

Concerning Free Will

“It is *because of him* that you are in Christ Jesus.”

-1 Corinthians 1:30

I suppose it would be best before searching for any answer to this issue that we clearly understand the question. It is always best to define our terms from the beginning but the problem with this is that in order for us to be biblical, we also need to derive our definitions from the Bible. But then it seems like we are staring before a circle of trying to understand a problem from scripture with the clarification to the problem rooted in scripture. Forgive my inadequacy to clarify these ideas but all I am saying is that if we are to be biblical with our answers to these issues, these very issues must also be defined biblically. With that said, what then is “free will?” We can define this two ways: by first formulating any sort of definition *before* appealing to Scripture or we first look to Scripture and *then* get our definition. Let’s try the first option. It seems to me, at least somewhat intuitively, that free will is an issue of ability and autonomy. If you are free to do something, then you are both able to do something and you have the choice of whether or not you want to do it. For example, I am free to go to the grocery store this afternoon. I am physically able and I can choose whether or not to go. But what about flying?¹ Am I “free” to fly? Most likely not, since I am not actually *able* to fly. And this restriction on my ability is furthermore a restriction on my decision. I cannot choose to do something I am unable to do. A man with no legs is not free to run.

So then, being free must be referenced to the object’s nature, that is, what they are capable of doing. We must keep this in mind as we dig deeper. For already, it seems, that we can say that we are not absolutely free, that is, free to do whatever we want even beyond our abilities i.e. beyond the limitations of our nature. And certainly this would apply to God as well. God too has a nature that he is restricted by but free nonetheless. God is perfectly righteous; therefore God is not free to sin. He cannot be unrighteous. This goes beyond his nature. So it seems then that if we define freedom as *the ability to operate within the restraints of our nature*, both God and man are free. When we move onto the issue of the will, things begin to get stickier however.

But is that the biblical definition as well? Let us now attempt to answer these issues biblically, that is, take an exhaustive look at all of the counsel of God to see where this issue is raised and since we have seen that freedom relates to the objects’ nature, it would be proper to begin by looking at what scripture says about our nature.

1. Man’s nature

We begin with the fall of man in Genesis.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely *die*.”

-Genesis 2:16,17

After eating from the tree, Adam and his wife therefore died. Surely this is not a physical death, at least not immediately, for we do not learn of Adam’s death till Genesis 5:5 which indicates

¹ Assuming, of course, that I am not suggesting actual air travel via plane.

that he lived 930 years! This is a *spiritual death* with grave consequences. Therefore, scripture specifies that we, while physically living are dead.

“...you were *dead* in your sins and in the *uncircumcision of your sinful nature*...”
-Col 2:13

“But Jesus told him, “Follow me and *let the dead* bury their own dead.””
-Matthew 8:22

“As for you, you were *dead* in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, *we were by nature objects of wrath*. But because of his great love for us, *God*, who is rich in mercy, *made us alive* with Christ *even when we were dead* in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved.
-Eph 2:1-5

“For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now *dead*, so that they *might be judged* according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.”
-1 Peter 4:6

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through *one man*, and *death* through sin, and in this way *death came to all men, because all sinned* – for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, *death reigned*...”
-Romans 5:12-14

“For the wages of sin is death.”
-Romans 6:23

Not only are our natures spiritually dead, but as Ephesians 2:1-5 suggests, we are also *objects of wrath*. Because we are saturated in sin, there is no faculty of our nature that is unaffected by this spiritual death. In order for God to still be righteous, He must not only despise sin but place his wrath and judgment on it. Our natures are in *direct conflict* with the very righteousness of God.

“Once you were *alienated from God* and *were enemies* in your minds because of your evil behavior.”
-Col 1:21

“For if, when we were God’s *enemies*...”
-Romans 5:10

So we know that due to the fall of Adam, we are enemies of God, spiritually dead, and objects of wrath *by nature*. One consequence we shall see is that we *by nature cannot* choose God. The

emphasis on that last sentence is “cannot.” We are unable to prefer God to sin. Dead people do not and furthermore *cannot* make decisions.²

2. Man is unable to choose God (he is not free but held captive)

Sinful dead men cannot choose a righteous living God. They are *unable*. Their nature prevents them from choosing God. Notice the following verses say that man *cannot* come to God. This “cannot” is a reference to ability. We are unable to come to God on our own initiative.

“*No one can come to me* unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day....He went on to say, “This is why I told you that *no one can come to me* unless the Father has enabled him.”

