

# ON AGENCY AND INEVITABILITY

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## IS THE NATURAL MAN FREE AND INDEPENDENT?

Therefore **do not let sin reign** in your mortal body, in order to obey **its desires**. Neither **yield your members to sin** as instruments of unrighteousness, but **yield yourselves to God**, as living out from the dead, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For **sin will not rule over you**, for **you are not under law**, but **under grace**.

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law, but under grace? Never may it be! Do you not know that to whom you yield yourselves as slaves for obedience, **you are slaves to him whom you obey**, whether of sin to death, **or of obedience to righteousness**? But thanks be to God that you who were slaves of sin have now become obedient from the heart to the pattern of teaching to which you were committed. And having been set free from sin, **you have become slaves to righteousness**. I speak in human terms on account of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you yielded your members in bondage to impurity and to lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now yield your members in bondage to righteousness unto sanctification.

**For when you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness**. What fruit, therefore, did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now, **having been set free from sin, and having become slaves to God**, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end is eternal life.

Romans 6:12-22

When Paul says “do not let sin reign” he establishes several things. First, that sin has its own desire to rule over us, as a foreign influence, distinct from us. This is the same teaching given by God Himself to Cain in Genesis, where sin is first discussed in the Bible. Second, we do have some power; that is, if we choose to exercise it consciously. Thoughtless behavior, carnal instinct, and indulgence are the opposite of that self-control; what seems like a free choice was actually a submission to that outside force. To govern one’s own spirit is thus a challenge, and without God we will fail more often than not. Our inherently corrupted flesh traps us in the cycle of sin’s dominance. This transgresses God’s standards and separates us from Him. Breaking free from sin on our own is impossible. We must yield to God as the alternative, freeing us from sin by enslaving us to Him instead. Under His spiritual protection (ie. grace) we cannot be controlled by sin as before. Here we find the heart of Christ’s work and our salvation.

For he who is called in the Lord *while* a slave is the Lord’s freedman. Likewise he who is called *while* free is **Christ’s slave**.

1 Corinthians 7:22

The paradox: those who belong to Christ are both freer than a free man, and more enslaved than a slave. To understand this we must again acknowledge that the natural man is inherently enslaved to sin without realizing it. Sin is an outside spiritual force that wants to dominate us, and we have limited power to resist it. Christ liberates us from that dark power altogether, but in exchange buys us with the price of his own blood, conscripting us into his own ministry and Kingdom. Thus, we are bound to him. But because he is a gracious Lord, he grants us freedom from the former (seemingly independent) life and guides us lovingly, not harshly.

They **promise them freedom**, but they themselves are **slaves of corruption**. For **whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved**. For if, after they have **escaped** the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again **entangled in them and overcome**, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

2 Peter 2:19-20

Here Peter reinforces the same paradox. Those who promote freedom are deluded, becoming ever more entangled in corruption and sin. On the other hand, knowing the Lord is what allows us to truly escape the defilement of the world. But this is also not our doing; the Lord overcomes us and enslaves us for Himself.

And he was saying to them, “**You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.**”

John 8:23-24

Jesus is neither earth-born nor earth-bound, and is thus not subject to the spiritual powers that prevail over natural man. Sin cannot overcome him. This reinforces the point: unlike him, we are bound to sin from birth, and can only escape through Jesus.

Of his speaking these things, many believed in him. Therefore Jesus was saying to the Jews having believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. And you will **know the truth, and the truth will set free you.**”

They answered unto Him, “We are Abraham’s seed, and **to no one ever have we been under bondage.** How do you say, ‘**You will become free**?’”

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you that **everyone practicing the sin is a slave of the sin.** Now the slave does not abide in the house forever; the son abides forever. **So if the Son shall set you free, you will be free indeed.**

John 8:30-36

Jesus proclaims that he can set them free from sin. They are convinced that they have never been slaves to anyone, proving that spiritual enslavement is hidden from men, who believe they have an unbound free will.

Now I mean that the heir, as long as he is a minor, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything. But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. So also we, when we were minors, **were enslaved under the basic forces of the world.** But when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights. And because you are sons, **God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who calls “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if you are a son, then you are also an heir through God.**

Formerly **when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods at all.** But now that you have come to know God (or rather to be known by God), how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless basic forces? **Do you want to be enslaved to them all over again?** You are **observing religious days and months and seasons and years.** I fear for you that my work for you may have been in vain.

