

The Free Moral Agency of Man

Throughout the Bible, running from cover to cover, are several congruent themes around and through which the “fabric” of the greatest (true!) story ever told are woven. Some, such as the existence and ever-present omnipotence of the Creator- Almighty God, are immediately proclaimed and thunderously manifested throughout. Others, while never expressly stated, are revealed so consistently and obviously that they cannot be overlooked by any but the most hapless or careless of readers. One such concept, as constant as the manifold nature of Jehovah, is the **Free Moral Agency of Man**. Though never precisely stated in these terms, they nonetheless clearly convey the principle that it becomes evident on nearly every page to the careful reader. It is to this particular theme that I would draw your attention this morning with a few sincere questions (and I pray their accurate answers) in hopes of not only allowing a better understanding of *Free Moral Agency*, but a better application of it in our lives.

I. What is this “Free Moral Agency” of Man?

A. Let’s be sure we understand the words themselves, since they are *man’s* words used to describe an endowment by *God*.

Free usually means either “**without cost**” or “**at liberty**.” As we proceed to understanding of the concept, we may conclude both definitions are involved.

Moral refers to **system** or **standard by which “right” and “wrong” are supposedly determined**, and thus allowing judgments regarding them.

Agency, when used other than in regard to a “business or service authorized to act for others” (such as an *employment* agency), simply means “**action**,” or a **mode** or **means thereof**.

So what do we have when used together in **Free Moral Agency**? That man is at **liberty** (thus free) to **act** (agency) *according his own judgment*, whether *right* or *wrong* (moral). Thus, man has been endowed by his Creator (*without cost*) to **do (act) however he pleases** (with *liberty* exercised whether *morally, immorally, or amorally*).

B. Does the Bible, and thus *God’s* words rather than *man’s*, support this concept and definition? Obviously, I believe so- otherwise we wouldn’t be troubling ourselves with mere human philosophy!

Gen.2:7-9 records man’s *beginning*, and vv.15-17 encapsulates his initial *instructions*- including both *positive admonitions* (vv.15-16) as well as *negative prohibitions* (v.17). So where does man’s *free moral agency* come into view? Note that God did not create man as a mindless robot without autonomous will, and destined only to do his Master’s will without thought or potential for deviation. Instead, as we see from 3:1-6, that not only was such *possible*, it indeed occurred. From here forward, the biblical record is replete with examples of man’s **choosing**- of his own accord, **to either obey** or **disobey** God’s will. Thus, with his own *free will*, he was not only able to, but also did *choose* how he would *act*.

Such exercise of this *free moral agency* is further demonstrated in Acts 4:32 – 5:2, where Ananias and Sapphira- despite previous precedent and example, *chose to sell a piece of property* but “*keep back some of the price*” for

themselves. But note carefully Peter's words of reply in v.4a, "while it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?" Though the *free moral agency* of man was not precisely his point in this instance, the principle is nonetheless plainly evident.

And surely, even in the last book of Revelation, the *free moral agency* of man still courses through the sacred text, as the letters to the *Seven Churches of Asia* manifest. To each of these (I believe 'representative') collectivities of believers save one (*Philadelphia*), a *charge* or *charges of indictment* were issued. And, a *means of correction* were given, complete with *warning for failure to repent*. But, and here is the pertinent detail to our premise, none were "made" to comply. Each had- since the foundation of the world and man's arrival upon it, the *liberty to refuse* God's will and *act upon his own*.

Thus, with each account or narrative that unfolds, from Genesis through Revelation, man not only has but uses the divine endowment of *free will* to *chose his own course*- either in accordance with God's revealed will, or contrary to it. Either way, he was provided *free moral agency* by appointment from heaven.

II. Why did God Create Man with this *Free Moral Agency*?

Some have proposed, surely without thinking through the proposal, that it would have been better if the Almighty had not provided man the latitude of *free moral agency*. Though this was assuredly within the *power* and therefore *capability* of our omnipotent Creator, consider further the notion of man **without** *free moral agency*...

