

*Love Shackled

He who declares it so, that the will is of no concern
Let him not be called a seeker, as in ignorance his seeds are sown
For if we know not where we stand or what we're able to do
How will we know what's done towards us for true freedom to break through?¹

Most would think it obvious that the will of man is free
What's done by him will one day stand before the Judgment Seat
But as their hay and stubble burn, their own ills to reminisce
Aren't the crowns of glory received given to the source of their righteousness?²

But if the will be not free, what then of love and guilt?
Would they both not fall on God who commands both by his will?
Love would be lost apart from free will, as robots we'd become
And guilt could not to man be ascribed, as all that is by God, by God's will is done³

But when I think about this will it is perceived freedom that brings on chains
For if not guided by God's purposed hand, we're left with randomness that constrains
What do I do? Why do it so? Experiences I've had and nature ingrown
What is so great about this will that is free? Impersonally determined and not of my own⁴

“But love, man, love – that's what true free choice brings”
Why don't you tell that to all of the angels, who forever in heaven will sing
They sing of a God who is holy and just, they sing of a God who is love and is good
They sing of a God immutable through time, and incapable to deviate if ever he would

¹ This is a summary of Martin Luther from his book “Bondage of the Will.” Luther Said, “*If we know nothing of these things, we shall know nothing whatever of Christian matters, and shall be far behind all People upon the earth.* He that does not feel this, let him confess that he is no Christian. And he that despises and laughs at it, let him know that he is the Christian's greatest enemy. For, if I know not how much I can do myself, how far my ability extends, and what I can do God-wards; I shall be equally uncertain and ignorant how much God is to do, how far His ability is to extend, and what He is to do toward me.”

² All will be held accountable for their works at the end of time. However, while man pays for the evils that he has done, the good works that have been done are not taken credit for, but are ascribed to Christ. From judgment day depictions in the Bible, we see that all evil is man's, but all good is Christ's.

³ If man is not in control of all his choices, two problems arise. First, how can man choose to love in a relationship? Love, it is said, requires the option to choose otherwise. Second, if we are not responsible for all our choices, how can we be held accountable for the evil that we do? If only God can cause us to do good, how can any evil we do not be his failure to exert his omnipotence?

⁴ While it may be distressing to some thinking about God ordaining all things, is it really any better to be left on our own? Where do choices come from? Choices are based on our nature, our experiences, where we grow up, etc. Is it really better to rely on arbitrary circumstances and characteristics to determine choice, or is that just a heavier shackle than the wisdom of God? Whether you believe that God determines or not, free will is not arbitrary choice, but rather choice based upon something else.

If love hinges on a characterless soul, always with freedom to choose otherwise
This God that I love does not love in return, he just acts on robotic desires⁵
But alas, my love is shallow as well, as God will change me to be like himself
For eternity on, after I pass, my new nature puts free love to shelf⁶

But even before I pass onto new life, I question how deep's my love in this temporal sphere
As deep as an ocean's deepest crevasse, and as devoid of all substance that's there
For if I've no nature, and preference no weight, no such thing as reasons exist
The reason I give for continuing in love, the same reason another desists⁷

Purported freedom debases all reasons for love, and makes man to be greater than God
It takes away purpose and design in all things, crowning randomness as omnipotent One
But still exists justice, requiring vengeance for guilt, so what's to become of this?
As it's one thing to love and reward some for naught, and another to award punishment⁸

Guilt, as with love, is not based upon hypothetical conjecture and stance
It's based upon what God actually decrees, and not on what's left to chance
The laws God's declared have been broken by all man, through nature and will and heart
Broken by all based on will, nature, and law, rather than on what circumstance and chance impart⁹

All man thus reaps exactly what's sown, with no aristocracy for luck and works to assign
It's only by grace freely and fully giv'n, that can change heart, will, and mind
But if you decry this monergistic reply, calling unfair nature causing demise
Then how in same breath can you praise God for good, that which he could not choose otherwise¹⁰

It is not inherent goodness or luck which is cause of true freedom imparted to man
And who could choose faith strong enough to cause God to extend his merciful hand?¹¹
No, it is not any free, changeable thing, upon which our salvation is based
But rather on the immutable, eternal God, who fully pours out his grace¹²

⁵ Let's assume that free choice (the ability to actually choose otherwise) is required for credit (love, punishment, reward/glory, etc). God's nature describes him as incapable of some things (evil, lying, etc), and capable always of others (good, love, etc). If we require that man have the ability to choose otherwise in order to be culpable or capable of love, how much more would an infinitely good and infinitely loving God need the freedom to choose? Or maybe the complete ability to choose apart from our nature is not a requirement of free will.

⁶ If free will requires the ability to choose otherwise, if we become unable to choose something/one other than God when we're in heaven, as many think will be the case, the ability to love when we're in heaven will be taken away from us. According to this definition of the will, we will become robots.

⁷ If nature and preference do not control our choices, what grounds then does reason have? In a world where nature and preference do not determine choice, choice is arbitrary. Why do I love someone? It isn't because of the amount of beauty, grace, love, etc. Those things would only cause me to love in a world where preferences and nature existed. In a world without nature and preferences, any reason I give for why I perform an action could be the exact same reason another would give for why they abstained from the action.

⁸ Assuming love is up to God, fine. Receiving grace for nothing we choose can be acceptable. Humans are ok with getting good things they don't deserve. However, it still doesn't seem fair that some would suffer without a choice.

⁹ Regardless of God's decree, we all know that we have willfully broken his commandments. It isn't by arbitrary luck or fate that we've broken them, but by our own choice and will.

¹⁰ Again, if experiences and genes determine who has more opportunity to trust God and turn from sin, that is arbitrary and random. But if it is solely by the grace of God that a heart is changed, and fully turned to him, then that is purposeful and wise and just. I again also hit on the point of God not being able to be praised for good if his nature determines that he can do nothing but good.

¹¹ Finally, it makes little sense that man could muster up enough faith to cause God to impart his grace to him. If it is not God who extends his grace, but rather man who earns his salvation through faith, how much faith would earn God's favor? It is God's purpose and full grace that reaches out to us.

¹² If our salvation were based upon something arbitrary and/or changeable, then what a fearful thing it would be. Just as easily and arbitrarily the choice could be made, so it could be rescinded. Salvation and all other choices would be

based on our fleeting and shallow moods and winds, as opposed to God's firm decrees and immutable nature. This stanza is essentially a response to the first stanza. The will is important. If we don't understand it, we won't understand what God's done towards us. God has done it all for us so that we may have complete and secure salvation.