

Why I AM Likes You: Free Will

Romans 10:1-11:1

Romans (no. 28 in the series)

July 31, 2022

Peter Hiatt

Video and audio versions available online:

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/why-i-am-likes-you-free-will/>

Transcript document prepared by: Brett Eades (brett@thesanctuarydowntown.org)

This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

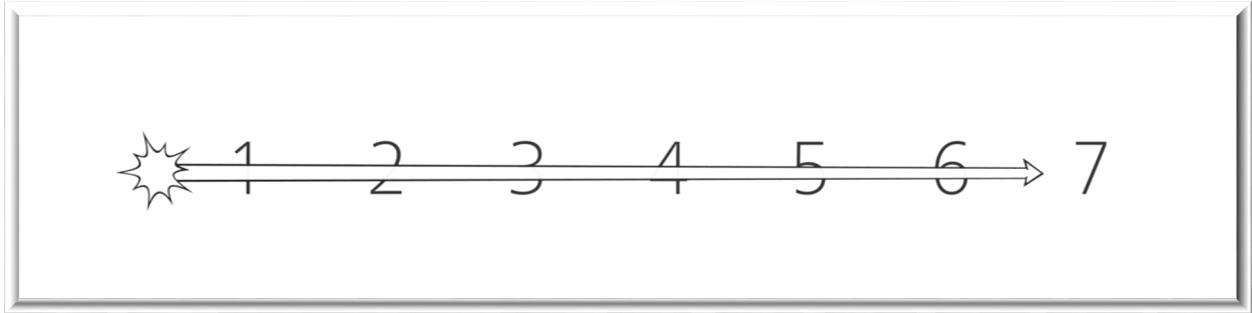
And so, Father, we know that you change our heart with your word, not a dead word but a living word. So, Father we ask now that you would speak your word, as you have been speaking your word this entire time—well, all of reality is sustained by your word—but speak your word to our hearts now, Lord, as we preach. And Father, since this is our thirty-something-ish message from Romans, I pray for those who are just now tuning-in or listening for the first time, that you would particularly help them connect the dots because, Jesus, Paul is connecting the dots in such a beautiful way. They all connect and reveal you so I pray that we would see you Jesus. It's in your name that we pray, amen.

Message

What I have to say today, as usual, is something profoundly simple. And yet, as usual, I suspect that we'll all think it's utterly confusing and complex. And I suspect that's not because it is utterly confusing and complex, so much as the lies about the thing I'm saying are utterly confusing and complex. They all go back to one lie spoken in a garden by the liar. And, at least in America, they all have to do with this thing we call "free-will."

I think we believe that we are our "free-will" and maybe we are. Maybe we are the sum total of all our choices, or at least, the good choices. I think we believe that we are saved by "free-will" and maybe we are. We say, "Some make poor choices and some good choices... because God gave us free-will." We say, "Some are going to heaven, and some are going to hell because, you know, free-will." I think we believe that we are judged by "free-will" and maybe we are.

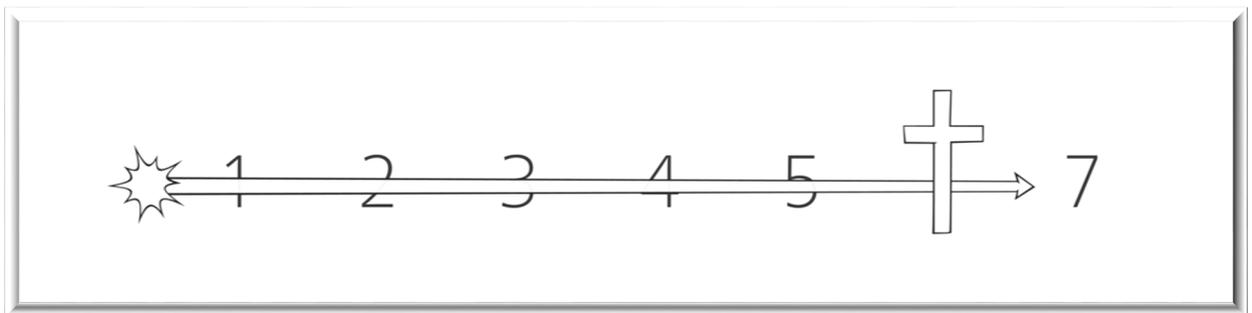
But what is "free-will?" We talked about that last time (3 weeks ago now). "Free-will" isn't a term that the Bible uses but we use it all the time. And so, last time we suggested that a free will, must be: A Will that's free from constraint by other wills (No one makes it will, and what it wills happens). A free will is a will that's free to, not only will what it wants, but also want what it wills. In other words, a truly free will, wills what it knows to be The Good. If that's Free Will, then I would remind you that the Bible is The Story of Free Will.