A. What would be the point?

Should God have created mankind **without** *free moral agency*, what **function** would such man perform? To invariably do God's will without the encumbrance and hesitancy of individual thought of deviation? Surely all else of earth's nature below and heaven's host above already does this, cf. Acts 17:24-25! While man surely *needs* God, the inverse is not so, for the Creator can accomplish His every desires with but a word expressing it! All else of His creation is at His beck and call to accomplish without hesitancy or deviation anything/everything He wills.

So, again **without** *free moral agency*, what **purpose** would man serve? Surely not his own, for **without** *free moral agency* he has none. Man would thus be relegated to *mindless, robotic* purposes as those fulfilled by a rocks, trees, and stars- who although they clearly reflect the wondrous majestic power of their Creator (cf. Psa.19:1-6), they know nothing of themselves or Him and His purposes for and through them.

B. But **with** (and in) *free moral agency*, Man has both **purpose** and **function**:

1. Continue in Acts 17 to vv.26-27 where man's creation (*with free moral agency*) in v.26 has a stated **purpose** in v.27a, "that they should **seek God... and find Him**." This purpose cannot be fulfilled without *free moral agency* because man must be allowed to *think* and *act* at *liberty* in order to accomplish it!
2. Man also has, again *with free moral agency*, **function**. It is to **worship Him** (deliberately choosing Him over *idols* of our own creation), v.29; to **acknowledge our dependence upon Him**, v.28; and **choose His will** over

our own, v.30 (for such is the essence of *repentance!*). *Without free moral agency*, these things are vain, empty, and worthless even if possible.

Therefore, only with free moral agency does “man” have both *purpose* and *function*.

III. Only by Man’s Creation with Free Moral Agency, does God Gain *Benefit*.

Think carefully here: What *appreciable benefit* does God receive by creating man without free moral agency? If man is not at liberty to *act* according to *his own will*? Surely all else of God’s creation (which has no such *free will*) reflect God’s majestic power and sublime goodness, cf. Rom.1:20; but it is only through man being *able* to *reject God’s will for his own* that true benefit to the Almighty is achieved. Thus:

A. God is *benefited* by man’s choice to seek and *find* Him only if he is given the prerogative not to do so.

B. God is *glorified* by man’s *worship* and *service* only if man has the ability to do otherwise.

Thus, only with and through the *free moral agency* of man does God gain any *benefit*.

IV. What’s the Point of All This? A couple actually, if we return to Acts 17:

A. Judgment is Coming, v.31.

Throughout this lesson we’ve seen both evidence for and the necessity of man being created with and therefore possessing the *ability to choose* whether or not to acknowledge and serve God. Man doesn’t have to believe in, seek for, or find, submit to, and worship God. But it does not follow that should man use this ability to reject and turn from God, there will be no consequence. In fact, *free moral agency* demands a consequence, for if there is no consequence for “wrong” choices or rewards for “right” ones, *free will* has no point at all. Furthermore, since man- when given a *choice*, will invariably *choose wrongly* (Rom.3:23)...

B. Repentance is Required, v.30.

The “*times of ignorance*” were once “*overlooked*” by God simply because the *plan/remedy* for man’s *redemption* were then not yet fully accomplished (through the *propitiation* of Jesus Christ), and therefore its *revelation* to mankind was not yet complete. But once both the *plan* and its full *revelation* was achieved, man’s “wrong” choices could no longer be left unpunished. The only way to avoid the necessary consequences of “wrong” choices was by *repentance* (a *turning away from* man’s own “wrong” will and *turning* and *adherence* to God’s “right” will).

C. So, what are you doing with the *free moral agency* God has graciously provided?

Foolishly using it for your own *purposes* and *functions* toward temporal personal gain? Or, employing it to God’s *purposes* and *functions* to eternal glory? Aside from such things as your parents, birthdate, and gender (which were all determined by others) God has given you the *choice* to think, believe, and do whatever choose. But use it wisely, I implore you, for although you are free to choose, you are not free from the eternal consequences of your earthly choices!