

## THE FREE WILL OF MAN (the good and the bad)

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### 1 Corinthians 13:11-13

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

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In the beginning of one's life on this earth, that is, when a human being is born into this world, the only thing that is important to that person is that their needs are being met. Whether they are hungry or thirsty, or because they need to be cleaned up and get a fresh diaper, or they may just be cranky for no apparent reason, whatever the case may be, they sense their need, as if by instinct, and will then voice that need by invoking an unsettling (to me anyways) high-pitched screeching sound of which we call a baby's cry. As that baby grows up to be a child that can walk and talk, and their brain has developed to where they realize they can make their own choices, they learn that the crying and tantrums won't work like they used to. That child will also learn that they can't just do whatever they want, such as pouring chocolate syrup all over the carpet, or scribbling all over the walls with markers. Around that time of their life, they begin to establish what we call a value system, based on their own interests and desires, but of course a large part of their value system as a child, is instituted, and if all goes well, eventually instilled in them, by their parents or guardians. Since the child finds out then that even though they have the capability to make their own choices, some choices are best made to please their parents or guardians, as to not invoke the wrath of said parent or guardian.

So that child then grows, and gradually learns that though they can make up their own mind to do whatever they want and do whatever pleases them, and that though they may have a "free-will", of which they may or may not be cognizant of, they do not have a completely free-will to do whatever they want. When the child begins to go to school, they learn that it is not just their parents that have rules that must be obeyed. They learn that they must do what the teacher tells them to do. They also learn that the other children have their own value systems as well. They may find that out when they and another child both think that it is their right to play with the same toy at the same exact time. Both of them will usually insist that it is "their toy", or one child will yank it away from the other child, to which the other child who is empty-handed is left to ponder the ramifications of what has just happened. After a short pause you will

hear what has evolved from a baby's cry, a harsher-sounding wailing of betrayal from that child.

So, through much trial and error, a child grows up to learn that they have the ability to make their own choices, but that even though they may have a "free-will" of sorts to make their own choices they also have to consider how their choices will affect other people and that their choices may have consequences that may have a negative impact on themselves or others. By this time the child has learned that there is a moral code that all or most people follow as a society, except for those that are called "bad people." So this child has to consider the outcome of their choices and decide on whether they are willing to accept the effects of their choices on themselves as well as others. It would seem then, if everyone did their part and made the right, responsible choices so that no one's choices adversely affected any other people, then we would be living in a perfect world, full of bliss, and we could all live happily ever after. Well, for some reason we haven't quite made it there yet. Now, I'm not calling anyone out per se, or trying to put the blame on anyone specifically, but how about we just say it's all the "bad people's" fault for now. We would need to just identify who those people are and then make sure they don't do it again. [Sigh] But you see, therein lies the problem concerning the issue with people having their own free-will to make their own choices which sometimes adversely affects other people. What one person may deem as acceptable behavior, another person may find entirely offensive. While it may be agreed upon by both neighbors (as well as the law) that they shouldn't treat the oak tree that is adjoining their two properties, the same way as a dog would (if you know what I mean), one of the neighbors may think it is entirely appropriate to climb that tree and practice their polka music on the accordion eight hours a day (during the night hours while their neighbors are trying to sleep even). After all, isn't it their right to practice their music how and when they'd like to. Come to think of it, who is the ultimate authority in what is right and what is wrong? And then, *what is* "truly right" and "truly wrong".

The crux of the whole matter then is, once again, that there needs to be an ultimate authority to say what is right and wrong and there also needs to be an absolute truth that perfectly defines both what is right and what is wrong, of which the aforementioned ultimate authority would also have to ultimately mediate between the two parties of said rightness and wrongness. Come to think of it, most societies in this world have established what they would call their ultimate authorities on what is right and what is wrong, which are called justice systems. Through the years, decades, and even centuries of different societies making laws, refining laws, fine-tuning laws, and trying to have a law for just about every possible offense, with its accompanying penalties and punishments, we find

even then it doesn't quite solve societies problems to bring us to the place of zen-like harmony with each other. One society may agree to say one thing is wrong while just a short distance away another societal group may say that same thing is acceptable. How can that be?! One may even sit in a prison for years for something they did that if they had done it a few miles away they would still be living their life just as they had been. Quite the conundrum we have with all of our free wills, huh? What keeps an ultimate authority within a society from saying whenever they feel like it, "off with their heads!?" At this point the question may seem rather rhetorical but is the "Age of Aquarius" or the perfect utopia even possible? Should we even try? Do we all just need to take the same blue pill to get us all where we need to be?

