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### Free Will or Willed Folly?

*Abstract: This essay explores the question of free will in regards to Adam and Eve's fall. Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that God did not simply create man with the ability to fall based on free will; instead, He deliberately acted to ensure their downfall and guarantee the glorification of his one and only Son Jesus.*

John 14:15 states, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Simply put, having freedom of choice means one chooses either to obey God out of love or succumb to evil, with equal ability to do either. A free choice constitutes examining a set of options, having the knowledge of what is good and evil as specified by God, and making a decision in full awareness of its ramifications. This choice is uninfluenced by any predestination or outside force other than one's own knowledge and conscience, so that every man is responsible for his actions. In John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve make substantial choices, but not under the specific conditions that define free will. God's deliberate actions and suspicious allowances throughout the story set up the perfect storm of circumstances that constrain Adam and Eve to inevitably fall in order to carry out His plan to ultimately glorify His Son exceedingly more than any perfect Heaven and Earth could achieve.

Every human after Adam and Eve enjoys the afore-mentioned 'free will,' making choices unhindered by external supernatural influences. Every day one faces choices influenced by various outside sources, such as the people around them. These inevitably present forces have an

inherent effect on one's decisions whether intentionally or not; however, once the influence reaches beyond the realm of the natural world and into the supernatural one, free will is negated. God gives commands and then leaves it up to the individual to decide whether or not to obey and does not directly intervene to influence one's choices, as that would form a restraint on one's free will. There may be some instances in which one may question the reasoning behind a command, but God uses those situations to test one's love for Him, since obedience without question is a key part of one's faith. In the case of Adam and Eve, however, God does not simply sit back and let them make unimpeded choices. He gave them a command to not eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and gave no reason for it, which would not have been problematic if not for His actions before and after issuing that command. Adam and Eve did indeed love God very much and were therefore willing to obey Him in adherence to John 14:15. However, God created them and then proceeded to take advantage of their human nature as we will examine later; but first, we will explore how God set them up for failure from the beginning as soon as Satan became a fallen angel.

In Book II of *Paradise Lost*, we learn how Sin became the offspring of Satan himself and how she and her incestuously-conceived son, Death, became guardians of hell's gates. Sin recounts, "...this powerful Key / Into my hand was giv'n, with charge to keep / These Gates for ever shut, which none can pass / Without my op'ning" (*Paradise Lost* 2: 774-777). Immediately following Sin's explanation, the obvious question arises: Who in their right mind would give Sin the keys to hell, knowing that she is directly akin to Satan? There are only two opposing powers in Milton's epic, those of good and evil: God and Satan. We are therefore left to assume that God himself gave Sin the keys, consequently giving her the power to later allow Satan to pass through the gates into the newly created Earth. This event alerts us to one of the first red flag

warnings of God's suspicious actions leading to the fall of Adam and Eve, as we are about to examine.

If God had wanted to truly protect his creation from Satan's temptations, He had all the power in the universe to place a more resolute guard at hell's gates, but chose not to. Sure enough, Sin allows Satan's escape from hell, proving that God purposely acted to grant Sin the power to allow Satan's exit. One may argue that God intended for the gates to be shut forevermore; however, such an omniscient being such as God himself would know perfectly well the possible result of His actions, even though it may falsely appear that he never expected Satan to escape. Although God did not directly tell Sin to free Satan, His initial action in giving her the keys were enough to make Him guilty of allowing Satan's escape and consequential tempting of Adam and Eve. It may seem that Sin is culpable for these events, but the blame really falls on God for allowing them. In this case, there is virtually no distinction between God directly acting to free Satan and allowing Sin the power to free him – either way, God's hands are dirtied. In allowing Satan to infiltrate Earth, God has already taken action to ensure Adam and Eve will be tempted and thus has taken away their free will, since a supernatural force (that of God Himself) has acted to influence their future decisions. At this early stage in the game God has already guaranteed that his creation will inevitably be tempted by allowing Satan's escape and in doing so immediately creates the opportunity for a future 'choice' between good and evil. However, the choice that Adam and Eve will have to make in the future is not a free one, as we will soon discover. This preliminary event will prove to be one of many orchestrated by God in order to bring about the fall of Adam and Eve and consequently the need for redemption through His Son.

Stepping away from God's direct actions within the story for a moment, we must consider one innate quality that God instilled in man upon first creation critical in proving that Adam and Eve did not act with free will. In "Humanity as Art," Bill Caudell discusses humans' inherent curiosity due to the way God created them: "Though Eve's curiosity got the best of her in Eden, the human desire to expand understanding is not a flaw" (Caudell 2). This fact may be true, but Caudell also states, "As proven by Adam and Eve, and the rest of humanity, a conscience does not prevent people from doing the wrong thing; it just prohibits them from enjoying it. Man had the choice to obey the word of God or face the consequences" (Caudell 2). However, I will argue against this assertion that Adam and Eve had a conscience; if they did, they would already have knowledge of good and evil and therefore act in full awareness of the consequences. However, as Caudell himself stated, they did not in fact know the potential consequences of their actions and therefore could not possibly make an informed decision based on a conscience, but rather only acted in order to satiate their curiosity. Of course, that conscience would be delivered to them soon after their fall and to every human in existence after them. Although God created Adam and Eve with this native curiosity, that does not seem to fully deny their freedom of choice; however, God's next exploit certainly will.