In the beginning, God wills everything into existence with his Word. His will is totally unrestrained for it is all that is. He wills all things into existence over the span of six days and calls it good. At the end of the sixth day, he sees that everything is Good. In other words, he wills what he wants and then wants what he wills. At the end of the sixth day and beginning of the seventh, he declares that everything is good (everything is right) and “It is finished,” perfected, completed, ended, *tetelesthai* from telos.

God is Free Will and has Free Will. But on the sixth day, something utterly bizarre happens: A being which God has willed into existence with his Word, begins to will what God does not will. We begin to read about that in Genesis Chapter 2. So, Genesis 1 is the history of all time. And Genesis 2 begins to tell the story of what happens on day 6, the day that Adam, humanity, is made in the image and likeness of God.

In Genesis Chapter 1:26 on the sixth day, God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...” That’s his will, God’s will. And on the seventh day (at the end of chapter 1), it’s finished, even time is finished. But in Genesis 3:6 on the sixth day, Man (Adam: male and female) tries to make himself in the image of God—that’s man’s will. Man does his will and everything begins to die. Adam, man, wills what he wants, and then doesn’t want what he wills; it’s evil and it’s not the image of God—and now he, that is “we,” are beginning to know.



The rest of the Bible is then wrestling with this question, although not stated in this fashion: “Who has free will? Who gets his will?” “Will God make man in his own image, or will man make himself in the image of God?” And now, once again, just as we did three weeks ago, we need to pause for a message from our commercial sponsor:

Video clip: *Volkswagen Mini Darth Vader Superbowl Commercial*
Fox Sports. (2011)

A kid, dressed as Darth Vader goes around the house attempting to use the force to make things happen. Frustrated that nothing has happened, he focuses on the Volkswagen parked in the driveway. His father starts the vehicle using his key fob from inside the house and Mini Darth Vader backs away, amazed.

I love that commercial. Have you ever experienced a bonified miracle? Where you will something and you miraculously get that something—like the little boy in the Darth Vader outfit? It's what the Bible refers to as "a sign." You think to yourself, "I can't believe that just happened," and then you wonder "Why doesn't it happen all the time?" Well, what would happen, if every time that little boy wanted to levitate the dog, control his mom, or start the car, his dad pressed a button and it just automatically happened? What would happen to that boy if he always got whatever he wanted, if he had what some would call "free will"? Well, you know what would happen. If he had very much free will, he could never grow a good will; instead, he'd be trapped in a bad will. He'd be spoiled.

Spoiled children get whatever they want. And then, they don't want what they get, for they don't know what they truly want. They don't know the Good, which is usually the person from whom their trying to get what they want.

I bet that little boy thought his dad was a bit like Darth Vader—his Dad could pick up the Dog, exercise some kind of control over his mom, and start the car whenever he wanted. That little boy wanted to be like his dad. But did you notice how he pushed his dad away, trying to impress his dad, or be his dad? Well, if that little boy had too much free will, if his dad actually gave him whatever he wanted, he wouldn't just pretend to be Darth Vader, he'd become Darth Vader. In which case he'd need to be saved from himself, which is an incredibly painful procedure—it's killing the false Anakin Skywalker to liberate the true Anakin Skywalker; it's taking off Vader's Mask; it's the circumcision of Darth Vader, like we talked about last time.

And so, why did the father start the car at all and then chuckle when he did? Well, perhaps because he genuinely likes his son, delights in his son, enjoys his son, such that when his son is happy, he is happy. Maybe it's a sign, of what's to come: free will, a good free will, a son raised in the image and likeness of his dad.

