



MAN AND FREE WILL

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Today I invoke heaven and earth as a witness against you that I have set life and death, blessing and curse, before you. Therefore choose life so that you and your descendants may live! (Deuteronomy 30:19)

This passage from the Holy Scriptures, which is the basis of our meditation, takes us back to the order that God laid down for man in the Garden of Eden. This command repeated below in Genesis 2: 16-17, is the very first commandment God gave to Man: Then the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die."

Whereas God has the power to bring man's heart unconditionally to do or not to do something, a power He could have exercised in an inescapable or coercive

way over Adam and Eve, leaving them no possibility of choosing between eating and not eating the forbidden fruit, God on the contrary just gave them a command, followed by the death penalty should they disobey. At the same time, He gave them the FREE WILL, which is the ability or capacity to think, make a choice, and decide wilfully (without constraint).

Using the power of free will, Adam and Eve had to make use of their ability to CHOOSE. They both agreed to eat the forbidden – hence, they chose to disobey.

Since creation, free will has undergone mutations as Man progressed with God, and following the plan of Salvation. We will present these mutations below, through the key moments that humanity is going through, concerning Faith.

1. AT CREATION

Man was created in the image and likeness of God, to be His representative to the rest of creation and to subdue it (Genesis 1:26- 28). Remember that, in the order of creation, Man is created "god" (Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34-35), yet

remains submissive and obedient to God, his Creator, who has given him authority over the rest of creation.

Man, knowing the other creatures, has the power to tame them in order to satisfy the needs of his livelihood on earth, and to enjoy the relevant benefits with thanksgiving to the Creator.

Moreover, Man is the only creature with the spiritual knowledge of knowing God and worshiping Him according to the way He has revealed Himself to him. This knowledge is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The story of Cain and Abel is a good example that shows us that in the beginning, there was no law or any ordinance requiring Man to bring offerings to God. However, Cain and Abel, through spiritual knowledge (revelation), were convinced to offer the products of their labour to God in worship, even though there had been no offering practice before them. (Genesis 4:2-4).

YHWH is the Creator and the ONLY God of both Man and the entire creation. Although Man has the power of free will, he nevertheless remains the only CREATURE with a

relationship with God based on total OBEDIENCE and ADORATION.

2. AFTER THE FALL

Satan, well-versed in mischief, was well aware that God had given

Man the ability to decide freely on the choices regarding himself and other creatures. Through deception and lies, he aroused pride and disobedience in Man, convincing him that all he had to do was eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree so that he would have the knowledge of good and evil, and become like God the Creator. (Genesis 3:1-6)

The lie is that because the devil's plan to become like God had failed, leading to his downfall (Isaiah 14:12-15), he now decided to persuade man that he could, through the knowledge of good and evil, become like God. Subtly, Satan incited man to use his free will, and to choose to become like his Creator.

Being tempted, man no longer wanted to be who God

wanted him to be, i.e. "a creature in the image of God", but he opted to be the equal of God, Creator, and to take responsibility for good and evil.

He listened to Satan, the liar, and disobeyed God, and yet there was a permanent dialogue between him and God. He should have brought to God Satan's question or solicitation.

Alas, Man wanted to know more than what God wanted him to know: "... *In striving to KNOW more than what is revealed... Man falls into pride...*" (MEVC, Feb. 2024).

It is relevant to recall in the meantime that the relationship between God and man is fundamentally based on obedience and adoration. Unfortunately, Man abused his ability to freely make decisions by choosing to DESOBEY, and disobedience is SIN.

By this sin, man broke the fellowship with God, and lost his divine nature. He fell under the control of Satan, and into the bondage of sin, having no power to free himself from it or to choose what is good:

"For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is in my flesh: for I want to do good, BUT I CANNOT DO IT. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the very evil I do not want." (Romans 7:18-19). This is, therefore, the decline of humanity; it happened because of disobedience.

This situation of decay allows the evil one to control and obscure the thoughts of man, turning his heart to evil. This is what the Word says in Genesis 6:5: "... Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was only evil all the time"; and in Genesis 8:21: "... even though the inclination of their minds is evil from childhood on..."

"Being carnally minded and not spiritually minded the fallen man entered into enmity with God and became unable to submit to His Law". (Romans 8:6-8).

