

Free Will: The Human Pretension to Autonomy

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November 2008

WHY DID THEY LIE?

Since Adam, being free to choose,
Chose to imagine he was free
To choose his own necessity,
Lost in his freedom, man pursues
The shadow of his images.

W. H. Auden¹

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, "if you continue in my word you are my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." They answered him, "We are descendents of Abraham and have never been in bondage to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will be made free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin...if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

"We have never been in bondage to any man." What an extraordinary lie! Had they forgotten their bondage in Egypt, the bricks without straw, the plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea and the celebration each year to remind them of their redemption from bondage? Interestingly Jesus did not remind them of their history of slavery. He simply pointed out that whoever sins is a slave to sin but if the "Son makes you free you will be free indeed."

The important question is: why did they lie? They lied about their freedom for the same reason we lie about our freedom. One meaning of freedom simply implies that no external restraint, coercion or force binds or inhibits a person. But given our human nature, being free in this sense merely means that our natural instincts and drives are without external controls. Inasmuch as we are sinners, we see ourselves as the center of all we survey. We hope, we wish, we want to have whatever we desire. And we believe that being able to have or to do what we want is freedom. We continue today to tell such lies as "we are born free," "he's free to choose to take revenge or to forgive," "he's free to get drunk or to stay sober," "she's free to commit suicide or to renew her hope," "terrorists are free to kill innocent people or to refrain from doing so." Each of the destructive choices is made from bondage. Drunkenness, suicide, vengeance and mass murder are instances of bondage, not freedom. Having no restraints is not freedom but license, a state of hazardous slavery.

¹ For the Time Being (New York: Random House, 1944), 68.

Archbishop William Temple has given us the simplest and deepest picture of the bondage into which we are all born.

When we open our eyes as babies we see the world stretching out around us; we are in the middle of it ...I am the center of the world I see; where the horizon is depends on where I stand ... Some things hurt us; we hope they will not happen again; we call them bad. Some things please us; we hope they will happen again; we call them good. Our standard of value is the way the things affect ourselves. So each of us takes his place in the center of his own world. But I am not the center of the world, or the standard of reference as between good and bad; I am not and God is.

This self as center is the cause and source of all sin and of our persistent bondage.

An Oxford don once observed that he had never known an independently wealthy scholar to finish the work for a doctorate in the time required. Wealth seemed to give one choices to delay, procrastinate, and put off work that needed to be done. Students, whose financial circumstances did not allow them the choice of continuing delay, tended to finish their work on schedule. Money confers the power of wider choices, but that very power can reinforce bondage.

Lord Acton's dictum, "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," is an insight not only about power but also about the nature of freedom. This easily documented wisdom is based on the unacknowledged fact that our wills are not free unless they naturally desire to do what they should. When they are given power to have their way they too often tend to increase bondage, not freedom. Professor Leonard Hodgson used to object to Acton's statement on the grounds that God is absolute power but not corrupted. This is true because God, unlike humans, is not self-centered and sinful. Too often Acton's quote is cited without the word "tends." "Power tends to corrupt..." because humans tend to self-centeredness. Yet there are many examples of the use of power without corruption.

The great counter-cultural wisdom advanced by Dante's Divine Comedy is that no one gets dragged into hell, or barred from heaven, by anything external. People get what they desire in the circles of hell. Cowards flee and haters hate for all eternity because that is what their wills choose. Those with an invitation to heaven willfully decline because they do not wish to relinquish the self-destructive commitments that cannot live in heaven. C. S. Lewis' Great Divorce describes this beautifully. His stories and illustrations of humans desiring lust, self-pity and revenge, because of past habits or hurts, prevent them from desiring heaven. With God's forgiveness and love, and our repentance (a change of heart), our wrongful desires are gradually replaced, our wills are changed as expressions of a changed heart, and we began to desire what we should.

The fact that our wills are in bondage can be learned from non-Christians as well as Christians. Few have illustrated the true nature of the human captivity of the will more dramatically than Jean Paul Sartre, in his play No Exit. As in Dante's Inferno, people

choose to be in a room from which nothing prevents their leaving, but they have no desire to do so. All of them are miserable and they encourage further misery in each other. Their wills imprison them and they are left among others who are similarly committed to self-willfulness. Here a non-Christian, Sartre, teaches us the seriousness of the bondage we mistakenly call freedom: "You remember all we were told about torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the 'burning marl.' Old wives tales! There is no need for red-hot poker. Hell is -- other people."²

Our wills are the agents of our hearts. Appeals to "will power" are limited without a change of heart. Scripture teaches that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9) Until our hearts begin to be changed we will continue to desire those things that lead to hell. Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) is credited with the observation: "What the heart desires, the will chooses, and the mind justifies." The power for good or ill is in our hearts; our wills are mere agents of our hearts' desires.