That Father likes his son, but that father isn't Darth Vader and doesn't want his son to be Darth Vader because he's not so fond of Darth Vader. So, I bet that father wouldn't start the car every time his little boy would will that the car start, so that he wouldn't become Darth Vader, so that he wouldn't have a free will without a good will, which is to be trapped in a bad will—not freedom, but bondage. A Good Father isn't only Power, he is always Love. And he wills that his son be made in his own image and likeness; he wills his son's will to be FREE, but only after his son knows what it is to be GOOD—in biblical lingo, "to be righteous." Well, that's a review of last time and context for this time, and maybe all time.

For a long time that little VW add was the most watched Super Bowl Ad of all time, and second most shared of all time. And I suspect that's because each one of us is a child of God, trying to

be God, but not fully aware of who God, our Father, is. Each one of us is a little child of God pretending to be Darth Vader. But our Father is not the Dark Father (Darth Vader); he is the Father of Lights, revealed on a tree in a Garden—Jesus is the Righteousness of God.ⁱ

Romans 10:1-4:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them [Israel, my church] is that they may be saved.ⁱⁱ ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge [epignosis: proper knowledge, recognition (they don't recognize him)]. ³ For, being ignorant [agnoeo: agnostic] of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end [telos: perfection, completion, fulfillment] of the law for righteousness to [in, for] everyone who believes ["all the trusting, all the 'faithing'"].

And now I need to remind you that Paul has been talking about righteousness for all of Romans.

In Romans 1iii, we read that “in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith [or “faithfulness to faith” since faith is also translated faithfulness], as it is written ‘The righteous shall live by faith’ or ‘from my faithfulness’”.^{iv}

In Romans 2v we read that it's not “the hearers of the law who are righteous but the doers of the law.” So, righteousness isn't simply a designation in a book somewhere, but a life that manifests in you.

In Romans 3vi we read that none are righteous. Then we read that “the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law... through the faith of Jesus... whom God put forward as a propitiation through [the faith in his blood].”^{vii} The faith is in his blood, like breath—that is spirit—is in your blood.

In Romans 4 We read that “faith is reckoned as righteousness”^{viii} That's not because God cooks the books, but because faith is righteousness. “Faith is reckoned as righteousness,” and it came to Abraham as A Promised Seed and grew in Abraham, and became a Kingdom, and not just in Abraham.

In Romans 5 We read that “as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to [justification of life] for all men.”^{ix}

In Romans 6 we read that we can be “slaves of sin” or “slaves of righteousness.”^x And yet we noted that the righteousness of God has made himself slave of all and servant to all.

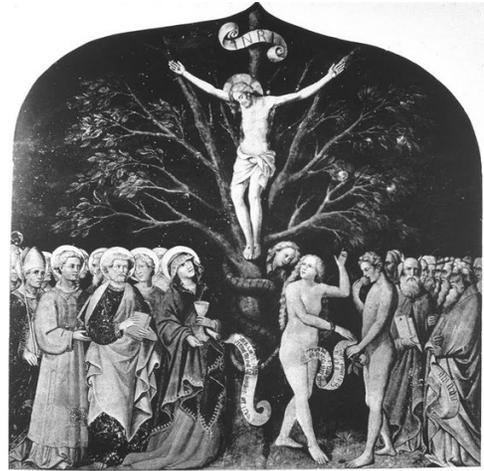
In Romans 7 we read that Paul is divided for he wants to do righteousness in his inner man, but he's enslaved to the law of sin, to unrighteousness, in his outer man—a body of sin and death.^{xi} So, in his words “The Truth is imprisoned in the chains of [his] unrighteousness,”^{xii} a bit like a little boy stuck in a Darth Vader outfit.