-John 6:44,65

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, *and he cannot understand them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”

-1 Cor 2:14

“Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, *no one can enter* the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.””

-John 3:5

“Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and *no one can say*, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”

-1Corinthians 12:3

“Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!”

-Job 14:4

“Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree *cannot* bear bad fruit, and a bad tree *cannot* bear good fruit.”

-Matthew 7:18,19

“And even if *our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing*. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they *cannot* see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” *made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*”

-2 Corinthians 4:3-7

“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It *does not* submit to God’s law, *nor can it do so*. Those controlled by the sinful nature *cannot please God.*”

² To see the relationship between sin and death observe Acts 2:24 where we see why Jesus’ sinlessness freed him from the curse of death.

-Romans 8:6-8

If we are unable to choose God, then we are not ultimately free. Ultimate free will would suggest that we have the ability to act as the ultimate self-determining factor of our salvation. But in fact scripture attests otherwise. It repeatedly indicates that we are not free but in fact prisoners, held captive to our own sinful nature.

“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a *prisoner of sin*, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held *prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.*”

-Gal 23:22, 23

“He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The *Lord sets prisoners free.*”

-Psalm 146:7

“To him who loves us and has *freed us from our sins* by his blood.”

-Rev 1:5

“Then you will know the truth and the truth will *set you free.*”³

-John 8:32

“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a *ransom* for many.”⁴

-Matthew 20:28

“Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and *escape from the trap* of the devil, who has taken them *captive to do his will.*”

-2 Timothy 2:25, 26

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death- that is, the devil- and *free those who all their lives were held in slavery...*”

Hebrews 2:14, 15

“That the creation itself *will be liberated from its bondage to decay* and brought into the glorious *freedom* of the children of God.”

-Rom 8:21

There is no biblical indication that we are free to choose God on our own initiative. Rather, the imagery is quite clear. We are prisoners and our will is in bondage to its sinful nature. Furthermore, there are 251 times in all of scripture that “choose,” “chooses,” “choosing,”

³ To be “set free” presupposes that we were *not free*.

⁴ Webster’s definition of “ransom” is “the redeeming or release of a *captive* or of seized property by paying money or complying with other demands.”

“chose,” or “chosen” were used. Of those passages 70 are used in reference to man’s choosing of something. For example, they are recorded as man choosing kings, animals, other disciples, etc. The other 181 references are used in reference to God’s choosing, be it His people, certain people in particular, or appointed events.⁵ There are *zero* references in all of the counsel of God that indicate that man chooses God rather it clearly suggests that not only we don’t, but we *can’t*.

3. If we are to be saved, it is God that takes the initiative

Before we begin exploring the idea that God takes the initiative with us and ultimately draws us to Himself, we need to see if God has a history of interfering with our natures. Does God or can God interfere with our natures? We shall see that the biblical answer to both of these is yes.

Let us begin with Abraham. When Abraham and Sarah moved through the region of the Negev, God intervened in the will and nature of the king of Gerar Abimelech.

“Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so *I have kept you from sinning* against me. That is why I did not let you touch her.”

-Genesis 20:6

God out rightly manipulates Abimelech so that he would not sin against God. Certainly when Abimelech’s will was in the hands of an all sovereign God, he was unable to sin at that point. Not only does God interfere with Abimelech’s desire to sin, we also have the encounter with Pharaoh where God explicitly interferes with his nature to not liberate the Israelites.

“The Lord said to Moses,”...*But I will harden his heart* so that he will not let the people go.”

-Exodus 4:21

“*But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart*, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you.....*But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart*.....*But the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart*, and he was *not willing* go let them go.”

-Exodus 7:3,4, 10:20, 20:27

God also interferes with the nature of every single Egyptian as mentioned in Exodus.

⁵ There is a possible objection to these statistics. This objection would be in reference to Joshua 24:15 “But if serving the Lord seems undesirable for you, then *choose* for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Upon further examination, this objection is disarmed. Explicitly, the *choosing* in this text is between the gods of their forefathers or the gods of the Amorites. The Lord is not an option. However, it can be argued that I am only giving this text an explicit or surface level merit whereas the intention of the passage is that choosing the Lord was implicit. Even so, there are two other reasons to avoid this interpretation. 1) This is the *only* text that is even loosely suggesting this idea. To bank an entire theology on an obscure singular text is theologically impermissible and unrespectable. 2) This text is not objectionable but rather harmonious with all of Scripture in that it points to our choosing God only *after* the fact that he choose us. His choosing is effectual. Therefore, we choose only *because* He chose. Our choosing is not determinate in the salvation process. So even if Joshua 24:15 suggests that we are capable of choosing God or not, it does not explain *why*. Fortunately, the rest of scripture unfolds this mystery. “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” – Ephesians 1:4. “From the beginning God chose you to be saved.” – 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

“The *Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people...*”
-Exodus 11:3

“*I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them...*”
-Exodus 14:17

However, God does not only harden hearts but he also opens them. Note this account in Acts 16.