Before we start popping pills though, let's see if we can backtrack a bit, if need be to some beginning point to get a fresh start, to try to flesh out some missing details. Don't worry there won't be any crying babies or wailing children here. We won't be starting with a recent birth of a baby, we're going to need to go back earlier in the history of mankind, maybe even eventually to the genesis of where human life began to find out what is going on. Some questions to consider in our digging for answers is: Why don't we as a society just all work together for the common good the way an ant colony operates? Why does everyone have to have their own opinions on what is right and wrong? You won't see two dogs arguing about whether it's appropriate or not to water the oak tree that was mentioned earlier. Well you wouldn't would you? Why does everyone seem to always consider their needs and desires more important than anyone elses? Why does one person think getting to the grocery store is more important than helping out someone on the side of the rode having car troubles? Even animals in the wild will help each other out when they are in trouble. I've seen them on Youtube videos, so I know it's true. And why are some people just really, really mean? Well okay, there are some really mean animals too, so I won't use that as a example in contrast, but yeah, there are some really mean people out there. The most important question to ask may be, is there absolute truth, or is everything just, "like that's just your opinion man." If there is an absolute truth then why is it not being enforced? Who could enforce it? Wouldn't it still be, in the opinions of others, "just *their* opinion." One last series of questions that we can ask that may save us some time and effort, by alleviating the need to pursue answers to the other questions are, why do we concern ourselves with what is right and wrong? Why not just allow everyone to just do whatever they want, and to the victor belong the spoils, may the strong survive, and let the games begin, and all that stuff? Is that not how animals in the wild operate? As was pointed out earlier, sometimes it seems the animals have a more confluent method of dealing with each other than us humans. What is wrong with allowing nature to work things out on its own? Why are we fighting

what seems to be a natural course of things? After all, there doesn't seem to be one universal set of morals that everyone can agree upon, as it seems quite natural for people to just do whatever *they* think is right.

For starters, there's two things that we will begin looking for, ultimate truth and ultimate authority. As we've determined earlier, if there is an ultimate truth it isn't universally accepted and if there is an ultimate authority then they don't appear to be enforcing that ultimate truth, at least not universally. The first place that I'd like to look, is in a book that tells of someone who claims, "I Am the Truth". The book that we are looking at is called *The Holy Bible*, or sometimes called *The Bible* or just *Bible*. The Bible is comprised of an Old Testament and a New Testament. The Old Testament is made up of 39 separate books and the New Testament is made up of 27 separate books, all put together in one big book, and each of those separate books were written at different times in history as well. It is where you can find the life story of Jesus, which was recorded in four books in the New Testament called the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The rest of the New Testament is mostly an elaboration of the teachings and purpose of Jesus' life and ministry, yet it is still only a fraction of what makes up the Bible. I found that according to *Guinness World Records*, "The Bible is the world's best-selling and most widely distributed book. A survey by the Bible Society concluded that around 2.5 billion copies were printed between 1815 and 1975, but more recent estimates put the number at more than 5 billion."

Wow, that's a lot of books! So, we have a book that has printed and sold more copies than any other book in all of known history, with a story about a man named Jesus making a claim that, *He is the Truth*. If Jesus is the truth that we are looking for and if He is the authority to establish and maintain that truth then we might have an answer to what is missing in our societies. The issue now that concerns me is, if Jesus is the truth and can tell us the truth to follow, what is to keep people in step in following that truth so that we are all doing the same thing. You know, no polka music outside your bedroom window at three in the morning kind of thing. Let's check out the Bible and see if it answers some questions that leads us towards our intended purpose. As I mentioned earlier, let us start at the beginning-the very beginning of the Bible. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Yes! Perfect! The beginning of all mankind. Maybe we can find out the source of it all.