Those who do not know God are slaves to the basic forces of the world; false gods, sin, corruption, passions. It is God's interference into our own hearts that allows us to escape this slavery. He grants the Spirit of His Son to us, which reaches out on our behalf and joins us as His children. But how can we be slaves to God and yet be adopted sons at the same time? Perhaps this is addressed in the first verses, which, although used by Paul to explain the adoption of Greeks through the promise given to Abraham to remove us from under the law, could go even further to double as the logic for why we, despite being newly adopted sons, are no different from slaves to God until the time set by the father. What time would that be? The Millennial Kingdom, or New Creation, when we will inherit the world and become full sons, no longer under a master as slaves. So we are like slaves to God now, minors, under guardianship.

For we know that the law is spiritual, but **I am of the flesh, sold under sin. For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.** .... So I find it to be a law that **when I want to do right**, evil lies close at hand. For **I delight in the law of God, in my inner being**, but **I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.** Wretched man that I am! **Who will deliver me from this body of death?** Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Romans 7:14-15 + 21-25

Paul now speaks as explicitly as possible on our subject, leaving no room for mystery. Our flesh is not free at all. Paul says that he does not even understand his own actions, and that he does what he hates. Though inwardly he delights in the law of God, he notices a contrary force inside his own flesh that wages war against what his mind knows is right, and makes him enslaved to the sin of the flesh. Paul openly disassociates from his own flesh, hating it and identifying instead with the part of his mind that is obedient to God. It is self-rejection. Self-denial. Spiritual warfare.

**“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be **born again.**’ The wind blows where **it wishes**, and you hear the sound of it, but **cannot tell where it comes from** and where it goes. **So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.**”

John 3:5-8

We are naturally born of this world, in flesh, through the water of the womb. To escape the power of sin and subsequent death, we must spiritually die to the world and to the flesh and be reborn spiritually. This rebirth in our Spirit infuses us with a foreign will: that of God. The Spirit within us goes where it wishes, steering us and guiding our speech. Christ lives through us, and we die to ourselves. The corrupt vessel of our body becomes filled with a new power, which has its own agenda.

But I, brothers, **could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh**, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for **you are still of the flesh**. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and **behaving only in a human way?** For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” **are you not being merely human?**

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

Paul makes a further distinction, not only between unsaved and saved people, but between the infantile carnal Christians and mature spiritual ones. Infants in Christ are not yet spiritual, and make arguments with no importance, neglecting the bigger picture. He calls this behaving in “only a human way” and “merely human”, establishing that to be a mature Christian means to transcend humanity. This is in line with the notion of being a new creation, dead to sin and the world, free from the spiritual dominion of darkness and ignorance. Strong Christians focus on spiritual matters, where the real war is being waged and true power is exercised.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. **It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.** If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. **The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.** As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. **Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.**

1 Corinthians 15:42-49

Our natural body is perishable, dishonorable, and weak. This weakness is what makes us subject to sin, and therefore bound to death under the law. But even when

we are reborn spiritually through Christ, we retain our worthless fleshly body until the resurrection, when finally our bodies will be transformed just as our spirits were. We will thus no longer be overpowered by evil. If God counts this transformation as fully growing into the sons of God, then we will no longer be treated as slaves like young heirs, but inherit all things and gain true freedom to reign and make decisions. This is what we should call freedom; not the pitiful natural self, nor even our current form as liberated souls within weak flesh. Weakness will be gone.

For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not **the spirit of the world**, but the Spirit who is from God, **that we might understand** the things **freely given us by God**. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, **interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him**, and he is not able to understand them because they are **spiritually discerned**. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

1 Corinthians 2:11-15

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him. They must be spiritually discerned. But ask yourself: how then can anyone with the spirit of the world hear the message of God, even if it is preached to them clearly? It is impossible, because it will only seem like folly to them. So the only way to comprehend is for God Himself to intervene and allow us to hear His message. Therefore God does not open everyone's ears equally, or automatically, for then every person who heard the Gospel would be saved, and no one would consider it folly. But there are many opponents of Christ who have heard the truth. Furthermore, Paul clarifies that we only understand the things "freely given us by God", meaning that we have done nothing to earn it or uncover it by ourselves. So God chooses those who will hear His message, and imparts understanding spiritually as He pleases.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, **following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work** in the sons of disobedience—among whom **we all once lived** in the passions of **our flesh**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were **by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind**. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **even when we were dead** in our trespasses, **made us** alive together with Christ—by **grace** you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might **show the immeasurable riches of his grace in**

**kindness** toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And **this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** For we are **his workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which **God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

Ephesians 2:2-10

The matter is settled with this. Far from being free and independent, the “rest of mankind” is merely following the course of the world, which is ruled by the “prince of the power of the air” (Satan), which is the same spirit that causes the unsaved to be disobedient against God. We were all enslaved once, but it is only God’s miraculous interference into our natural lives that changes us, giving us a gift without any credit given to us, nor our own choices. We are his workmanship. How can we be responsible for his workmanship in any way? It is either His, or we have a part. Specifically He does this so that we cannot boast, even about our own acceptance. To steal credit from God for our own enlightenment would be backward and evil.