The age-old question as to God's reasoning behind the placement of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil within the garden may never be answered completely. But if we scrutinize this action in conjunction with Adam and Eve's curious nature along with God's other suspicious allowances (such as Satan's escape from hell), we find a very austere purpose for the tree's existence. The moment God placed the tree in the garden, He created an opportunity for Adam and Eve to succumb to temptation, which He had already allowed to occur in the first place. The command was simple: Don't eat the fruit. As we have already found, Adam and Eve

had no knowledge of the consequences or why that command existed. It is true, God's previous actions merely allowed Adam and Eve to be tempted, but now He has generated a solid means by which they have the potential to sin. The tree is the only thing in the garden that could cause Adam and Eve to fall, and God provided it from the start – right after he allowed Satan to escape from hell. Here we have yet another example of God setting them up to sin; He knew that Eve would be curious about the tree since he made her that way and proceeded to place the tree there as a means of satiating that curiosity when the devil came along. If Eve had known the consequences of eating the fruit, she may have prevailed against temptation since she would be acting with a conscience, but without that knowledge, Satan just had to appeal to her sense of curiosity conveniently instilled in her to cause her to do what was strictly forbidden. Eve's lack of knowledge and helpless curiosity combined with a means by which to sin and the devil's trickery create a scenario that plays out exactly as God had planned. All of these things were intentional on God's part and conveniently, all of humanity's salvation rode on two curious people who had no knowledge of good and evil or of the consequences of their actions. There was never a question of "if" God would eventually need His Son to save humankind; the Son's glorious sacrifice was planned from the start as we continue to discover. So far God has been responsible for creating Eve's curiosity, for planting the tree as an opportunity to sin and for allowing Satan to tempt her, but He isn't finished yet.

In Book V we join Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and find the archangel Raphael attempting to warn them against Satan's trickery. On the surface, it appears that God sent Raphael as a last-ditch effort to save His beloved creation from the devil's snares; however, Raphael's warning proves not only to be ineffective, but downright counterproductive, leaving us to question God's motives for sending Raphael in the first place. Prior to Raphael's visit, it

seems that Adam and Eve are perfectly content going about their business in the Garden of Eden and enjoy serving and obeying God out of love. However, in a conversation with Raphael, Adam states, “Yet that we never shall forget to love / Our maker, and obey him whose command / Single, is yet so just, my constant thoughts / Assur’d me and still assure: though what thou tell’st / Hath past in Heav’n, some doubt within me move” (*Paradise Lost* 5: 550-554). With this line in particular, Adam expresses concern for what Raphael has told him about their free will to disobey God. Why would God send Raphael down to warn Adam about defying God’s one command when it hadn’t even crossed Adam’s mind as a possibility in the first place? Raphael’s attempted warning eventually turns into a sneaky planting of the seed of doubt into Adam’s otherwise peacefully subservient mind.

Looking deeper, we must consider how Raphael’s ineffective warning proves that Adam and Eve were constrained to fall. Raphael had the opportunity to deliver much more information and caution than he did, which calls into question why he beat around the bush when referring to Satan’s means of temptation. Regardless of the reason, he certainly managed to awaken curiosity within Adam and Eve. Perhaps later on their curiosity would have been sparked by another supernaturally influenced happening, but here God sends Raphael to deliver a furtive message that accomplished nothing but the opposite of its apparent intentions. Raphael was sent by God to deliver a message, and once again we trace the series of unfortunate events back to God Himself. In this instance, God spurs on Adam and Eve by exploiting their curious nature and giving them doubt in their own ability to withstand temptation, thus providing the supernatural influence that negates the definition of free will. God masterminds this so-called ‘warning’ and wastes no time letting Adam and Eve remain virtuous. Although in this part of the plan God acts indirectly through a messenger, it still stands as another example of God’s

roundabout methods to ensure Adam and Eve's fall and to bring them closer to the moment when He would proclaim His Son as the future savior of all mankind.

When we look further into the events that God orchestrated throughout *Paradise Lost*, it becomes clear that God's ultimate plan was to glorify His Son above all else. Of course, God had to come up with a great cover story so as not to appear scheming and selfish. He meticulously planned it out so that Adam and Eve had the illusion of free will, when in reality they were just two large pieces of the puzzle that had to be put in place in order for God's plan to be carried out. God never intended for Adam and Eve to live forever in obedience inside the garden's walls; instead, from the moment that Satan fell, God put into motion a series of events that would culminate in the fall of man – and therefore, Jesus' sacrifice in order to become the most exalted savior of all time.

By the time that Adam and Eve get around to eating the fruit, Milton has established numerous prior events that prove vital to the carrying out of the sin itself. From God's questionable appointment of Sin as guardian of hell's gates; His creation of Adam and Eve with an undeniable curiosity; His planting of the tree in the garden as an opportunity for sin; and His sending of Raphael to plant doubt and heighten curiosity, God takes great care to implement His plan ensuring the fall of Adam and Eve, all the while going to great lengths to appear innocent. Part of that artificial appearance involves deluding both Adam and Eve and the reader into thinking that the pair has equal ability to choose between God's commands and Satan's temptations. But due to God's deliberate and devious actions, both direct and indirect, God seals the fate of his creation by preventing any chance Adam and Eve may have had at free will. From start to finish, God's perfect plan goes off without a hitch, and Adam and Eve damn all of future humanity with one sin that they couldn't prevent since they were up against their one and only

omnipotent God. Their singular failure constituted the demand for God to send His one and only Son to save the world from all of man's terrible acts, for which Satan seems to be responsible for. Ultimately, Jesus is hailed as a hero for saving the world from their sin and God is glorified for His loving sacrifice; in the end, God's will was done, and Adam and Eve were powerless against it.