

Running Head: FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM

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Position Paper – God's Judgment - The consequence of man's free will or determinism?

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Part A – Introduction

Are God's judgments, both earthly and eternal, His response to a person's freedom of choice, or is a person destined to receive His judgment because of choices already determined by a course of previous events?

Freedom, according to Donald Palmer, is a state of the free will of a person and the resulting actions that take place, or as he describes them, free acts and free agents. The performance of these actions of free will, as a result, make the person responsible for them. Freedom creates the environment of morality, as in a person's moral responsibility for his choices and actions. Freedom and free will are the opposite of determinism (Palmer, 457). Determinism states that everything that happens is determined by what happened previously, and there is no freedom or free will involved in the choices made. [1] Richard Taylor, in his book *Metaphysics*, notes that "[for] everything that exists, there are antecedent conditions, known or unknown, given which that thing could not be other than it is." [2]

We will explore whether or not there is an application of freedom or determinism within the parameters of the Scriptures, which originate from God Himself (2 Timothy 3:16), for His Word is the plumb line that measures the morality of His people (Zechariah 1:16) and also determines the proper judgment for those who are disobedient to Him or not following Him (2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 34:11). In summary, freedom assumes moral responsibility, while determinism reflects the absence of morality.

Freedom, or free will, is the standard from which God renders judgment on His people.

Part B – God and Morality

There are numerous examples within the Holy Scriptures of God's judgment of His people. It is important to note that there is an assumption of the presence of God and that, without God's existence, there would be no morality:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist
2. Objective moral values do exist
3. Therefore, God exists [3]

In referring to Scripture, God establishes from the beginning after His six days of creation the presence of morality through the presence of tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17, 3:22).

If there is no morality, then there is also no conceivable reason for judgment. Note that the essence of determinism does not support morality or a moral standard. Its theory is based upon the assertion that all choices are the result of previous acts; therefore, a person could not be held morally responsible for his actions.

Part C – Adam, Eve and the Serpent

I will examine the actions and the resulting consequences of Adam, Eve and Satan, in the role of the serpent, and how each choice culminated in God's judgment of each individual.

Adam was told by God to eat from whatever tree that he desired except for one:

¹⁶ *And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden,* ¹⁷ *but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die.”* (Genesis 2:16-17 HCSB)

With this command, Adam clearly knew what His choices were. He must have known because he provided Eve with the information, for the serpent was conversing with Eve about the matter:

¹ *Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden’?”*

² *The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. 3 But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.’”* (Genesis 3:1-2)

The serpent's response was, ironically, based upon a truth (knowing about good and evil) and her desire to be like God (which led to Satan being cast from heaven himself). His comments deceived Eve and, as a result, Adam followed suit:

⁴ *“No! You will not die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.* (Genesis 3:4-7)

The consequence of Adam's sin of disobedience was the fall of man and the consequence was God's judgment of this sin:

^{17b} The ground is cursed because of you (Adam).

You will eat from it by means of painful labor

all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,

and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow

until you return to the ground,

since you were taken from it.

For you are dust,

and you will return to dust." (Genesis 3:17b-19)

From these verses there are a series of statements and declarations within the decision-making process of all parties involved. Are the decisions the result of definitive choices (freedom, as in free will), or is there a course of events that brought about an inevitable conclusion (determinism)? While it is evident to the believer in Jesus Christ that the provision for a Savior was a necessity after the fall of man (Romans 5:8), we should understand that

Satan's (the serpent's) deception does not absolve Adam and Eve from responsibility for their actions.

Note that Eve had the essential information of God's command not to eat from the "tree in the middle of the garden," which was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, even though she also added that she was *not to touch it*, as well. Even with this information, she was not forced to take the fruit nor did she endure any undue coercion in making her choice to eat the fruit from the tree. Eve violated her own words by touching the fruit in the first place when she said she was not to touch it. She did this after taking the time to look at the beauty of the fruit and that it would provide the wisdom that the serpent said it could do just by eating it.

The serpent deceived Eve, and God acknowledged that in how he addressed the serpent (Genesis 3:14-15), but Adam was not deceived at all (1 Timothy 2:14). He flat out disobeyed God's command and ate the fruit once Eve handed it to him. Adam chose to follow the lead of his wife—a clear decision of disobedience in exercising his free will.

A determinist's view would proclaim that Eve's choices could not be helped because of the serpent's deception (the serpent's action led to Eve's decision to question her own information and eat the fruit); however, Eve did not have to listen to the serpent's speech, and she made conscious, free will decisions from her desire for both the fruit and the impending knowledge that she would receive after eating it.

Satan, the serpent, was the deceiver of Eve, and he received his judgment from God for his role. His actions were also free will choices. In contrast, a determinist view would excuse Satan's role as a deceiver because of his nature, "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44) and because he elevated himself to be equal with God (Isaiah 14:13-14; Ezekiel 28:12-16). From his

actions, they may argue that his being thrown from heaven by God gave him the role of Satan, and he was merely fulfilling his role. Duns Scotus (1270-1308) dismissed the effect of sin as being superficial (Clark, 230), which implies that there is no net effect one way or the other when a transgression is committed. The issue that cannot be overlooked by determinists is Satan's free will decisions, by all Scriptural accounts, declare himself to be an evil adversary of God (Luke 8:4-12; 1 John 3:7-10; Revelation 13:6).

Part D – Conclusion

It does not matter to God if the transgression against His Word is the result of a person being a deceiver or liar, or being deceived, or the result of willful disobedience. God, in His sovereign authority, will judge any transgression by its own offense, but all of these choices are from people using their free will. Since God is a moral God, a person can choose to follow Him or not follow Him, with the resulting reward or consequence of God's judgment. A person can freely choose to be obedient to God, His Word and conform to His will, or he can choose to operate outside of His will and His standards. God's judgment and His acts of judgment are always the end result of a person's freedom of choice. Augustine puts this quite well according to Gordon H. Clark: "God, since he wanted man to live righteously, had to give him a free will. Now, if man uses his freedom wrongly, God is not to blame." (Clark, 193)

Donald Palmer (2014). Does The Center Hold? An Introduction to Western Philosophy, Sixth Edition. Copyright © 2014 The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., New York NY.

Gordon H. Clark (1957). Thales to Dewey, A History of Philosophy, Fourth Edition. Copyright © 1957 Lois A. Zeller and Elizabeth Clark George. Copyright © 2000 John W. Robbins, The Trinity Foundation, Unicoi TN.

1 Handout - Freedom and Determinism (n.d.). Freedom and Determinism. Purdue University, Purdue IN. Retrieved October 17, 2014 from <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~curd/Free.htm>

2 Website - Alexandra Kapelos-Peters (2002). Richard Taylor on Freedom and Determinism. Musings: Academic Texts. Copyright © 2014. Retrieved October 17, 2014 from <http://www.alexandrakp.com/text/2002/10/richard-taylor-on-freedom-and-determinism/>

3 William Lane Craig, God? A Debate Between A Christian And An Atheist (ed. James P. Sterba; Oxford, 2004), p.19. from <http://www.bethinking.org/morality/can-moral-objectivism-do-without-god>

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