In Romans 8 we read that “if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit [the Breath] is life because of righteousness.”^{xiii}

In Romans 9 we learned that we’ve all been vessels of wrath, but we’re predestined to be vessels of Mercy.^{xiv} “So, it’s not dependent on human will or exertion, but God who has Mercy.”^{xv} Mercy is the free will of God which, justifies us. “To justify” is literally to make right and declare right, that is “righteousness.”^{xvi} So, we’ve been building this slide as we’ve worked our way through Romans:

We are justified (made right) by:

- 1) 3:24 *“Grace as a gift.”*
- 2) 3:26 *“The Faith of Jesus.”*
- 3) 4:25 **The Resurrection of Jesus:** *“...raised for our justification”*
- 4) 5:9 **The Blood of Jesus:** *“We have now been justified by his blood.”*
- 5) 5:18 **The Life that is Jesus:** *“...justification of life”*
- 6) 6:7 **The death of self:** *“One who has died has been justified from sin.”*
- 7) 8:33 **God:** *“It is God who justifies.”*



“The Fall and Redemption of Man” by Giovanni da Modena

You, see? Jesus is the Righteousness of God and how God makes us righteous. We all want righteousness, and we all need righteousness. Righteousness means “rightness.” Every sinner is seeking righteousness in the wrong way^{xvii} because every sinner is not aware of what, or who, righteousness truly is. And the worst of sinners are religious sinners. They are the very best at seeking righteousness in the wrong way.



Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.

And so, seeking to establish their own righteousness, they do not submit to God’s Righteousness. In other words, they crucify Jesus trying to be Jesus, rather than submit to Jesus and thus bear the

fruit of Jesus: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Good, Faith. Faith is Righteousness and we don't create it with our own "free will." Righteousness is the Free Will of God, the faithfulness of God, that creates us.

So, God has Free Will and is Free Will, and what does that say about God? Well, it means that God wills what he wants and wants what he wills. It means that God in Christ Jesus died on the cross for you, not because he had to, but because he wanted to, and he always wants to.^{xviii}

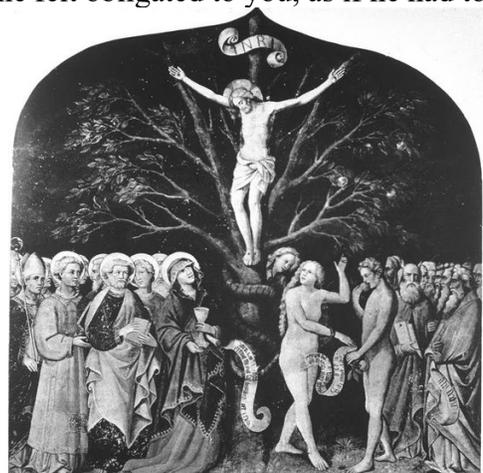
In Modern American Evangelicalism, preachers often say, "God is Love, but God is also just, and so to satisfy Justice, God has to—you force him to do this—he has to punish someone, and so he punished Jesus instead of punishing you." But God does not have to do anything. And God's Justice is quite literally, God's Righteousness. Which means that God's Justice is God doing what he wants to do and always wanting what he does. In other words, he suffered for you only because he wanted to suffer for you.

Jesus said to his disciples "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord"^{xix} Jesus is the Free Will of God. And Jesus is the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the World. And so, God decided to die for you, long before you sinned against him. And he didn't die because he had to, but only because he wanted to.^{xx} I'm saying that, dying for you was not an obligation for him.

I just spent four days of biking, 4-wheeling, hiking, and rafting with my son Coleman, who's married now and working on his PHD in Logan Utah. Before he arrived, I had called him and left a message, "Coleman, I know life is crazy for you right now, and so if you can't come to Denver, I don't want you to think you have to come; I don't want you to feel obligated." Well, at lunch, having nachos, in downtown Denver, where we had bicycled to, just like we used to when he was only five, he stopped me, looked me in the eye, and he gave me the greatest of gifts: He said, "Hey Dad, I don't want you to ever think that I'm here with you because I feel like I have to be with you; I always want to be with you."

God in Christ Jesus suffered and died for you, not because he felt obligated to you, as if he had to love you, needed to love you, or should love you. God is not obligated to Love you, and he doesn't want you to feel obligated to Love him, but you do. For you, and for me, Love is a law. But Love is actually a Life—Actually the Free Will of God, in human flesh, hanging on a tree in a garden.

Do you see him? That's the Righteousness—the Good—that is God, hanging on that tree. And that's the Life that is God, hanging on that same tree. That's the free will of God that is God. So, do you have free will? We'd like to think we do and yet, we can't choose—we can't will whatever we want and get it—I mean we all die.



