

Connect

With Sunny Place Church of God

November, 2023

What Is Free Will?

Wouldn't life be less complicated if we were prevented from making harmful choices? Maybe so. But what would that accomplish? Why did God give us free will?

People are hurt by their own lack of judgment and by the bad decisions that others make. Wouldn't it solve a lot of problems and spare us all a lot of misery if we couldn't make mistakes?

If people were more like machines...

God could have made us like machines. Machines do what they're supposed to do without thinking about doing anything different or considering why they do whatever they do. Sure, they eventually break down because they're mechanical devices. But they don't make bad choices that damage themselves or hurt other machines.

Maybe the world would be a better place if people were more like machines.

Then again, machines have no character, soul or personality. Machines can't experience joy, anticipation or pleasure. They aren't creative, spontaneous or inquisitive. Lacking self-awareness or consciousness, they have no relationships, no sense of priorities and can't make plans for the future and experience the satisfaction of accomplishment. They do not have free will.

On second thought, aren't we glad people aren't more like machines?

We wouldn't want to give up our freedom of choice, but it seems like there couldn't be a perfect world unless some higher power had complete control, regulating every aspect of everyone's life. How frustrating would it be to be forced to only eat healthy foods, always go to bed on time and never skip a daily workout? Generally speaking people would resist an external force always making them do "the right thing." In fact, it sounds like a good premise for a bad science-fiction movie.

Instead of creating machines or robots, God created

people. And He gave us free will—the ability to think, reason and make our own choices. He gives us commands and instructions that show us how He wants us to live, but He allows us to decide whether we will obey. He created us with free will for a simple reason: To fulfill His purpose of creating an eternal, spiritual family, He wants His children to *choose* to be like Him.

Free will and the law of consequences

When God created Adam and Eve, one of the first things He did was to give them the opportunity to choose whether they would obey Him. He instructed Adam very clearly to not eat the fruit of a particular tree, under penalty of death (Genesis 2:15). But when the serpent (Satan) gave Eve a different explanation and appealed to her sense of independence and curiosity, she and Adam both chose to ignore God's command. That one mistake resulted in tragic consequences in their lives and changed the course of history.

One of the first lessons we learn in life is the law of consequences. Good choices bring about good results, and bad choices cause unpleasant or even disastrous outcomes. As the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (New International Version).

There's an old expression that some people sow wild oats and then pray for a crop failure. But the reality is that God's universal law cannot be denied. Eventually we will reap what we sow; the choices we make inevitably lead to consequences, good or bad.

God is creating children with free will, not building machines

The phrase "free will" means that we were created with minds with which we independently think, analyze, draw conclusions and make choices.

That godlike quality of reasoning and decision making is part of what is meant in Genesis 1:26-27: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in

(Continued on next page)

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the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Men and women have different physical characteristics, but all of humanity is created with the ability and responsibility to manage and have authority over their own lives as well as the rest of the physical creation.

God gave us a great deal of responsibility so that through experience we will grow in the ability and strength of character to make the right kinds of decisions. When we choose to obey His commands, God is, in effect, teaching us to think like He thinks. He can't accomplish that by doing our thinking for us. We must have freedom of choice. Eventually, the way that we choose to live will have the ultimate consequence.

Choose life

Just before Israel entered the land that had been promised to them, God instructed Moses to gather the nation to remind them of choices and consequences. In Deuteronomy 29 and 30, Moses summarized the blessings that would result from obedience and the curses that would come about if they disobeyed.

He concluded in Deuteronomy 30:15-19: “See, *I have set before you today life and good, death and evil*, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.

“But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that *I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life*, that both you and your descendants may live” (emphasis added).

Free will allows wrong choices

Sadly, much of the rest of the Old Testament details the wrong choices and bad decisions the people of Israel made. They did indeed suffer the consequences of those mistakes. Individually and as a nation they suffered terribly.

One might reason that God could have intervened to make it impossible for them to fail, but that would not have accomplished God's purpose for them—that they *choose* to obey Him.

The commands, promises and warnings given to Israel apply to all of us today. God sets before us all life and death, good and evil, blessing and cursing. As free moral agents—created with free will—how we live is our choice. God, of course, desires that we choose to be like Him, meaning that we choose to obey His commands. When we make that choice, God ultimately will bless us. If we choose to disobey, there will be tragic consequences.

The apostle Paul repeated the same principle in Romans 2 as he wrote of “the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil” (verses 6-9).

