

Can You and God Both Have Free Wills?

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon explores the relationship between human free will and God's divine guidance, emphasizing trust and active engagement in life.

Scripture: Psalm 139:1, Proverbs 3:5, Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 2:10

Topics: "Free Will", "Gods Sovereignty"

Description

Ernest O'Neill delves into the dichotomy of living solely responsible for ourselves versus living in complete trust in a wise and all-powerful God. He discusses the dangers of passivity and the importance of actively engaging in life while acknowledging God's sovereignty. O'Neill emphasizes the balance between using our wills to act and speak while trusting in God's foresight and guidance in our lives, even amidst free will choices and challenges. He highlights the profound concept of God knowing every detail of our lives and orchestrating circumstances to align with His will and our choices, all while respecting our freedom to choose.

Transcript

To live as if you are totally responsible for yourself -- or to live as part of another person who is absolutely wise and all-powerful -- that is the question! And the answer that most of us give is "we only know the first and have no idea how to experience the second". All we know to do is to live as if no one will act for us except ourselves and as if no one can see what we should do except ourselves.

Those of us who were brought up to become "self-made men and women" are convinced by personal experience and observation that "God helps those who help themselves". We look at the ruins of communism and the dangers of socialism's extremes, and we feel utterly justified in our attitude. You can't just lie back and let things happen -- you do have to strive and compete and apply yourself. If you sit back and expect someone to present life to you as a gift, you deceive yourself and the world will pass you by.

Quietism was a word used to describe certain pious people who took the attitude that "I will not move unless I am moved". The "being moved" here meant being moved by God. The dangerous extreme of this attitude results in passivity -- passivity of mind, emotions, will, and spirit - and can deteriorate into that mesmerized state produced by repeated chanting of mantras or the unconsciousness induced by drugs or alcohol. So, anyone engaged in business or professional life is immediately sceptical of any life that suggests failure to do what you can see needs doing.

Who Does What?

It's exactly here that precision is needed in our thinking. Obviously we are here on earth to act and speak and think. Obviously we have been given wills that can direct our thinking and speaking and thinking. Obviously we are meant to use these wills rather than to sink into passive knee-jerk response to external stimuli like Pavlov's dogs. But is it possible to do all of this from a relaxed attitude of trust that someone has foreseen your whole life, is wise and loving enough to wait for your free acquiescence, and at the same time daily leads you in your actions and words?

Although we are naturally sceptical of this possibility, most of us have known at least once the happiness of doing something because of the wishes of someone who loves us. Even though we have met many who want to force their wills upon us, we usually know at least one person who respects our right to freely choose. But even if we cannot imagine another human being who would refrain from forcing us to do what he knew was best for us, this is exactly what our Maker does! He knows us better than we know ourselves because He has made us part of His own Son - yet he refuses to force us against our wills -- even if this means continual strain and pain for his dear Son in whom we live.

However, the more astonishing fact is that our Maker has foreseen every detail of our lives (which is reasonable if He made every detail of our personalities) -- yet, despite this, He so works circumstances together with his own ideal will and our free choices, that His will and ours are both fully involved in what we do and say. This ability to see time and eternity at once -- to live in the past, present, and future simultaneously - is beyond our finite understandings, but this is part of the meaning behind the words in Psalm 139 -- "Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, you know it altogether". God knows it because in the first milli-second of eternity that He conceived you as part of His Son, at that same moment He lived your whole life for you - and now gives you the opportunity to express it here in time and space.

Whence our Unease?

The only reason we hesitate here is our tendency to question if anyone with this kind of intellectual ability would or could refrain from making us do what he wants. And the answer is - only if he does not want robots as children - and only if he is willing to bear the pain of the bad consequences of our free wills. Everytime war or murder or cancer occurs, the answer is clear to anyone who will think.

Did you speak a moment ago? So did Christ! Did you think critically a second ago? So did Christ! What you chose to do, you forced Him to do. But what did He do in eternity that caused you to speak - and what did He do in eternity because He saw it in you centuries later? We have only to look at Him as he lived in Palestine in the first century to see which is which. The overwhelming truth is that He acknowledges both kinds of deeds as His -- so that He may bring you safely into His Father's home.

What attitude then can we take to our lives in the light of this reality? First, a tranquil confidence that our Creator knows the life he has put us here to live -- and that the spirit of His son is alive in us to lead us in this life. Secondly, a gentle attitude of faith that "listens for the footsteps of God".

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