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

So much of what we call “Christianity” is simply magic and the idolatry of signs; its boys and girls pretending to be Darth Vader. So, we say, “If you only had this knowledge or that knowledge, or tried a little harder, you could pray what you want, will what you want, and it would happen.” And you see, sometimes it does happen—marriages get saved, the money comes in, cancer is healed, legs even grow (It happened to me! Freaked me out) and yet, we all die.”

We can’t, simply, will what we want, and we often don’t want what we will. Whenever you feel obligated, you obviously don’t want what you will—not only what you may have willed in the past and now discover is bad, but whatever it is that you’re “trying” to will in the present. It’s deeply ironic, but some would argue that, because God gives us the law, that fact reveals that our will is free. They say, “God says, ‘Do this and you will live, but do that and you will die,’ and that reveals that life is our choice—our free will.”

But the law doesn’t reveal that our will is free; the law reveals that, in fact, our will is not free and that we are dead and dying. Law tells us the things that we have to do. But if you think that you have to do something, it just reveals that you don’t want to do that something, and so you must force yourself to will that something, precisely because you don’t actually want that something.^{xxi} In fact, you will that something because you actually hate that something and only will that something, because you actually want something else. In other words, you’re using that something, or someone.

And this is the entire law: You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. The Law reveals that we don’t love God, but use God, because we want what isn’t God... Perhaps, even, that we would be God. That is, a God who isn’t actually God, but something more like Darth Vader.

Well, we’ve all been tempted to turn Love into a law—that’s original sin. But,

- Law can’t make us love; it can only reveal that we don’t love.
- Law can’t make us free; it can only reveal that we’re not free.
- Law can’t make us right; it can only reveal that something is wrong with us, with Adam.

We’ve all turned Love into a Law, but when that Law becomes a Life, we get pregnant with Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, the Good, Faith—that is, the Righteousness, which is the Free Will of God... we begin to like God.

As I said last time, the term “free will” really isn’t in the Bible, but the reality it refers to is all over the Bible: Free Will is Love. And there’s another term that is conspicuously absent from the Bible, and yet the reality it refers to is all over the Bible—that’s the word “like.” And the reality it refers to is also Love. But you see we don’t consider “liking” to be “loving,” particularly in church, for we’ve crucified Love, so he’s no longer a life, but only law, that is human religion, which is bondage, not to our Father of lights, but to the Dark Father, the Father of Lies.

Now whether you followed all of that or not, this is the very simple thing that I’m trying to say, which you at best are only barely beginning to believe: Ready? God likes you.

You say, “Oh yeah, he has to.” NO! God doesn’t “have to” do anything. You say, “Ok but his opinion will soon change.” NO! God is eternal. He is the “Ground of all being.”^{xxii} He always just likes you. In the Words of Karl Barth, “God is the one who loves in freedom.” Freedom. That means he loves you, not because he has to, but because he wants to.

Actually, God likes everything that’s anything. He wills all of creation into existence and calls it Good, and that which isn’t good is that which he did not will and did not create.

So, this is the Good News; this is the simple thing that I always want to say:

- God likes you and will always like you, for God is eternal. That means,
- God likes you and there’s nothing you could do to make him like you any less than he already does, for that is who I am that I am is.
- God likes you regardless of whether or not you like him.
- God likes you thoroughly, relentlessly, unequivocally, and furiously.
- He likes you so much, that if you were to see it now, I think you’d just burst into flames until nothing was left but Faith in Him.
- God likes you—his creation, his son, his daughter.

But he isn’t so fond of Darth Vader because Darth Vader is a lie about you, and a lie about him. God likes you, and he wills that you would like him too, and that’s the righteousness of God, Judgment of God, and free will of God. God likes you, and he wills that you would like him too—a communion of liking each other, if you will.

One day when my daughter Elizabeth was in Kindergarten, I took her for her annual physical and we were having a wonderful day that day. The doctor had her sit on the examination table. Elizabeth was smiling at me, and I was smiling at her, as she swung her legs back and forth under the edge of the examination table. The doctor, began with a question: “So Elizabeth, what do you like about yourself?” Without skipping a beat and looking at me, Elizabeth smiled, and said, “I like being with my Daddy.” And then, this young lady doctor, reacted with a speed and intensity that betrayed a wound buried somewhere deep in her soul. “I like being with my Daddy!” said Elizabeth. And the doctor said “NO!” Then she caught herself and said, “I mean, what do you like about yourself?” Elizabeth looked at her as if to say, “Well I just told you.” The doctor clarified, “I mean, what do you like about yourself... just you... like, for instance, that you know, that maybe you run fast.” And Elizabeth said, “Well I like that I can run fast.”