In other words, there are consequences, both good and bad. If we want the good results of life, we must be willing to exercise our free will to choose to live each day honoring God through obedience, as one who seeks the gift of immortality. Those who choose to be selfish and disobedient will reap the consequences of sin. God gave us the gift of free choice so that He would know what kind of person each of us chooses to be.

Creation isn't finished yet

The physical creation is summarized in Genesis 1. As cited earlier in verse 27, mankind is physical but created in the image of God. However, the spiritual creation of each person's character is an ongoing process, which we contribute to through the power of choice.

In Colossians 3:1-4, 5-7, 8-10 Paul wrote that there are many characteristics of human nature that we must be willing to eliminate, such as immorality, covetousness, anger and lying. He wrote that we “put off the old man with his deeds and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”

In other words, by the proper exercise of our free will, our minds, hearts and character will be created in the image of God.

Free choice has its complications. There will be those who make poor decisions, causing themselves and others grief. But God would not accomplish His purpose in our lives if He were to deny us the freedom to make choices. He is creating a family made up of those who choose life, by exercising the freedom and responsibility of free will.

What Is Free Will?

lifehopeandtruth.com
by Don Henson

Submitted by Tim Kasza

Connect

Published by:

Sunny Place Church of God
901 E Oak St, Addison IL 60101
Church Office (630) 530-1830
Editor: Lynn Drury

Senior Pastor: Peter Weber
Treasurer: Glenda Kasza
Elders: Tim Kasza, President
Phyllis Clark, Vice President
Nona Koivula, Secretary

Sunny Place Church—October Events

Give Thanks to God for He is Good!
Happy Thanksgiving.



Second Saturday Senior Luncheon
Saturday, November 11th, 11:30 am



Coming Sunday, November 19th:

Praying Together...Time with Jesus

Stay and pray for our family of God as listed in our bulletin.

A 'Harvest Table'
Will be presented in the Sanctuary



There will be a 'Harvest Dinner'
in Fellowship Hall after Prayer



'After Thanksgiving' Ladies Luncheon

at Aurelio's Pizza in Addison,
on Wednesday, November 29th,
11:30 a.m.

And remember, no cooking
or cleanup.



Adult Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.

"Faith in Action"

A study of the Book of James
Led by Pastor Pete

Sunday Worship Services, 10:45 a.m.

In-person and on Zoom

7:00



"Pray Without Ceasing"

A study on having a life
of fervent prayer.

Led by Pastor Pete
In Person and on Zoom

Our Sunday Worship Services, and Thursday night Bible Study will be held at the scheduled times.
If you would like to join us for a service or study via ZOOM, send an email with your name and contact information
to: sunnyplacecog@gmail.com to request a link to be sent to you.
You can also listen to the audio sermons, within a few days afterwards, by selecting either version on:
sunnyplacechurch.org/resources/audio-sermons.

TLC

Together Loving Christ

Are you sharing in the exciting and spiritual blessings of studying God's Word and discovering how it applies to your contemporary life?

Join with us in our Adult Study Group Thursday's at 7:00 p.m.

Grow in the Word!



Scripture of the Month:

Free Will

“³¹If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

³²Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

“³⁴Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed.’

John 8:31-32 & 34-36



901 E. Oak Street, Addison, IL 60101

Visit us at: www.SunnyPlaceChurch.org

Connecting Families With The Love Of Christ

Minutes of the Elders Meeting held October 4, 2023

Attended by Pastor Pete Weber, Tim Kasza, Glenda Kasza, and Nona Koivula

Devotion: Proverbs 3:3-7 "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes."

Old Business

Evangelism continues with neighborhood canvassing. Two new families attend our church as a result of the evangelism. Pastor Pete invites other people to join the team contacting people in our neighborhood.

Hispanic Church Plant : The Elders discussed the ideas brought by Eric Livingston. After considerable dialog, the Elders decided it was not time to move forward with a church plant. Pastor Pete contacted Eric Livingston and shared this decision with him.

New Business

The Ministry Team Budgets are due November 1st. The Team annual reports are due December 1st. There will be a calendar planning meeting for 2024 in November so teams should be praying about events planned for next year.

Reports

This is a list of the Ministries and the Leaders:

Worship – Phyllis Clark, Coordinator

Prayer – Nona Koivula

Missions, Outreach, Evangelism – Phyllis Clark

Encouragement – Eva Struchen

Stewardship – Tim Kasza

CE & Fellowship – Pastor Pete and Jacob Garcia

The next meeting will be November 1st.