Desire can be every bit as incarcerating as being in jail if the object of our desires is inappropriate or pathological. It is said that if one marries only for money one earns every penny. Getting what we want can be very expensive in the long haul. Finishing a whole pizza while struggling with obesity is getting what we want but this is bondage not freedom. As a procrastinator I think I am free if I can put off a duty until another day. The overwhelming tide of these secular times panders to our Pharisaic inclination that we are free when we get what we want. "You deserve it," the advertisement says. This is only true if what we want corresponds with ultimate reality, with what is God's will and is our promised joy. We joyless Pharisees need to be reminded of Jesus' words: "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full." (John 15: 11)

This issue of freedom is confusing, as William Temple's description of us reveals. Being the center of the world does not mean that everyone is completely self-centered. The human heart is complex and ambivalent. The pagan graces of family, friendship, and communal loyalty, as well as empathy in suffering and care for nature, give us some modicum restraints on our self-centeredness and produce some genuine desire for the good of others. As baptized recipients of death to self, and the assurance of the Easter triumph as the final reality, we are on track to enjoy becoming "free indeed."

Freedom at its depth is an unfathomable mystery, but simply because it is a mystery does not mean that we are unable to say some very clear and crucial things about it. There seems to be a mystery about why our stomachs don't digest themselves, but that mystery does not mean we give up eating or that we cannot learn a great deal about what we should eat. Childbirth is a profound mystery but that should not put obstetricians out of work. Several things need to be said about freedom without assuming one can dispel its mystery. This is especially true concerning aspects that have been distorted by the pervasive yeast of the Pharisee.

² Jean Paul Sartre. No Exit, (New York: Vantage Books, 1989). 45.

The **first** is to be reminded of what our Lord emphatically told us, that when we sin we are "the slaves of sin." Sinning and freedom seem to be synonyms only to our sinful natures. But according to Jesus, sin is slavery. "He who sins is a slave to sin."

Secondly, freedom is not to be equated with having choices. Some choices will lead to freedom and some will lead to bondage. Making right choices is an expression of freedom. Life, beset with destructive sinful and damaging choices, is an expression of slavery.

We find an expression of true freedom in the example of Charles Wesley. When he returned from his miserable failure in Georgia he was visited on his sick bed by the Moravian, Peter Boehler. Peter asked Charles what confidence he had if he were to die at that time. Charles' answer was a confident, "that I have given my best endeavors to serve God." Peter sadly shook his head in disappointment, which hurt Charles poignantly. Peter gave him Martin Luther's Commentary on Galatians to read. Halfway through the penny dropped and Charles confessed that he had no dignity but his trust alone in Jesus Christ.

Before this event Charles had written very few poems or hymns. Now flowed from his heart something between 7,300 (Rattenberg) and 8,989 (Townsend) that were produced in the 50 years following his finding his true freedom. The word in Galatians gave him the choice to relinquish confidence in his own righteousness and accept that of the righteousness of Christ. It was not that he was free to make the choice but out of his bondage he was made free by the Word to choose true freedom

An alcoholic has choices of rum, gin, vodka, bourbon, or scotch before breakfast. Having such choices is sadly and demonstratively a form of bondage. Sometimes freedom from choices is true freedom. Liberation from the choices of addiction can be a most wonderful freedom. A person, whose character has been so molded that deception and lying are not choices to be made each day, enjoys a greater freedom than one hounded constantly with choices to deceive and frantic attempts to recollect what lies were told that need to be covered.

Sir Walter Scott saw the bondage that results in the choice to lie: "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!" A tangled web is a veritable straightjacket in comparison with the freedom stemming from an honest heart. The possibility of lying would not occur to one whose commitment is to truth. It is like a mature married woman who has no desire for intimacy with men other than her husband. Each is more free by giving up choices. To choose to be a fireman eliminates the choice to be a carpenter or a policeman. The freedom of being a fireman may be seriously limited, not enhanced, by constantly revisiting the decision made when the commitment was made to be a fireman.

The third confusion that encourages the lie is that we are not born free but we are born **to be** free. The New Testament scholar C. K. Barrett teaches us that being made free, according to scripture, "... is nothing other than a synonym for salvation."³ Nowhere in scripture is

³ C. K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John. London: William Cowes and Sons, 1967), 285.

freedom assumed in humanity's natural condition: "...you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient *from the heart* to the standard of teaching to which you were committed and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." (Italics mine) (Rom. 6:17, 18), "For freedom Christ has set us free." (Gal. 5:1) "...and the truth will make you free." (John 8:32) "...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (I Cor. 3:17)

When Hurricane Hugo hit Charleston, S. C. in 1989 the power lines were down and trees were strewn across the streets. I rode a bicycle from home to the Diocesan headquarters and went immediately to check the archives in a large closet on the second floor. The door closed behind me and I heard the lock click. There was no window and no light. I tried the heavy metal door and could not push it open. No one knew where I was. I wondered how long it would take to be found. I examined the hinges with my hands, hoping I might be able to remove them and then realized that it opened in and not out I was in terrible bondage because I did not recognize the true necessity that the door simply needed to be pulled and not pushed. When I recognized this reality, this necessity, I was free.

A simple story, perhaps, but in the long run God's unseen and spiritual realities are in this sense no different from material and physical ones. In pushing on that door I was reminded of the account of Paul's conversion. "It hurts to kick against the goads." (Acts 26:14). Kicking against God's spiritual realities is as frustrating as kicking against the steel door. Any who have experienced addictions know what this is like. The central question regarding freedom is whether my center is the Last Word, or whether God's will is the Last Word.

The poet Robert Penn Warren expressed this fundamental point: "For the recognition of *necessity* is the beginning of freedom." (Italics mine)⁴ Communism claimed, that historical inevitability of the triumph of the proletariat and the withering of the state, was the necessity which would provide true freedom. This was an enormously effective selling point until the very idea of this historical inevitability lost its conviction of necessity. The confidence born of hope and trust in the triumphant necessity of Jesus is the foundation of true freedom.

In summary, freedom remains a mystery but four things can and should be said about it: 1. Self-centered human nature, regardless of intelligence, believes that to sin is an expression of freedom. 2. To sin is not freedom, but slavery. 3. Freedom cannot be equated with merely having choices. 4. Freedom must be in accord with necessity.

Predestination

No other Christian doctrine is as offensive and shocking to human and cultural sensibilities. The reason for this is simple. It goes back to William Temple's description of us. We come into this world perceiving ourselves as the center. But we are not the

⁴ Brothers to Dragons, (New York: Random House, 1979), 214.

center of the world, God is. As we resent a sibling or colleague, who has a rival center, all the more do we resent God who is **the** center.

This resentment is universal and infects everyone from children to the intellectual elite. "It's all about me" is too often the persistent posture of adults. That we are not the center of the world is a fact that some only slowly and reluctantly admit while others never do. When we encounter the claim of God's predestination this reluctance can turn to anger and denial. But when we realize that freedom utterly depends on some necessity, some reality, we must ask, what necessity is it? Is it not some residual antagonism toward God as center that makes us resent the very idea that God's destiny for us is the ultimate necessity, the only sure ground for our freedom? His will, not mine, will be until my will is perfectly matched with his.

Article XVII of the Anglican 39 Articles states: "As the godly consideration of Predestination, our election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons ...so for curious and carnal persons lacking the Spirit of Christ to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination, is a most dangerous downfall ...doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation."⁵

"Curious" in the 16th century sense means: "Desirous of knowing what one has no right to know or what does not concern one, prying." (Oxford English Dictionary)
"Carnal" is the English word that translates "flesh" (translation of *sarx*) as opposed to "spirit" as it is described in Galatians 5:19-21. ("fornication, impurity, ... enmity, strife, jealousy, anger" etc.) "Flesh," as used by St. Paul, is the natural enmity humans have toward claims to any center other than self.

To see and hope for a destiny centered in God's will is not possible as long as we are looking at the world simply from our own center. No threat, no law, no fear can make us welcome God's destiny. But the love that God has shown in Jesus Christ gives us a vision of "unspeakable comfort" in the trust that his will is the last Word, his mercy, his justice, his love. This destiny is not a perhaps, or problematic or one that depends on us. It is assured and is predetermined, for it is God's unproblematic final and certain victorious will. For those of us who resent the very idea of predestination, how would we answer the question, "For whose final destiny or for what purpose and final necessity do we hope, mine or God's?" This is why we began this lecture with W. H. Auden's quote: "Since Adam, being free to choose, chose to imagine he was free to choose his own necessity."

In a scene in C. S. Lewis's novel, Perelandra, Ransom makes a courageous decision be once believed to be impossible.

You might say, if you liked, that the power of choice had been simply set aside and an inflexible destiny substituted for it. On

⁵Book of Common Prayer, 871.

the other hand, you might say that he had been delivered from the rhetoric of his passions and had emerged into unassailable freedom. Ransom could not, for the life of him, see any difference between these two statements. *Predestination and freedom were apparently identical.* (Italics mine). He could no longer see any meaning in the many arguments he had heard on this subject.⁶

Predestination is often misunderstood and rejected as determinism, but it is in fact the very foundation of our freedom. The mystery is still here but this we know: there is no freedom that is not in accord with reality and the ultimate reality is God's will. It is important to explain carefully how God aligns our wills with his in order to understand that predestination is not determinism.

Jesus did not run after the rich young ruler who went sadly away, asking, "If I put this another way would you buy it?" He would not impose or coerce. Predestination is not a matter of coercion but the attraction of a loving necessity. He invited but did not draft his disciples. He submitted to the rejection of Caiaphas, Pilate and the multitude without forcing their compliance. He did not restrain Judas, but allowed the betrayal. He will deal with us in the same way. He will only evoke and elicit the response of faith. This is not because he refuses to "violate our freedom" as has too often been expressed, but that force and coercion can never evoke love and create true freedom from bondage. As St. Augustine has taught us we are not saved by our wills, but God will not save us without our wills.

The great mystery lies not in God's will as the foundation of our freedom. That is a simple fact. The mystery lies in the sure and certain final reality of justice, mercy and love and how we are, or are not, a part of that victory. Our human nature persists in attempting to abolish the mystery by the lie that in our "freedom that is perfect bondage" we choose to have the faith that saves. Scripture and the saints have unanimously insisted otherwise: God has chosen us and our faith is his gift. How do we account for those to whom faith is not given and are not saved? We don't. How God manages remains a mystery. One of the many blessings of not being God is leaving the remaining mystery with him.

An early and reoccurring heresy taught that the unity of Jesus' divinity and humanity was accomplished by the replacement of something in Jesus' humanity (his mind or his spirit) with divinity.⁷ It was soundly repudiated at the Council of Constantinople in 381 because the grace of God never destroys nature and what God in Christ did not take on, did not assume in his full humanity, he did not redeem. If divinity replaced Jesus' mind or his will, our human minds or wills will not be redeemed. The recurrence of this heresy

⁶Perelandra, (New York: Scribner, 1972), 127.

⁷The heresy is called Apollonarianism. Its teaching regarding the replacement or destruction of human will continues to live on in modern examples such as the enormously popular work by B. F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity, and in certain behavioral therapies that seek to train, educate, or cure people with methods and techniques that circumvent or destroy the will. This is true of all tyranny, political or personal, something markedly absent from the life of Jesus. Anthony Burgess's book and movie, A Clockwork Orange, is a classic example of the appeal and the horror of this "solution" to human behavior.

has given much of the evangelical tradition a warrant for anti-intellectualism. The poet W. H. Auden described this when he put into the angel Gabriel's announcement to the virgin Mary, "Love's will requires your own..."⁸ and this same love requires our own will. Everything about Jesus' life and witness even unto death was not to destroy our wills but to change and free them. This is not determinism.

The temptation to replace or destroy our wills with God's will is still with us. The otherwise beautiful words to Hymn No. 707⁹ "Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine," makes our wills no longer ours. When they are transformed they are not lost but fulfilled. Much better is Charlotte Elliott's hymn, "Renew my will from day to day, Blend it with thine and take away, all that now makes it hard to say Thy will be done."¹⁰ Redemption does not replace, take away, or destroy our wills or minds, but blends them with God's where they remain distinctively ours but now fulfilled. This is redemption not determinism.

The sinful assumption that we are born free has crept into much of our teaching and devotional material, especially the catechism of the Episcopal Church's present Prayer Book. No catechism before the 1979 book ever explained freedom this way:

Q. What does it mean to be created in the image of God?

A. It means that we are free to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God.

Q. Why then do we live apart from God and out of harmony with creation?

A. From the beginning, human beings have misused their freedom and made wrong choices.

Q. Why do we not use our freedom as we should?

A. Because we rebel against God, and we put ourselves in the place of God.¹¹

The truth of earlier catechisms was replaced with a Pharisaic lie. In the 1928 Prayer Book the catechism reads:

"Catechist: My good child know this; that thou art not able to do these things of thyself, nor walk in the commandments of God, to serve him without his special grace; which thou must learn at all times to call for by diligent prayer."¹²

Freedom is not an agency, but rather a condition of not being in prison physically, psychologically or spiritually. We come into this world unfree. We are not born free to live in harmony with others, "with creation and with God," as the more recent

⁸ For the Time Being, (New York: Random House, 1944), 77-78.

⁹ Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1982).

¹⁰ Charlotte Elliott, Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1940). #420.

¹¹ The Book of Common Prayer, (New York: The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 845.

¹² The Book of Common Prayer, (Church Pension Fund, New York, 1928), 528.

catechism falsely asserts. As William Temple has taught us, we are born as self-centered creatures, out of harmony with God and others, observing everything from our own center's perspective.

But some will say, "Are we not free to reject God's offer of grace and salvation?" We often reject God's offer but we are not free in doing so. Such rejection is an expression of bondage not freedom. Certainly some do reject offers of grace and salvation but only those infected with Pharisaic yeast call that rejection "freedom." Scripture calls such decisions slavery and bondage (John 8:34).

An example of what this lie about being born free does to the Gospel is Bishop James Pike, one of its victims. He started on his path to Unitarianism on p.80 of his Time for Christian Candor¹³ where he assumed the lie of our being **free in the initial situation** (born free). "A necessary corollary is that not only is man free to do good and constructive things but he is also free to do evil and destructive things." Doing evil and destructive things is not freedom but bondage. Repeating the lie about sinners being free excludes the need for grace that produces true freedom. It eliminates the need for God's atonement in Christ's sacrifice and ends with a Unitarian deity. By page 124 the logic had led Bishop Pike to relinquish belief in the Trinity, which he observed "is not essential to the Christian faith." If we are already free we need no Trinitarian action of the Father's love, the Son's redemption and the Spirit's encouragement.

Archbishop William Temple, in contrast, has expressed not only the reality of our bondage but also the true nature of our freedom.

What is quite certain is that the self cannot by any effort of its own lift itself off its own self as centre and re-systematise itself about God as its centre. Such radical conversion must be the act of God, and that too by some process other than the gradual self-purification of a self-centered world assisted by the ever-present influence of God diffused through nature including human nature. It cannot be a process only of enlightenment. Nothing can suffice but a redemptive act. Something impinging upon the self from without must *deliver it from the freedom, which is perfect bondage to the bondage, which is its only perfect freedom.* (Italics mine)

The so-called "freedom," which is perfect bondage, is what humans invariably begin with by believing it is true freedom. We believe in false freedom, not intellectually but willfully. Simply to have no external constraints or compulsions is what many mean by being free. The absence of force or compulsion in the invitation, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28) does not mean that we are free when we reject his offer. This choice of refusal that sinners naturally call "free"

¹³ James A. Pike, A Time for Christian Candor (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 80,124.

Bishop Pike (1913-1969) was author of a score of books and was one of the most popularly acclaimed clergymen of his generation. He was censured by the House of Bishops for his "tone and manner" not for the substance of his denial of the creedal affirmations regarding Christ and the Trinity.

is precisely what Temple calls the "freedom, which is perfect bondage." We need to be reminded of C. K. Barrett's insight that freedom and salvation are synonyms. Ultimately, the internal trajectory of our human bondage is self-destructive. Jesus tells us quite plainly that we are not free unless the Son makes us free. We have seen that freedom is not freedom unless it fits with necessity and the final necessity is the will and love of God. The fulfillment of self-centered wills is not freedom but hell, the absence of God's love. Jesus as Lord is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the ultimate necessity and the Last Word.

The Roman Catholic, Fr, Harry McSorley, teaches all Protestants what they desperately need to know:

If the doctrine of justification is the article on which the church stands or falls, then the doctrine of the unfree will is the **foundation** of the article on which the church stands or falls, or the article on which Luther's doctrine of justification stands or falls.¹⁴

A pastorally frustrating result of this false freedom ("of perfect bondage") is that it infects clergy and leaves them with no compassion for sinners. They cannot see that the members of their congregation are bound by the lie concerning their alleged freedom. If their parishioners are not tithing, not attending church regularly, not giving to missions, and not behaving, if they believe the parishioners are free in this behavior and are able of themselves to do otherwise, their sermons will be scolding, exhorting, and rebuking chastisements. Or more likely in a permissive age, the sermons will skirt all moral issues that are condemned by the law, but be overly concerned about tithing and politically correct issues. Their sermons will not tell the story of grace and hope that will set people truly free. If they do not believe that members of their flock are in bondage, but rather misusing their freedom, they will have no compassion for them. If they have the innate ability to fulfill the demands of tithing, moral behavior, etc., if they are free not to sin, "Why in heaven's name won't they do it?" Assuming the lie that sin is freedom is a rationale for frustration and, ultimately, hatred.

This is as true of the laity as it is of clergy. If our attitude toward people, who are damaging themselves and us, is one that assumes they are free in this behavior, we will have no compassion, no understanding, no inclination to forgive and little capacity to love them. Understanding that sin is bondage, and when the Son makes us free we are free indeed, gives us a graceful sadness in the presence of unacceptable behavior rather than aggressive counter-productive anger. Such understanding is the enabling first step in human forgiveness. It is incumbent upon us to forgive, not only because God demands it, but also because it is necessary for our soul's health and joy. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" is the apparently awful request our Lord has taught us to make. "For judgment is without mercy for one who has shown no mercy." (James 2:13)

¹⁴ Luther Right or Wrong. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1969), 11.

Forgiveness is difficult, sometimes humanly impossible, because the injustice, pain and suffering seem too great. Yet the necessity is even greater the more serious and unfair the hurt. When we understand that all sin is an expression of bondage, not freedom, it begins to help us see that as God has forgiven us our acts and choices in our bondage so we are enabled to begin to forgive others in their destructive bondage. Neither we nor they deserve forgiveness.

This acknowledgement that sinful behavior is bondage, not freedom, leads us to the recourse of the "old, old story" that carries the grace which can break the bondage and set us authentically free. This is not sentimentality but tough love, as we see in Jesus' harsh statements regarding Sadducees, Pharisees, and Scribes. Sin is indeed a serious and destructive reality in everyone's life. God will judge the sins of our enemies but also ours. As we have received undeserved mercy so we are able to show mercy to those who do not deserve it.

"If you continue in my Word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31, 32) The order in this verse is crucial. First must come the Word, the good news of God's love and action in saving sinners. Then we become his disciples, the messengers of his Word. Then we shall know the truth and finally we shall be made free. The Pharisaic yeast reverses the text by beginning with freedom to obey God's law that we sinners do not have.

The Pharisaic system, so congenial to our basic nature, offers the false hope that we can by our wills do what is necessary to be saved. When we believe that by our wills we can have faith (evangelical Pharisaism), an inevitable condescension and antipathy to those who have not used their "free" will to accept Jesus as their savior, results. Scolding people for not believing in Jesus is a symptom of the lie and is invariably counterproductive. The belief that by our wills we can gain sufficient knowledge and self-control to attain salvation (high-church Pharisaism) is also a symptom of the lie. An example of the latter can be found in an article on Moral Theology in the first two editions of the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church: Moral Theology is defined as: "The science of Christian conduct, trusting of God as man's last end, and of *the means which he may be attained*." (Italics mine)¹⁵ This has been mercifully replaced in the third edition by a significant corrective.¹⁶ Following Jesus as our supreme example, while omitting the story of God's initiating love in his sacrifice for our sins thus enabling us to follow him, is the form of the lie told by liberal theologians. We are not saved by Jesus' example but by his sacrifice, which established his mercy. In turn, in gratitude we can begin to follow his example. This tradition, that reduces Jesus to merely an example to follow, has perhaps had more influence on the culture than the evangelical and High Church traditions combined. Its father is Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) who made the following egregious claim:

¹⁵ Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1st edition, 1957, 921 and 2nd edition.

¹⁶ Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1997, 1110.

If what is commanded be not in the power of every one, all the numberless exhortations in the Scriptures, and also all the promises, threatenings, expostulations, reproofs, asseverations, benedictions, and maledictions, together with all the forms of precepts, must of necessity stand coldly useless.¹⁷

The clear assumption behind this assertion is that we sinners are indeed able to do what is commanded of us. Erasmus' work, The Freedom of the Will,¹⁸ is the foundational lie that panders to our natural Pharisaic inclination to believe that we are free before grace and undergirds the whole liberal tradition from the 17th century until now. If Erasmus is right we can see how Christianity is simply a matter of numberless exhortations without the saving story of God's loving and enabling sacrifice. Luther's reply to Erasmus in The Bondage of the Will is the abiding antidote to this lie.¹⁹

This antidote to the sickness of bondage is not easy to swallow. Professor Gerhard O. Forde warns us:

Writing a book on Luther's Bondage of the Will is a foolhardy business — not because the arguments are so hard to understand but rather because they are so difficult for sinners to take.²⁰

When one begins with the false assumption of being free, all concern will be involved with how to keep such "freedom" in check, how to control sin. The result is the deadly religion of the Pharisee. If one begins with the assumption of bondage, the concern will be how to proclaim the Word in kindness, patience and love so that people are enabled to be set free.

The crucial answer to both the Pharisee, as well as the Sadducee, is the very person of Christ being God's "impinging upon the self from without." Christ's sacrifice gives us access to the only occasion of a true meeting of both mercy and justice, without which humans ultimately can not know the love that begins to set them free to be whole and saved.

Another spiritually pathological result of assuming that we are born free, or naturally free, is the so-called "free will theodicy" — the attempt to explain apparent innocent suffering on the grounds that such victims have misused their freedom. As with all-powerful lies this one too has a partial truth in it. One can certainly explain some headaches by recalling how much rum one drank the night before or the relation between smoking and cancer, a

¹⁷ Martin Luther, Bondage of the Will, Lection LXV.

¹⁸ Ernest F. Winter, ed., De Libero Arbitrio, Discourse on the Freedom of the Will, (New York, 1961).

¹⁹ See Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will: A New Translation by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1957) and The Captivation of the Will by Gerhard O. Forde, Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage, Lutheran Quarterly Books, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans II, 2005). The introduction by James A. Nestingen is especially invaluable as a simple and clear exposition of biblical freedom.

²⁰ Gerhard O. Forde, The Captivation of the Will, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), xvi.

corollary of the falsehood that "he was free to smoke" (in contrast to "he was in bondage to smoke"). But many things happen that have nothing to do with any choice we may have made. Random calamities, personal and social, occur from a myriad of causes having nothing to do with human volition.

Rabbi Kushner's book Why Bad Things Happen to Good People mentioned in Chapter 2 eloquently and justly dismissed the "free will" explanation for his son's fatal illness, (the son had done nothing to deserve his malady), even if his own solution (to forgive God) is vain. However, that self-centered autonomy in each of us often takes inappropriate responsibility and produces neurotic guilt for random calamities. A woman dying of cancer in Chicago is ridden with false guilt, insisting it is her fault. "If I had not left Chillicothe, Ohio, I would not be dying of cancer." Our natural Pharisaism drives us to insist that we are always in control. When we lose that control we often neurotically blame ourselves. The very fact that Kushner needed to write this exceedingly popular book to absolve people of false guilt indicates the spiritual pathology that stems from the claim of autonomy. A terrible price is paid for believing we are a law unto ourselves (autonomous). Our self-centeredness naturally tends to resolve issues by control. This idea is so pervasive that it has now become a psychological term of neurosis, "control." As a fruit of our self-centeredness it produces arrogant assumptions about our "freedom" and, in this case of innocent or random calamities, a cruel and heavy burden of false guilt.

Given human nature, this tendency to assign inappropriate responsibility showed itself in scripture and continues today:

There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices and he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. (Lk 13:2-5)

Jesus makes it quite clear that all calamities are not punishment for sins. This false theodicy was a large part of the "comfort" of Job's false friends. I remember calling on a parishioner who had just been diagnosed with a terrible immune type disease (and ultimately fatal). She asked the universal question, "Why me? What have I done to deserve this?" I responded with Jesus' words about those upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell to assure her that there are random acts that have no relation to behavior. Multiple sclerosis is bad enough without the added burden of false guilt.

But I didn't finish the text. I didn't tell her what Jesus added, "...but unless you repent you will...likewise perish." It did not seem to be a gracious thing to do to tell her to repent. I was wrong. Although not at that particular time, but I should have told her about the good news of what true repentance is — the promise of joy and abundant life in God's unassailable center.

Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love

All that we have considered in this chapter begs this question: why does Jesus demand repentance of his hearers who, like those upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, are presumably no more sinful than others? The fact is that the need for repentance is universal and points to something deeper than sins committed. Repentance treats something more profound — our commitment to our self-as-center — that which causes us to sin and to believe that we are in control.

The Pharisaic influence in the church's history has soiled the image of the term repentance. What Jesus is asking is something deeper than being sad or remorseful about something we have done. Repentance (*metanoia*) literally means a "change of mind." Ashley Null's book on Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love²¹ is important, not only for its excellent study of Thomas Cranmer, but also for its deeper and much needed positive understanding of repentance. Oxford University Press erred badly when they did not include the subtitle on the cover of the first edition. "Renewing the Power to Love" conveys a much different spirit from merely "feeling bad about something we've done" — the superficial and conventional view of repentance.

This change of heart is an exquisite expression of true freedom. But it comes only from charity (*agape*), the divine love that "impinging upon the self from without" (William Temple's phrase), delivers us from the "freedom" that is perfect bondage into the "bondage that is perfect freedom."

The insight from Philip Melancthon deserves repeating: "What the heart desires, the will chooses, and the mind justifies." What Jesus is demanding is not mere sorrow for transgressions, or remorse concerning sins, but a change of heart that enables us to love. All human loves, whether friendship, romance or domestic loyalties, are tainted, undermined, and ultimately betrayed by a self-centered heart.²² In spite of the literal meaning of repentance (*metanoia*) as a change of mind the overwhelming meaning in scripture, as we see in the context each time it is used, is a "change of heart."²³ To understand that our hearts (the symbol of our very identity) are what need changing is to go a long way toward understanding the unworkable pretension of the Pharisee. On one hand, the expectation that our wills can respond to demands of the law without a change of heart brings frustration, hypocrisy and depression. On the other hand, to have some measure of "loving that which thou commandeth," even in small doses, brings expressions of true freedom, real joy, and growing love.

I have a friend who is a Methodist pastor. He ministers not only to his own flock, but also to the whole town. Whenever a problem, tragedy or catastrophe occurs, the social

²¹ New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

²² The Four Loves (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960). The quotation on the title page from John Donne should not be missed: "That our affections kill us not, nor dye."

²³ G. Kittle, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), IV, 626-629.

workers, police, physicians and other clergy call him. I have seen him in what most people would regard as singularly awkward and disagreeable situations of drug addiction, suicides, crime, and heartbreak, He is invariably upbeat, tender, reassuring, realistic and encouraging. He seems to have more energy than anyone since John Wesley. His explanation is that he truly wants to do what he is called to do. He doesn't tell his wife, "Oh, Lori, I'm afraid I have to go back to that dysfunctional, self-destructive family again." He doesn't have to make himself go. He wants to and is truly free to do so.

Why? And how? Because he has been given a new heart to do so. What the heart desires, the will chooses and the mind justifies. How was he given a new heart? Many years ago, like the prodigal son, he found himself in tears on his knees at midnight in the only unlocked church in town. He sobbed out the recognition that his self-as-center was rotten and that it was the source of what was wrong in his life. How did he get a new heart? He asked for it. How was he able to ask for it?

He had been given, but had previously ignored, a picture of true love. This picture of God's vulnerable love in Christ who suffered and died a horrifying death on a cross for him was no longer a mere picture, but an experience, an experience that freed him from the destructive escapes of self-indulgent permissiveness. That love broke his heart and reset it in a new center. Only that love can change our hearts and set our wills free to choose him and thus become truly free.

Because God will not save or set us free without our wills, he not only gives us this same true picture and action of his love, especially at those humbling and distressing times, when our self-as-center is not working and we are miserable. On those occasions we are most susceptible to having our hearts changed. When our self-reliance on our ability to control gives way and we can see and experience that bloody love, as did the Wesleys, Charles Simeon, William Wilberforce, C. S. Lewis and Charles Colson, then are we blessed with a new heart that is grounded in the joy, certitude and service that is perfect freedom.

George Herbert describes the condition in two short lines:

Who in heart not ever kneels,
Neither sin nor savior feels.

How can we receive this experience? Not by wasting the humbling times but by allowing them to become what they were for my Methodist friend.