

Week of June 24-30

Today's devotional-writer is Kurt Verderber. Kurt serves on our Board of Elders and is a professor at SUNY Cobleskill.

Fate or Freewill?

Scripture Reading: Read Romans chapter 9

Ravi Zacharias often notes that if you want to understand the philosophies of a culture or generation, listen to its music. Music, it seems, is unparalleled among the arts in evoking the pathos of a culture. Consider these words penned by the Canadian rock trio, Rush...

*A planet of play things; We dance on the strings; Of powers we cannot perceive.
'The stars aren't aligned; Or the gods are malign...;' Blame is better to give than receive.
You can choose a ready guide in some celestial voice.
If you choose not to decide, you still haven't made a choice.
You can choose from phantom fears and kindness that can kill.
I will choose a path that's clear; I will choose freewill.*

The argument of fate versus freewill is not new to humanity. If you searched for it, you would find it in ancient Greece and the writings of Buddha around 500 B.C. But if you went back even further, you would find it being played out in the prose of Job, possibly the oldest written book in the Old Testament.

Although very old, the argument has never gone away. It exists today in the Church Universal, dividing pulpits and denominations. Perhaps more aptly termed predestination (or predetermination), the idea that each person's ultimate destination is etched in stone 'before the foundation of the world' is taught by some of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, much of their argumentation is drawn from Romans (chapters 8 and 9).

After an initial read of Romans 9, Paul almost appears to be making the argument for fate in verses 11-12, 15-16, 18-19, and 23. Loosely translated, "God is sovereign and he'll do with His creation what he desires; this to this one, and that to that one."

Well, I certainly believe that God is sovereign; but not capricious. Rom 8:28 tells me that he is "always working all things together...for my good!" Rather than fate, it is most likely the doctrine of election that Paul is teaching in this chapter – "it is God's sovereign choice to save us by His goodness and mercy, and not by our own merit." Also, if we consider verses such as Mt. 19:14, Ez. 33:10-11, and 2 Pet. 3:9, we see a God who desires that all people are saved – quite a stark contradiction to the theory of predestination.

The argument of fate versus freewill will probably not be resolved until Jesus returns (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). So what's the point? I think the key verses to this chapter are very similar to the key verse for the epistle (1:17). Looking at verses 30 – 33, we see clearly that righteousness comes by faith. The Gentiles who didn't have it (righteousness), got it – by faith! Israel who thought they had it, didn't – not by faith! In the end it appears that what is truly important is not the argument of fate versus freewill...but *faith!*

Action Step & Prayer Focus: What do you believe on this topic? 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to be prepared to give answers for what we believe. Take some time, think, study, and write out your beliefs. Pray for wisdom in this area – that God would reveal His Word to you through the Holy Spirit.

Take-a-way: It's not about fate or freewill...but *faith!*

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