I remember wanting to scream, Get behind me satan. How dare you tell my daughter that she is her own will and exertion. How dare you suggest that she like herself, because she can beat her neighbor in a foot race. How dare you tell my daughter that she is her flesh. One day her legs will fail; her flesh will fail, turn to dust, and blow away. But love is eternal, and she will always be my beloved in whom I delight. I remember feeling so angry at that doctor. And then I remembered that she had been a little girl—a little girl that may have been abused by a father, a little girl that didn’t, and perhaps doesn’t, know that God is her Daddy, and she is always the Apple of His Eye.

It was that year that we sent Elizabeth off to kindergarten, where she was taught to take knowledge, then judge and be judged relative to her neighbors: the other little girls and boys in her class—who run the fastest, spell the best or the worst. It was that year that Elizabeth had the terrible, no good, very bad day that I told you about last December. It was the day she morphed into a little Darth Vader and nothing I did would bring her back... Until I told everyone to get into the Van, cause' we were going out to dinner, but then I made Elizabeth stay in the van, with me, as everyone else went in and joined the party at Chuck E Cheese, or Red Robin, or whatever. I made her sit in the front seat, next to me, and look at me.

I said, "What's gotten into you?" And she said, "I know but I'm not telling you." Not knowing what to do at that point, I made her come sit on my lap. And I just hugged her, my sweetheart, hidden in Darth Vader. I now see that she was trying to be me, because she didn't want to need me, for she had lost faith in me. I just held her for a long time, until she cracked. She finally said, "Daddy do you remember Kelly." I said "Yes." Then she said, "Do you remember when you came to my kindergarten class?" I said, "Yes." "Well after you left my class, Kelly said that you said to her, that now you really loved her and you didn't love me." And then, my Elizabeth, just erupted into an absolute fountain of tears, and Darth Vader began to dissolve before my very eyes.

After a time, I said, "Elizabeth, Does Kelly have a Daddy?" She said, "Yes, but he just left Kelly and her Mommy." And then, through my sorrow and tears, I spoke a word, "Elizabeth, I love you, and I will always love you, and nothing will change my love for you. And please believe me. I'm a very fallible earthly Dad. But maybe it wasn't just me that was speaking. I said, it hurts me when you don't believe that I love you, so if you doubt my love for you, please tell me, so I can show you: I love you."

What got into Elizabeth? The same thing that got into Eve, that got into that first Adam, that also got into you—a lie, from the Father of Lies. "You don't have a Daddy, and if you do have a Daddy, he only pretends to love you; he doesn't want to love you; he actually doesn't even like you." It's not ok to believe that God does not adore you; It's evil.

Romans 10:4, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness in all those believing." He's the end of the have to, so that you would want to.

Romans 10:5-8:

For Moses writes about the righteousness ~~that is based on~~ [ek: of, from, out of] the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness ~~based on~~ [ek: of, from, out of] aith^{xxiii} says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

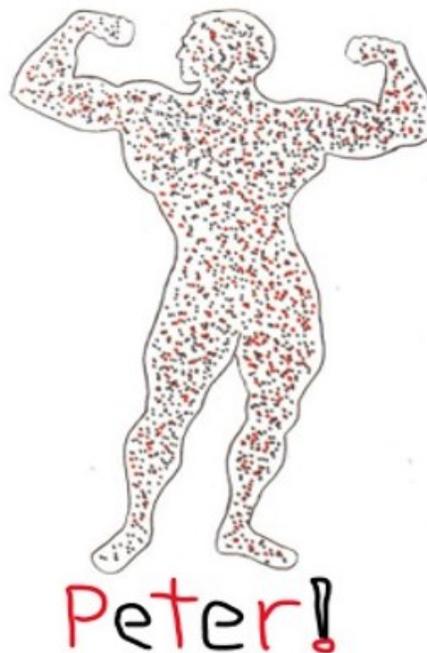
We focused on these verses last time; Paul is quoting Moses in Deuteronomy and he's equating the commandments, with righteousness, with faith, with Christ, with the Word, that is the Word

of faith that we proclaim—It’s not a dead righteousness, but a living Righteousness; it’s not a dead word but a living Word; it’s not our free will, but the Free Will of God rising in us.