3. UNDER GRACE

In the preceding point, the state of the fallen man was presented not to make a statement and complain about it; but, in truth, it was a way of denouncing the devil's trick and his evil works. His ultimate goal is to separate man from the face and love of God and to prevent him from being saved.

That is why, "... God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

Through Christ, grace came to favour man, to justify him, and free him from the bondage of sin, from the grip of the devil and his works of darkness.

Grace gives man the ability to make the right choice, that of receiving Christ as Lord and Saviour. Christ gives man his life, and he becomes a new creature, or a born-again person. Grace, through faith REHABILITATES man in his capacity as a child of God, reconciles him with God, and allows him to recover his divine nature.

The psalmist reminds us in the following scripture: "I have said, you are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes" (Psalm 82:6-7).

By faith, Christ lives in every man who accepts and receives him. He takes authority over his life, and makes his choices and decisions meaningful: "IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE, IT IS CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME".

The statement in Galatians 2:20 reveals that, by an act of faith, a man who has received Christ, denies himself, submits voluntarily and totally to the direction (governance) of Christ, that is, to the will of God.

In this respect, let's take the commendable example of Moses, who, without renouncing his leadership position conferred on him by God over the people of Israel, knowingly renounced his power of decision, by addressing God, in humility, in these terms: "... Behold, You say to me: Bring this people up! But you have not let me know whom you will send with me... If your presence does not go with us do not

take us up from here." This biblical account is one of the fine examples of total submission to God. (Exodus 33: 12-15).

Knowing God's will is, therefore, the highest point in man's relationship with God during his lifetime. So, amidst all the many voices within and around us, let's learn to recognize God's will and live by it.

But how can we recognize God's will in order to draw the difference between our own will, and the will of those who advise us, teach us, or mentor us spiritually?

We will certainly recognize God's will through our personal DAILY MEDITATION of his Word, and by DWELLING in PRAYER continually. This is the best way to usher our whole BEING in silence, in rest, and intimacy with God, so that our heart may listen to his voice, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 says "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the

person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed".

The Apostle Paul says: "... We do not cease to pray for you and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you might walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing..." (Colossians 1:9-10).

Indeed, grace gives us the ability to rid ourselves of our weaknesses, to listen to the voice of God, to live according to His Word, to pull down strongholds, and to bring into captivity every thought into the obedience of Christ, as God allows us. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Isn't it written: "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13).

Christ willingly chose not to come down from the cross although all authority was given to him by the Father, instead, he decided to submit to the will of God and became obedient unto death (Hebrews 4:15-16). (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, says that he knows his sheep, and his sheep know him and hear his voice (John 10:3-5); and Revelation 3:20 says: "Behold, I stand at the door, and I knock. If any man HEARS MY VOICE AND OPENS the door, I will enter him, and I will eat with him, and he with me."

CONCLUSION

Man, created in the image of God to be his representative to all creation, is granted the power of free will to govern himself and the rest of creatures through obedience, thanksgiving, and the worship of God.

After his fall, Man lost the power to choose what was good and was plunged into the bondage of sin due to the influence of Satan. Satan's designs were actually to lead man away from the face of God, as it is written in Genesis 3:8: "And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Jehovah God in the middle of the trees of the garden."

By grace, through faith, man uses his free will to accept and receive Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour. He is then justified and rehabilitated in his nature of "god", and he deliberately chooses to let Christ live in him.

So Free Will finds its essential significance in the fear of the Lord God and obedience. Now, this constitutes the mark of wisdom and faithfulness to God.

While Adam and Eve used their free will to disobey, the redeemed and faithful Man in Christ, on the other hand, used his free will to submit voluntarily and totally to God's goodwill, obeying and allowing himself to be taught by the Holy Spirit, in righteousness and the hope of salvation.

Now, that he has eternal life, man is definitively delivered from the pressure of choice between good and evil, and can only resort to worship THE HOLY of holies.

Brethren, having gone through the evolvment of the power of free will, about disobedience, Faith, and Salvation, you are left with one and only one WAY to make good and wise

use of FREE WILL. This precious gift of God to Man; this only WAY is that of making an ultimate choice, that of submitting to Christ and making with him the following confession: "YET NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS BE DONE". (Luke 22:42).