

## **The Cost of Free Will**

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The subject of free will is a complicated topic. The subject relates to our ability to make decisions. But, how do we make decisions? What influences our decision-making process? Can we blame poor decision-making on various influences? Who is responsible for me? Can we take sole credit for wise decisions? These important questions demonstrate the complexity of the subject of free will.

### **Defining Free Will**

Before proceeding, let's try to define free will. The Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, David Hume (1711-1776), said that trying to define the nature of free will was "the most contentious question of metaphysics." Defining the term is a difficult task. The following definition highlights the complexity of this topic.

"The power or capacity to choose among alternatives or to act in certain situations independently of natural, social, or divine restraints" (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/free-will>).

In the Bible, there is an example of people choosing to contribute to the Tabernacle project. Moses asked Israel to donate to the project. The text uses the expression "willing hearted" to describe the people who gave personal items to be used to make the Tabernacle. Their hearts were stirred and their spirits moved to participate in this effort (Exod. 35:20-21). The donations were voluntary.

In the New Testament, the Revelation letter closes with an invitation: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17 KJV). This is an open invitation for those who are willing to accept. The Spirit and Bride invite. They do not coerce.

In the instances of Moses and Revelation, people were permitted to make a decision. Israelites could contribute to the Tabernacle project or not. We can accept the invitation of the Spirit and Bride or not. A concise definition of "free will" is self-determination.

### **Free Will & External Influences**

Everyone is influenced in their decision-making. The battle of nature versus nurture is part of the discussion of free will. There is no doubt that we are shaped through nurture. Nurture represents our background; the context of our decision-making. And, while nurture may explain bad decisions, nurture does not excuse them.

Since the Garden of Eden, God has attempted to influence the decisions of humans. He has given us what we need to have healthy, productive lives. He has made clear how we can live in harmony with Him and one another. Likewise, God has made clear certain boundaries

and the consequences for violating them. Then, God makes us responsible for the stewardship of His world and our relationship with Him. He permits us to choose how we live; yet, He holds us accountable for our choices.

Our upbringing may explain what contributed to how and why we made a certain decision. However, there comes a point in our lives when we must accept responsibility for our choices. Adam blamed Eve and God for his sin; yet, God held Adam responsible for his decision (Gen. 3:12, 17-18). Israel blamed their forebearers for their problems; yet, God declared, the soul that sins will die (Ezek. 18). God will not treat us any differently.

### **Free Will is Not Free**

The term free will can be a misleading concept. People use this concept as a point of pride. They are entitled to make decisions irrespective of what others or God may think about their decisions. This is how the concept is often promoted in our democratic, capitalistic society. People want to live in a world where their choices do not have negative consequences. Yet, this is nothing more than a philosophical farce: a fairyland. In reality, our choices come at a price. Free will is not free.

When a husband acts on his selfish impulse of lust and commits adultery, he harms his wife. This is unavoidable. When a woman has an abortion, she harms her unborn child. When an up-and-coming entrepreneur defrauds investors, he or she harms the finances of the investors. When a little boy calls a little girl an unkind name, the feelings of the little girl get hurt.

Biblically, when sin is committed, there is a price to be paid. A wrong must be righted. Justice must be served. God does not turn a blind eye to sin. Yet, God does not exact His wrath upon us when we sin. He did not consume Adam and Eve when they sinned. Instead, God promised to save them and us through the Seed of Woman, Jesus (Gen. 3:15).

In the New Testament, the cross of Jesus is described as an atonement for our sin. Jesus took the penalty for our sinful choices. He paid for our redemption with His blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Our sinful choices cost Him everything. But, what does this mean for us?

We can choose to be saved from our sins by obeying Jesus, our Lord. And, while God permits us to make this choice, it comes at a cost. We must choose to sacrifice the sin that made the death of Jesus necessary: "...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

Giving-up sin is not easy. Such changes often result in the loss of relationships. Peter warned us not to be surprised when we lose friends when we give up sin (1 Pet. 4:4). Yet, whatever we have to pay to sacrifice sin will never compare with what we will be given by God (2 Cor. 4:17).

Likewise, if we choose to live in sin, there is a price to pay for that decision. God will not turn a blind eye to us if we reject the salvation offered by His sacrificed Son. Paul warned that God will inflict vengeance on those who have rejected Him and the Gospel (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

### **Conclusion**

As strange and unusual as this may seem, our Creator endowed us with self-determination. His existence and provisions represent influences on our lives. His love is intended to attract us to Him (John 12:42). He permits us to choose how to live, but He also holds us accountable for our choices.

In our society, free will sounds great. However, we must be careful. Free will is not free. There are costs to our decisions. Prices must be paid. There is a day of reckoning in our future. If we reject God in this life, we will leave this world with insurmountable debt. If we obey God in this life, we will leave this world with the debt of our sin having been paid by our Savior. The choice is ours.