In Deuteronomy, Moses says “The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”^{xxiv} So, Paul is saying, “Christ is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do Christ.” And as you know, Christ is the Word that is constantly doing us, creating us and sustaining us. He is THE FREE WILL that creates us and becomes us. Free will in us is Faith, Hope and Love in us, the righteousness of God in us—not simply imputed to us, as an entry, in a ledger, but rising in us like a life in a tomb, and not in just one moment of time, but every moment of time.

Last time I shared how I argued with Susan that something I had said was the result of an idea that I had thought; that is, the result of my free will. And then Susan revealed that she had actually seen Jesus—the Free Will of God—whisper that word in my ear, the moment before it became a word on my tongue. So, whenever I’m proud of free will, perhaps I crucify free will, and enslave myself to bad will. But whenever I’m grateful for free will, Jesus rises in me as Good will in me that comprises the New Me.

So, actually, I am created by free will, saved by free will, and judged by free will, but it’s not my own free will; it’s the righteousness of God manifesting in me as Me, the New Me. We’re saved by Grace through Free Will and this Will is not of ourselves, that none should boast. Faith Hope and Love are the gift of God, that is God in us.^{xxv}



So, every good decision in me is the free will of God rising in me, like one of these little red dots. And every bad decision in me is what I thought was free will, but is actually bad will, for it’s good will that I claimed to be my own creation: self-righteousness, that isn’t righteousness (“Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (Romans 14:23)).

1. You'll remember we said that there is a me that I think I create with my judgments, and there is a me that God creates with his judgement, his Word
2. And right now I am a confusing mix of the two.
3. And to get from one to the other I have to die with Jesus and rise with Jesus
4. And that process is, literally, the old me giving birth to the new me.
5. But you see: it doesn't just happen in one moment of time—what we call the “moment of decision,” at the end of the cross talk at camp.

It doesn't happen simply at one moment in time; it happens at every moment in time when I sit on my father's lap, or crawl into the inner tent, or just let him hold me as I listen to his Word: I love you because I want to love you. I will always love you; and nothing can change my love for you. I like you thoroughly, relentlessly, unequivocally, and furiously, just as you are, for I know who you are, even if you don't know who you are. You're not Darth Vader; you are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.

You see that Word creates reality and that Word is eternal, which means it can and will transform every moment of time; it turns every black dot into a red dot; it's the Word of faith & faithfulness. It transforms moments in the past, from shame into praise... and we call it forgiveness. It transforms moments in the future, from fear into hope, and so we walk into the Kingdom. It's the Word that speaks you, even as you speak the Word—a creator in the image and likeness of your Dad.

Romans 10:8-18:

“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For with the heart one believes ~~and is justified~~ [*eis*: into + *dikaioisune*: righteousness], and with the mouth one confesses ~~and is saved~~ [*eis*: into + *soteria*: salvation].¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes ~~in~~ [*epi*: on] him (he's the foundation stone) will not be put to shame.”^{xxvi} ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [*Yahweh*] will be saved.”^{xxvii} ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”^{xxviii} ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed [*hupakouo*: *hupo*: under + *akouo*: hear = “listen to”] the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard [*akouo*] from us? ^{xxix} ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing [*akouo*], and hearing [*akouo*] through [by] ~~the~~ [*a*] word of Christ.¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

That's Psalm 19:4. Creation whispers the Word to us all the time. Sun, Moon, flowers, and rocks whisper, “I didn't make me, and you didn't make you, and yet, we are good.”

Romans 10:19:

But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.”

That’s Deuteronomy 32:21 and lyrics to a song that Moses sings at the end of the giving of the law—He tells Israel to record the law as a testimony against them, but to sing this song when they have failed to obey. The Word is whispered by creation and sung when the law has failed.

