they have lost their freedom. But God didn't make slaves, He made free men, and free women, with the freedom to make all their own choices. The Lord gave us Free-will so we *wouldn't* conform. He doesn't want conformity, He wants individuals, because He created us individually, and He treats us as individuals.

There will always be people around who will want to control others, they're called bullies. And there will always be people who will feel they can't do something, because others won't approve, that's the herd mentality. But neither of these is the Lord's Will. We do need guidelines for the sake of order and decency, but those guidelines are only there for those who would impinge on the Free-will of others.

6.

The price of freedom

Having Free-will means nothing is set in stone. We can choose to do a certain thing tomorrow, then wake up tomorrow morning, and choose to do something entirely different. We are not on a railway track, we are on an ocean. We can go left or right, forward or backwards, and there are no restrictions placed on us, except by necessity and fate.

But having Free-will doesn't only mean we make right decisions. It also means we can make decisions that take us out of the Will of God. I can make a choice that puts me in the wrong place at the wrong time, and I could drive around a corner one night, and be killed by a drunk driver on the wrong side of the road. Accidents happen, disasters happen, children die, and people die painful, lingering deaths every day, not because it's the Will of God; but because having Free-will allows us to make decisions that take us *outside* the Will of God.

I have a friend who tells me he will not die until the minute the Lord has finished with him, not one minute earlier, and not one minute later. That could be true, but it doesn't take into account Free-will. I had a friend who ate unhealthy food, until he became so overweight, that his body couldn't function normally any longer, and he had a stroke and died. I don't believe that was his time to go, because he was still a young man. But the Lord didn't expect us to use our bodies as rubbish bins.

In 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul said, ***'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.'*** We could say, ***'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not good for***

me. It's lawful for us to eat whatever we want to eat, but it isn't always good for us.

I have another friend who told me about a teenager who was riding his skateboard on a footpath, when he fell off, landed on his head, and died. My friend was really angry about it. She said, "Why did God let that happen? That isn't supposed to happen! God's supposed to stop that from happening!" Really? No, the Lord gave us Free-will. It's lawful to ride a skateboard without a helmet, but it isn't always expedient, because the Lord didn't design our skull to be used as a crash helmet. We can also live on a beach, and be washed away by a tsunami, or live on a fault line, and be crushed by our house, when it collapses during an earthquake, those are the prices we can pay for Free-will.

7.

Protected by love

Is the Lord really supposed to stop anything bad from happening to us? If we read Psalm 91 it sounds like it. In verses 5-7 it says,

'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; Nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at the right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.'

So, Psalm 91 does promise us the Lord will protect us from anything that would harm us, but this all comes with a proviso, which we find in verse 1. It says,

'He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.'

He that *dwells* in the Presence of God. Not he who *visits* the Presence from 10 till 12 on Sunday morning, but he who *lives* in the Presence of God. Verse 9 tells us the same thing,

'He who has made the Most High his (or her) habitation.'

And in verses 14-16, the Lord says of these ones,

'Because he hath set his love upon Me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known My Name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him My salvation.'

I have a friend whose father was a farmer, and he was a Godly man. He would get up early in the morning and pray, until the Lord's Presence came. Then all day long as he worked, he would be careful not to do anything, that would chase the Lord's Presence away. Sometimes he would have an accident, he might cut himself, but he would ignore it, because he knew that if he concentrated on the cut and trying to fix it, he would take his mind off the Lord and the Lord's Presence would leave him, and he didn't want that.

So, he would ignore the cut, and continue in prayer and worship as he worked. Then, when he looked at the cut later, it would be gone, it was healed, because he lived in the Lord's Presence. That's what Psalm 91 is about, we don't just *visit* His Presence, we *live* in it, and in His Presence we are protected, as He promised us. That's what the Lord promises us, protection from the things we can't protect ourselves from, because we are the love of His life.

8.

Making choices

All through the Bible we have examples of Free-will being used, and choices being made. Probably the most quoted one would be from **Joshua 24:14-15**.

'Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the Gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'

Joshua gave Israel the choice, either serve the Egyptian Gods your fathers served, serve the gods of the Amorites here, or serve the Lord? Each one of them had that choice to make for themselves.

Having Free-will means we can choose to trust the Lord, or we can choose to doubt Him. Imagine a 3-year-old, he climbs up on top of the dinner table and stands on it, and to him that's a real achievement. So, he yells, "Look at me daddy, I'm on top of the world!"

Dad puts his arms out and says, "Come on, jump and I'll catch you!" "No!" the boy screams. "Come on, trust me!" Dad says. "No!" the boy yells again. "Come on, Jump, and I'll catch you!" Dad promises. So, the boy decides to trust his Dad. A big smile spreads across his face, he puts his arms out, and jumps, and Dad catches him.

The boy had the choice to trust his father, or doubt him, and that's the choice Free-will gives us. When the Lord puts His arms out and says, "Come on jump, I'll catch you," do we believe what He has promised, or do we doubt Him?

The Lord promised Israel that He would take them to a land that flowed with milk and honey. But they doubted Him. Paul reminded us of that in Hebrews 4:2, he said,

‘But the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.’

The Lord promised he would take Israel to the land, but Israel did not trust Him to take them there, so He couldn't do it, because of their unbelief. **Having Free-will gives us the choice to express faith or doubt.**

9.

Given the freedom to choose

When we become Christians, the Lord doesn't take away our Free-will, and He doesn't leave us to bravely muddle-on-through the best we can, being subject to chance, and the wrong choices that others make. No, He gives us the best He can give, His own Spirit and Presence. And He says, "Hey buddy, this world is a mine field, but I'm going to order your footsteps, and keep you safe. Just walk with Me where I lead you, and I will protect you." He won't stop us getting sick, but He does promise us healing. Disasters will happen, but He will go through them with us. He will guide us through the storm, and the valley of the shadow of death, because we *chose* Him.

Our Free-will is sacred to the Lord, but the triumph of Free-will comes when we choose to say from our hearts, "Lord, not my will but yours be done. I want You to choose where I go, and guide me there. Where You lead me, I will gladly follow. What You ask me to do, I will gladly do. What You want me to believe, I will gladly believe, and trust You." When we can willingly surrender our Free-will to the One who gave it to us, and live by His Will and His Word alone, trusting, that what He has promised us, he is also able to perform, we will have the perfect peace, that this world cannot give.

That's the difference between a self-centred life, and a Christ-centred life. Do we want to live a self-centred life? At the mercy of our own wrong choices and the wrong choices that others make? Or do we want a Christ-centred life? Being jealously guarded by the One who knows all things? A Psalm 91 life?

We should begin every day with prayer, "Lord, I accept this day out of Your Hand, and I offer it back to You in Your Service. I invite You to step into my shoes, and live through me today, however you should choose to. Please fill my heart with Your love, my mouth with Your Word, and may Your Spirit have pre-eminence in all I do. Not my will, but Yours be done in all things."

10.

The ultimate choice.

So why did the Lord give us Free-will? It's because at some time in the life of each one of us, He will knock on the door between His world and ours, and invite us to "Come follow Me?" There are no constraints, and there are no demands. It's a choice that we can respond to or ignore, Free-will allows us to make that choice. But it's a choice that each one of us must make for ourselves, and whether we have an Eternity to live after this life, depends on the choice we make, so we must choose wisely.

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Ed.D.