“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. *The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.*”
-Acts 16:13-14

Even the cross, being foreordained⁶, had to be carried out by the manipulation of people’s wills. We get a glimpse into the background of what was really happening when Herod and Pontius Pilate were influenced by the conspiracy of the crowds.

“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. *They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.*”
-Acts 4:27,28.

God can and often does interfere with our natures in whatever way he pleases. He can penetrate our natures and cause us to be hard to certain things or he can penetrate our natures and cause us to be soft in order to avoid sin or to respond to the gospel. God does whatever he wills with whomever he wills. And this is not *bad* news but *good* news, as we shall see below.

“*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.*”
-Exodus 33:19

“Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.”
-Romans 9:18

In much the same way we need to realize that even Paul’s apostleship was not ultimately his own decision. Was Paul an apostle by his will or God’s? A simple stroll through *every* Pauline epistle indicates that Paul’s apostleship was initiated and carried out by God’s will.

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, *called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.*”
-Romans 1:1

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God*”

⁶ See Acts 2:23.

-1 Corinthians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God*”

-2 Corinthians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle – sent not from men *nor by man*, but *by Jesus Christ* and God the Father.”

-Galatians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God.*”

-Ephesians 1:1

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God*”

-Colossians 1:1

So if God has a history in interfering with our natures, be it hardening, sin prevention, apostolic calling, or softening in order to responding to the gospel, certainly he can interfere with our natures in order to draw us to Himself. Keep in mind it is our very nature that prevents us from initiating with God. Our salvation is *necessarily dependent* on God’s interfering with our natures lest we receive the just punishment of assaulting the glory of an all-righteous God. So how does God do it? How does he initiate our salvation?

Notice that in every one of these passages it is God doing the action. Notice the verb tenses. We are the passive recipients of His works. He is the initiating origin of these actions.

“When you were *dead* in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your *sinful nature*, God *made you alive* with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.”

-Col 2:13

“So if the Son *sets you free*, you will be free indeed.”

-John 8:36

“As for you, you were *dead* in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, *we were by nature objects of wrath*. But because of his great love for us, *God*, who is rich in mercy, *made us alive* with Christ *even when we were dead* in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in the kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not *from yourselves*, it is *the gift* of God-not by works so that no one can boast. For *we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus* to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

-Ephesians 2:1-10

Allow me to repeat a huge verse in the previous passage for emphasis.

“For it is by *grace* you have been saved, through faith – and *this not from yourselves.*”
-Ephesians 2:8

“For it is God who works *in you to will and to act* according to his good purpose.”
-Philippians 2:13

“Yet you brought me out of the womb; *you made me trust in you* even at my mothers breast.”
-Psalm 22:9

“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a *prisoner of sin*, so that what was promised, being *given through faith in Jesus Christ*, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held *prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.*”
-Galatians 23:22, 23

“And even if *our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing*. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they *cannot* see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” *made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*”
-2 Corinthians 4:3-7

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but *God made it grow*. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, *but only God, who makes things grow*. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; *you are God’s field, God’s building.*”
-1 Corinthians 3:6-9

“All this is *from God*, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and *gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*”
-2 Corinthians 5:18

“Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for *this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.*””
-Matthew 16:17

“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the *author of their salvation* perfect through suffering....Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the *author and perfecter, of our faith*, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
-Hebrews 2:10, 12:2

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy *he has given us new birth* into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”
-1 Peter 1:3

“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ *have received a faith* as precious as ours.”

-2 Peter 1:1

“This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh *is from God.*”

-1 John 4:2

“For it has been *granted* to you on behalf of Christ not only to *believe* on him, but also to suffer for him.”

-Phil 1:29

“They stumble because they disobey the message-which is also what they were *destined for*. But you are a *chosen people*, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of *him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*”

-1 Peter 2:8, 9

“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and *brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*”

-Colossians 1:13

“It is *because of him* that you are in Christ Jesus.”