We read that in the first six days of creation God created the heavens and the earth and all living things, large and small, plants, trees, sun, moon, and stars; all that is in the universe. And then finally, in the image of God Himself, He created man (who was called Adam) and then from man, He created woman (who was called Eve) and

placed them in a garden called the Garden of Eden. God told Adam and Eve that they had dominion over all the earth and that they should be fruitful and multiply (yes, having babies, but that would be further on in the story which we won't be getting to-no more crying babies in this message). Then on day seven, God rested from all of His work. God told Adam and Eve they could eat of any tree in the garden except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told them that if they ate of that tree that they would surely die. Long story short, Satan, also called the serpent, talked Eve into eating fruit from the one forbidden tree by getting her to question God's word and believing that they would be like God knowing good and evil. Then Eve gave some of the fruit to Adam and he also ate of it. What we find as a result of their actions is explained by Dr. Terry Tramel in a book called *The Beauty of the Balance*. He mentions that their punishment for disobeying, otherwise known as sinning against God was two-fold. First they took on guilt and fear, sorrow and suffering, banishment from the presence of God, and then eventual death. Secondly, they initiated a sin nature within all of mankind. So, in other words, since then, each and every person born into this world is born with a propensity to sin against God. What that comes to is this: In the book of Romans we find a slightly more succinct clarification of what is going on. 1) Everyone will sin against God (**Romans 3:23**) and 2) The wages (or cost) of sin is death (**Romans 6:23**) Another thing that can be reiterated only in a different way is that sin caused a separation between God and man. A. D. Beacham, Jr. explains: "How can a person stand in the presence of a holy and righteous God? Those who consciously violate God's moral law cannot stand in His presence because of their sin. Those who live moral lives still cannot present themselves pure because of inherited sin from Adam's fall. Thus, the good and the bad are guilty of sin before God. What can we do? The answer is, we can do nothing.

So there we have it. We have become eternally separated from God because of our sin and if that isn't bad enough we are also told, that is the reason we all succumb to death, eventually anyways. All of those movies you see about someone finding the fountain of youth, where they can be eternally young is all silliness. If God almighty, the creator of all things, including of you and I, says that you're going to die, then well, sorry if I'm the one to break the bad news to you, but you will one day die. Please don't hate me, I'm just the messenger. The ones we should be pointing our fingers at are Adam and Eve. This may explain why we as a society can't seem to perfectly get along. If we are prone to sin against or disobey God then surely we will likely disobey or rebel against others. But what about those really bad people? Aren't they the ones who should be punished, not good folks like you and I? The fact of the matter seems to be that we are, once again, all sinners according to God and are all destined to the same fate. The Old Testament, at first glance appears to be a God full of anger and wrath, yet we find prophecies or hints at God's

plan of salvation even right after God kicked Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden. God spoke a curse over Satan the devil saying, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (**Genesis 3:15**) That word bruise means to break, bruise, or cover. That means the Seed of Eve would stomp on the head of Satan. King David proclaimed, "The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted." (**Psalms 18:46**) God had a plan and revealed His plan to His people. Jesus boldly claimed to be that Truth.

Jesus was born by a virgin mother who conceived Him by the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of God). He grew up as a carpenter's son. As an adult, He fasted for 40 days during which He was tempted unsuccessfully by the devil. Do you notice what is consistent with the devil? He is a liar and the father of all lies. (**John 8:44**) Jesus then began His traveling ministry where He recruited 12 disciples, and in His own words, when He was asked who He was, "Jesus answered and said to them, **Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.**" (**Matthew 11:4-6**) Yet, as we read further, He did offend the religious leaders though, with all the healings and raising the dead, and in pointing out the hypocrisy of those religious leaders, so much that they eventually had him crucified on a cross. Jesus died on that cross but the story doesn't end there. Three days after His death, Jesus reappeared with the wounds purportedly still in His hands, feet and side (a soldier had pierced His side with a spear) and He appeared to well over 500 people, including the 12 disciples. He remained with them for 40 days, eating, drinking, and preaching, and then He was raised up into the air in a cloud and taken up to heaven. That's about it.