## TO WHAT EXTENT DOES GOD FOREORDAIN THE RESULTS OF OUR LIVES, WHETHER INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY?

Lord, we know that **people do not control their own destiny**. It is **not** in their power to **determine what will happen to them**.

Jeremiah 10:23

Here the question may already be settled, leaving no room for argument. Man ultimately does not control his own destiny. The wording makes it clear that this would apply both individually and collectively. But even so, there is still a question over who or what does determine our destiny, if not ourselves.

**Declaring the end from the beginning**, And from ancient times *things* that are not *yet* done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And **I will do all My pleasure**,’ **I summon** a bird of prey from the east, **a man for My purpose from a far-off land**. Truly I have spoken, and truly **I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, and I will surely do it**.

Isaiah 46:10-11

God plans the end of things from the beginning, and then He brings it to pass according to His own pleasure. If God summons a man for His purposes, it means he is unknowingly obeying the will of God, not his own natural inclinations. This is not framed as being foreknowledge and permission, nor is it merely synchronicity and natural alignment, but a deliberate execution of His ancient plans by actively playing a part in reality. This, we are told, is why He declares the end from the beginning; not because He happens to know how things will turn out, or is good at making predictions, but because He Himself “will surely do it” – in defiance of anyone who would try to deny Him.

for they **not yet having been born nor having done anything good or evil**, so that **the purpose of God according to election** might stand, not of works, but of the One calling, it was said to her, “The older will serve the younger.” As it has been written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

What then shall we say? Is there injustice with God? Never may it be! For He says to Moses: “**I will show mercy to whom I may show mercy**, and I will have compassion on whom I may have compassion.” So then, **it is not of the willing, nor of the running, but of God showing mercy**. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “**For this**



**very purpose I have raised you up**, so that I might show My power in you, and that My name should be declared in all the earth.” So then, **He shows mercy to whom He wants**, and **He hardens whom He wants**.

Then you will say to me, **“Why then does He still find fault? For who is resisting His purpose?”** But rather, O man, who are you, answering against God? Shall the thing formed say to the One having formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” Or does the potter not have authority over the clay, to make out of the same lump **one vessel unto honor, but one unto dishonor?**

And what if God, **desiring to show the wrath** and to **make known His power**, bore with much patience the vessels of wrath, **having been fitted for destruction**, that He might also **make known the riches of His glory upon the vessels of mercy**, which He **prepared beforehand** for glory, **even us**, whom **He has called** not only out from the Jews, but also out from the Gentiles?

Romans 9:11-24

We are destined before birth—prepared beforehand like vessels of clay made for various purposes—to either be shown mercy or wrath. Some are fitted for destruction, with no choice to resist God’s will. This is the pattern of the Bible, with Pharaoh being a perfect example, and therefore it is a statement on reality itself. It is called God’s election; meaning He elects only those whom He desires. Paul specifically rules out our willingness as being partially to credit, so we cannot say that it is merely compatibility or synchronicity, or foreknowledge of what free people will do on their own. Those of us who are miraculously plucked out from the rest of mankind are, in some sense, merely being trained and educated by witnessing the examples of history, as well as by struggling with our present day’s evils. This is why doing good and working in the world is necessary, so that we can internalize lessons firsthand about life and suffering, and to build up a burning desire within us for that perfect future God has prepared. The inevitability of God’s will changes nothing for us as servants, but rather gives us the opportunity to earn blessings and obey our rightful Master. In the process we begin to transcend fear and confusion which naturally comes with ignorance about the future. When we see that God works through all things to accomplish His ends, how can we be troubled about the future? Therefore we should have no reason to doubt or complain any more. He is preparing us to become suitable heirs of the Kingdom, and of New Creation, where we may have much greater influence through our contributions. He wants our company for eternity as free souls, so the process of developing us in this life requires firsthand training.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— yet **you do not know what tomorrow will bring**. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time

and then vanishes. Instead **you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”** As it is, **you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.**

James 4:13-16

Here we have a profound reminder of just how little control we have. It is considered arrogant and evil to even presume that we can make plans for tomorrow if God does not permit it. How could we pretend to have control of our ultimate destination?

and, "a stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over." For they stumble at the word, **being disobedient, to which also they were appointed.**

1 Peter 2:8

The disciples consoled each other by pointing out that disobedient people are appointed by God to stumble and fail. Rather than blaming themselves or the people, they lay the responsibility where it belongs: on the One who controls our fates.