-1 Corinthians 1:30

“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s *desire or effort*, but on God’s mercy.”

-Romans 9:16

There are certainly more. The bible is emphatically clear that salvation begins and ends with God’s initiating and determining will over ours. Left to our own free wills, we would never choose God. We would forever be dead enemies of the King of the universe. When Jesus was asked, “Who then can be saved?” His answer was horribly and truthfully scary.

“Jesus looked at them and said, “*With man* this is impossible.”

-Matthew 19:26

Man alone cannot save himself. Jesus said Himself that this was impossible. It is impossible because our natures are bent to enjoy and love sin more than the righteousness and glory of God. But all praise to God that He didn’t just stand by and let us perish. Praise be to God for acting and for transforming our hearts and for piercing our dead natures and making us alive in Christ. Praise be to God that He did not stop at “*With man* this is impossible.”

“...but *with God* all things are possible.”

-Matthew 19:26

4. What this looks like

God has ordained that we are to be justified by faith. But obviously our natures are sinfully dead and are incapable of summoning this sort of faith. Thankfully God simultaneously gives us rebirth, that is regenerates our old sinful nature with a softened new nature, (or in other words we are born again) while at the same time giving us the gift of faith. To explain, our hearts were hard and calloused but God will give us this new birth through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is who regenerates our old natures into a new nature that is free to choose (and ultimately *will* choose) to believe on Christ. Let us examine how God gives us a new nature through the Spirit and then we will examine how He supplies the faith, the means of our justification.

“I will give them an undivided heart and *put a new spirit* in them; I will remove from them their hearts of stone and *give them a heart of flesh*. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people and I will be their God.”

-Ezekiel 11:19,20

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy *he has given us new birth* into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

-1 Peter 1:3

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but *God made it grow*. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, *but only God, who makes things grow*. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; *you are God’s field, God’s building*.”

-1 Corinthians 3:6-9

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the *Spirit* of the Lord is, there is *freedom*.”

-2 Cor 3:17

“Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and *the Spirit*.” Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.””

-John 3:5,6

“Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one *can* say, “Jesus is Lord,” *except by the Holy Spirit*.”

-1Corinthians 12:3

“In the last days, God says, *I will pour out my Spirit* on all people.”

-Acts 2:17

“Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And *you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – *for all whom the Lord our God will call*.”

-Acts 2:38,39

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the *washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.*”

-Titus 3:5

“They said to you, “In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.” These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and *do not have the Spirit.*”

-Jude 18, 19

God giving us a new nature through the Holy Spirit now frees us for the first time to be able to choose God. We are liberated from the shackles of our sinful nature and can now freely choose God by our own wills. This raises the question, what if we *don't* choose God? What if God does all that work by regenerating our natures with the Holy Spirit but we still don't choose God? I will address that question next but let us first notice that faith, belief, and repentance are all gifts by God, given to fallen man in order to save him.

“For it has been *granted* to you on behalf of Christ not only to *believe* on him, but also to suffer for him.”

-Phil 1:29

“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the *author of their salvation* perfect through suffering....Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the *author and perfecter, of our faith*, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

-Hebrews 2:10, 12:2

“The grace of our Lord *was poured* out on me abundantly, along with the *faith* and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

-1 Timothy 1:14

“Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that *God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth*, and that they will come to their senses and *escape from the trap* of the devil, who has taken them *captive to do his will.*”

-2 Timothy 2:25, 26

“As for you, you were *dead* in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, *we were by nature objects of wrath*. But because of his great love for us, *God*, who is rich in mercy, *made us alive* with Christ *even when we were dead* in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in the kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, *through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works* so that no one can boast. For *we are*

God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

-Eph 2:1-10

"But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being *given through faith in Jesus Christ*, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until *faith should be revealed*."

-Gal 23:22, 23

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ *have received a faith* as precious as ours."

-2 Peter 1:1

Unless we are born again, we cannot enter the Kingdom of God. This rebirth by means of the Holy Spirit is the giving us a new nature. We are a "new creation."⁷ This new nature has the ability for the first time to choose God and because God's plans can *never* be thwarted⁸ we will necessarily choose God. And even this faith that we are now free to have, we realize that even that is given by God as a gift. Salvation begins and ends with God not man. For God has not ordained a way for man to save himself in any regards so that there is no possible way that man can boast. God in his perfect wisdom has provided a way for God to get all of the glory and man to get all of the joy. God is the author and perfecter of our faith and He will see it to completion. This again is not bad news but the best news we could ever hear.

"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

-Philippians 1:6

"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

-Romans 8:29,30

5. Future Warnings Concerning Our New Freedom

"Live as free men, but *do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil*; live as servants of God."

-1 Peter 2:16

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But *do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature*, rather, serve one another in love."

-Gal 5:13

"You have been *set free from sin* and have become *slaves to righteousness*."

-Rom 6:18

⁷ See 2 Corinthians 5:17.

⁸ See Job 42:2.

“This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the *freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.*”

-Gal 2:4

“So you are no longer *a slave, but a son*; and since you are a son, God has made you also an *heir*. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were *slaves* to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you now God-or rather are known by God-how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be *enslaved* by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!”

-Galatians 4:8-10

“It is for *freedom* that *Christ has set us free*. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened by the yolk of slavery.”

-Gal 5:1

“Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like *slaves of Christ*, doing the will of God from your heart.”

-Eph 6:6

6. Conclusion on the Matter

No other biblical passage encapsulates all of these ideas like 1 Corinthians chapter 2. In it, we see our nature as dead and unable to understand. We see our inability to come before God. But we then see God initiating and regenerating our natures with the Holy Spirit. We see the activity of God and the passivity of man. Observe:

“We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that *has been hidden* and that *God destined for our glory before time began*. *None of the rulers of this age understood it*, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: “*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him*” but *God has revealed it to us by his Spirit*. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. *We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us*. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and *he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned*. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment: “For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.”

-1 Corinthians 2:6-16

We must never elevate our flawed reasoning over the mighty authority of God’s Word. Allow us to rest in mystery but never demand more than what has been revealed – lest we attempt to

overthrow the Sovereign throne with sin. And so let us approach this issue Biblically. Our flawed and sin-affected reasoning would have us sit and be idle before an all sovereign God. Our reasoning would compel us to think that there is no need for obedience, missions, evangelism, and prayer. But this is NOT the biblical model shown to us:

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on *to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*”

-Phil 3:12

Furthermore, our reasoning would lead us to think that this is unfair. It is unfair for God to simply choose some and exclude others we conclude. Paul knew this objection would surface and he confronts this after devoting an entire chapter to these issues. After explaining how God chose Jacob and excluded Jacob's brother Esau, even though they were twins, even though Esau came out first and was therefore “older,” even before they had done anything good or bad, Paul anticipates the objection.

“What then shall we say? Is God *unjust?*”

-Romans 9:14

Paul then goes on to answer his own question.

“*Not at all!* For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.”

-Romans 9:14-16

So to summarize, we have seen that freedom is the ability to do whatever you want. But according to our natures, we are not free to determine what it *is* we want. A sinful nature necessarily wants more sin and wants nothing to do with righteousness. Our will is ultimately governed by our nature and forces outside of us. When our nature is changed by God, we then want things that we previously didn't, namely God. When we have been regenerated, the desire of our heart is God.

“Delight yourselves in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.”

-Psalm 37:4

When our sinful nature is changed into a righteousness-loving nature, the Lord himself is the ultimate desire of our heart. And this nature changing is not an infringement on our rights. As dead, sin saturated, enemies of God, we have no rights. We imagine that this assault on our will is bad news, but in fact it is the greatest news we could ever hear. For if God did not change our natures, we would never come to Him. But God regenerates our natures and gives us the beautiful gift of faith to trust in Him. And not only does he begin this process, he carries it to completion. The salvation of man begins and ends with God and has nothing to do with man's decision. As Romans 9 clearly says, “It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.”

So what does it all matter anyway? Are these just debates over semantics? Is this just theological nonsense detached from reality? What is at stake with being right or wrong about these issues? Well the stakes are high. For the *glory* of the Lord is ultimately at stake. If we look at what God has done and claim that we had any sort of hand in it, we then assault his grace. If we were co-contributors of our salvation, we are rightfully responsible to receive glory. But God will not give his glory to another.⁹ So therefore, let us stop assaulting grace and admire with reverent praise how great this God really is. Let us give *all* the glory to his miraculous work in our lives.

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For *from him* and *through him* and *to him* are all things. *To him be the glory forever! Amen.*”

-Romans 11:33-36

“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”

-2 Corinthians 3:5

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory.”

-Psalm 115:1

⁹ See Isaiah 42:8