So let's try and see what the Old Testament and the New Testament have to do with each other. While at a quick glance you may not see anything about Jesus in the Old Testament, with some further looking into, there are a multitude of references and prophecies, written hundreds of years before Jesus was even born, throughout the Old Testament concerning Jesus the Christ. Josh McDowell, in his book, "Evidence Demands a Verdict, did the research and found, "The Old Testament, written over a 1,000 year period, contains several hundred references to the coming Messiah. All of these were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and they establish a solid confirmation of His credentials as the Messiah." Not only did Jesus claim to be the Truth, He claimed much more than that. He said in **John 14:6**, **"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** To find out what He was saying about being "the life" I went back some pages in that same book of John where they recorded Jesus as saying in **John 3:16-17**, **"For God so loved the world that He**

gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

This may be a good time to review where we are in all of this. For arguments sake, if we assume all things considered to be true, then we so far have Jesus as our absolute truth and the way to eternal life with God Himself, but we haven't addressed the problems concerning society as a whole and how everyone who has a free-will of sorts has to somehow agree on some sort of absolute truths to bring us all together in unity. Might I suggest that we cut to the chase and just say that all those who disagree with the new set of absolute truths should be instantly vaporized. Wait a minute, hang on, I don't know yet about that, so let's not be too hasty in that decision. I just remembered the part about us all being sinners before God. Let's see if there's a better way. So let's get back to what Jesus said. He said He is the Way and the Truth and the Life. We've already looked at His being the truth and the life but what is it about Him being the Way? I did some more digging and I found what appears to be "the way"- in the lives of the Old Testament people anyways. In the New Testament, in **Hebrews 11**, there is what is referred to as of Hall of Fame of persons from the Old Testament. They were all commended for their faith in the promises of God. Reading a little further we get a summary of it all in **Hebrews 12:1-2**, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." So, the promise we have from God then is that He sent His Son Jesus to us here on Earth, to die on the cross for our sins, so that we may have eternal life with Him. In **1 John 5:1-5** we read, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?."

Isn't that awesome! God sent Jesus to die for our sins and through our faith in Christ we will have eternal life. He expects us to follow His commandments, but we do have an advocate now with the Father through Jesus Christ, if we do sin against God, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**). Furthermore, God

knows we can't do it alone. We've tried that and well, it didn't work out so good. So, when we believe in God and put our trust in Him through Jesus Christ, He gives us His Spirit to dwell within us to assure us that we are children of God (**Romans 8:16**), to guide us into all of His Truth (**John 17:13**) and to work in us in His righteousness. "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother." (**1 John 3:10**)

So if we all have the Holy Spirit guiding us into all truth and working in us God's righteousness then it seems like we will have that perfect society that we've been searching for. Yay! But, wait a minute. I just thought of something. I guess this is a confession, sort of. Since I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and received the Holy Spirit to guide me in His truth and righteousness, I once or twice, or maybe a few more times than that, have sinned against God, or as others around me would say, I was not a very nice person. If everyone had a bad moment, like that, at the same time...I shudder to think what could happen. Nevertheless, if everyone just ever so rarely, had a really bad moment, then it sure does seem like that would be an improvement over what we have going on in society at present. The problem with that is not everyone will or wants to believe in Jesus Christ. That's where that free-will comes back in play. **Romans 1:16** says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes..." Who is willing to believe? To all those willing to walk in faith, for that's when we find His truth and we begin to encounter God. *From a book called Foundations of the Christian Faith* we read, "There is a direct encounter of the individual believer with God. It is what Luther meant when he declared at the Diet of Worms, "My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God." It is what Calvin meant when he declared that "Scripture indeed is self-authenticated." Nothing but direct experience will ever ultimately convince anybody that the Bible's words are the authentic and authoritative words of God. As Calvin said, "The same spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what has been divinely commanded."

It is up to each and every one of us to decide on whether we will trust God with our lives and live in obedience to His Word. Yet even so, we are still living in what is a "fallen world." One day God will bring about a new heaven and a new earth as mentioned in Revelation 21, and then as **Revelation 22:3-5** says, "**And there shall be no more curse**, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever."