

Free Will

*"You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil".
(Gen. 2:17)*

Man has always had the free will to choose right from wrong. When God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17), Adam had the freedom to choose whether or not to obey and we know the result. Some say that free will ended when Adam sinned but the Bible tells us otherwise.

In Gen. 4:6-7, the Lord said to Cain, *"Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it"*. So, just like Adam, Cain had the free will to choose what is right and please God.

Then, in Josh. 24:15, Joshua told the Israelites that they had a choice to make. He said, *"... choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"*. So we can see that in the Old Testament man had the free will to choose whether or not to be obedient.

The New Testament also makes it clear that we have free will and, added to that, we have the Holy Spirit to encourage and strengthen us to choose what is right. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is outlined in 2 Pet. 1:3-4 which say, *"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness [so that]... you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires"*. These verses tell us that the Spirit empowers us to say no to sin and live a Godly life.

This work of the Spirit is further explained in Php. 2:12-13 where it says, *"... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God [the Holy Spirit] who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose"*. Here we are told that the Holy Spirit is working within us, convicting our conscience (John 16:8) and willing our hard hearts to do what God desires of us (Ezek. 36:25-27). He softens our heart of stone and strengthens us to choose to do what is right rather than hard heartedly continue in sin. Notice that we are told to *"continue"* to work out our salvation. The onus is on us, in a lifelong process, to submit to the Spirit's leading and choose what is right. We are not at the pointy end of a Holy Spirit remote control. It's entirely our responsibility to choose obedience and the failure to do so will result in damnation.

The Bible gives Christians many serious warnings about the need to persevere in holiness in order to be saved eternally (Heb. 12:14). It's a common belief that all who receive the Holy Spirit *will* persevere because the Spirit will see to it that we do. But if that was true then we would not have to *"work out our salvation with fear and trembling"* as Php. 2:12-13 tell us. If we have no free will, but are kept in check by the Spirit, then God's many warnings are simply a waste of words and He is a Toothless Tiger. But the truth is, we have free will and God is not a Toothless Tiger. He is a Consuming Fire and will consume His enemies just as Heb. 10:26-27 make so clear:

*"If we [Christians] deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth,
no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and
of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God"*.

Finally, God has given man the free will to accept or reject His call to salvation through obedience (Rom.1:5). All who accept this call receive the Holy Spirit who empowers believers to live obediently. If anyone later chooses to return to a life of unrepentant, wilful sin then he will be consumed by God's wrath. The choice lies with each of us so let's be like Joshua and say, *"as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"*. Amen.

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