“Woe to the world because of the causes of sin. For the **stumbling blocks are necessary to come, but woe to the man by whom the offense comes!**”

Matthew 18:7

Jesus laments the fate of the evil people who create stumbling blocks, while also acknowledging that it is inevitable and necessary. This is perfectly in line with the rest of his prophecies, declaring the inevitability of apostasy and evil, but never holding those who commit the evil blameless.

And we know that **God works together all things** for good to those loving God, to those **being called according to His purpose**, because those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined to be conformed** to the image of His Son, for Him to be firstborn among many brothers. And **those whom He predestined, these also He called**; and whom He called, these also **He justified**; and whom He justified, these also **He glorified**.

Romans 8:28-30

How can God “work together all things” without trampling on the supposedly inalienable agency of humans? It is impossible that He manipulates all things together while still respecting the free will of everyone involved. This is the opposite of a perspective shift or semantic distinction. We must remember what we already learned about the natural man’s supposed free will: we are born slaves to sin, not being free at all, weak in the flesh, incapable of comprehending God’s messages, and

not able to escape death without God's miraculous interference. Here we are simply given the logical extrapolation in the big picture: our agency is not greater than God's plans for us, and in fact He determined what we would become before we were born.

“It is **the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all**. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus **knew from the beginning** who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, “This is why I told you that **no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.**”

John 6:63-65

Jesus says no one can come to him unless God the Father grants it first. Not even one person can decide on their own to hear Christ's message and be saved without the Father having chosen them beforehand. This is why Jesus says that it is the Spirit who gives life (which we know is the Gospel), and that the flesh (natural mind) is no help at all. Jesus knew from the beginning who would receive his message, even though they did not, believing that they were his true disciples.

even as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love **He predestined us for adoption** to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, **according to the purpose of His will**, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. .... In Him we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will**, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians 1:4-6 + 11-12

Let there be no dispute. Before the foundation of the world we were chosen. Not simply known or appreciated, but chosen. The word used for “predestined” means ordained ahead of time according to somebody's plan. To emphasize this, He reminds us that God “works all things according to the counsel of His will”, because this is the language of active manipulation, not simply foreknowledge. Our souls have always been in His hands. Our moment-to-moment decisions may be ours for the most part, but just as we were often overcome by the flesh to commit sin despite ourselves, so God can overcome us by His Holy Spirit. His predestination plan is supreme, while our limited freedom is overridden when necessary. Our own contributions may be freely made eventually, but only as only the result of what He first initialized in our hearts. We become capable of things that we were not able to understand before, and all of the necessary parts were ordained before the foundation of the world.

## WHY WE MUST INSIST ON THE TRUTH

1. It is a convenient fabrication of men in charge of large churches and religious institutions to convince their followers that humans determine God's success. This is a recruitment tool, a motivator for church donations and activity, and a powerful trick to make us devoted not to God's predestination, which is itself faith, but to the human leader's strategy for how to salvage God's endangered will from ruination.
2. Accordingly, churches have distorted the message of the Gospel greatly to exaggerate the stakes involved. Not only do they say that God's plans depend on our own effort and cleverness, but that all who are not saved will burn in Hell eternally, rather than being consumed and annihilated. This makes men either hate God for His injustice, or panic in the overwhelming sense of suffering that has resulted from our own failures as servants, who could have theoretically changed the outcome of every single person who ultimately dies in sin.
3. On the other hand, to quickly and conveniently expand their organization for new members, they simplify the entire Gospel to a single pre-scripted prayer, promising a guarantee of eternal salvation by a quick rehearsal of words.
4. In conjunction, we are simultaneously meant to believe that all people around the world simply need to recite a small prayer to obtain eternal life, or else burn in Hell for eternity with the same punishment reserved for Satan himself. The absurdity of this situation is meant to be in the church's favor, since the requirement is so effortless and beneficial, and the risk is so heinous and unimaginable. (This is ignoring the even more wicked teaching of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, which have perverted the steps to salvation beyond any recognition in the Bible.)
5. By putting aside the exaggerations of misguided and self-serving churches and giving full credit to God working all things together, we become all the more thankful for our own predestination. Our faith is secured not on a flimsy idea of our own importance in the grand scheme, but on God's faithfulness toward us despite our own corrupt flesh. Inevitability trumps agency, and therefore the work we do for the Kingdom need not be a panicked scramble to spam the Gospel message to unwilling listeners, but the natural bearing of the Holy Spirit's fruit within us over time, as we mature and appreciate Christ's teachings as they are revealed in parts.
6. Most importantly, as we have shown above, the Bible insists on predestination with limited free will, and therefore we have no choice but to report what God says.