Romans 10:20:

Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”

That’s Isaiah 65:1 and testimony to the fact that The Righteous One has made us righteous, for he has “born our griefs and carried our sorrows.” The Word is whispered by all creation, sung when the law has failed, and understood when rising from a tomb, in a garden, by a tree at the edge of eternity and time.

Romans 10:21-11:1:

But of Israel he says, “All day long (the 6th day) I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”^{xxx} ¹ I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! [*Me Genoito* “Hell, No!xxx]

This is Paul’s point in Romans. It’s only the 6th day of creation; not all is finished in space and time; the Word is still working, and the Word will accomplish that for which it was sent. And if you’ve heard it, you will speak it, sing it, and whisper it all the time; You will speak him, even as he’s speaking you.

I grew up knowing I was different, wrote Mary Ann Bird, and I hated it. I was born with a cleft palate, and when I started school, my classmates made it clear to me how I looked to others, a little girl with a misshapen lip, crooked nose, lopsided teeth, and garbled speech. When schoolmates asked, “What happened to your lip?” I’d tell them I’d fallen and cut it on a piece of glass. Somehow it seemed more acceptable to have suffered an accident than to have been born different. I was convinced that no one outside my family could love me. Then I entered Mrs. Leonard’s second-grade class.

Mrs. Leonard was round and pretty and fragrant, with shining brown hair and warm, dark, smiling eyes. Everyone adored her. But no one came to love her more than I did. And for a special reason. The time came for the annual hearing tests given at our school. I could barely hear out of one ear and was not about to reveal something else that would single me out as different. So, I cheated. The “whisper test” required each child to go to the classroom door, turn sideways, close one ear with a finger, while the teacher whispered something from her desk, which the child repeated. Then the same for the other ear. Nobody checked how tightly the untested ear was covered so I merely pretended to block mine.

As usual, I was last. But all through the testing I wondered what Mrs. Leonard might say to me. I knew from previous years that the teacher whispered things like “The sky is blue” or “Do you have new shoes?” My time came. I turned my bad ear toward her, plugging up the other just enough to be able to hear. I waited, and then came the words that God had surely put into her mouth, seven words that changed my life forever. Mrs. Leonard, the teacher I adored, said softly, “I wish you were my little girl.” The Word was in Mrs. Leonard. Then the Word was in Mary Ann Bird. And now, the Word is you that have heard.

And God not only “wishes,” he wills what he wants and wants what he wills, and there is no other will, that can thwart his relentless desire for you—NOT EVEN YOURS. So, at the edge of time and eternity, when we did our absolute worst, he revealed the very best—himself.

Communion

He took bread and broke it saying, “this is my body given to you.” And in the same manner after supper and having given thanks, he took the cup saying, “this is the covenant in my blood.” The life is in the blood, like the Breath is in the blood, like the Spirit is in the blood, Faith, Hope, Love and Free Will—are in the blood.

Close your eyes, and imagine Jesus giving you his body and his blood. You say to him, “Why did you have to do this?” And he answers, “I didn’t. This is Who I Am and Who I choose to be.” But now, let me ask you: “Who are you and who do you choose to be?” Now suddenly you’re a little child because that is what you actually are. And yet, you’re dressed like an adult, like Darth Vader.

The Lord says to you—and you can picture him as a man or a woman, perhaps your mom if you’re a girl, your dad if you’re a boy—he says, “Would you let me undress you?” You hand him your light saber. He takes off your mask and your cape. He tucks you into bed, gives you a kiss, and says: You’re not Darth Vader; you’re my little girl, my little boy, my beloved. Today (Friday) you tried to be Darth Vader. But tomorrow, I’ll take your daughter to work day, or take your son to work day. So tomorrow, I’ll take you to work with me, but it will feel like play. And together we will sit on my throne, and freely will an entire creation into existence with just our word. And then, I’ll clothe you with the sun, as you stand on the moon, and I’ll crown you with stars, twelve stars to be precise.^{xxxii} And now, do you understand what all of this means? It means, I like you a lot and my opinion does not change.

Benediction

So, this is a simple thing, alright: God likes you. But now this is the confusing thing: do you like yourself? That’s kind of a trick question because you don’t yet know who you are. “What we will be has not yet appeared;” writes John, “but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we will see him as he is (I John 3:2).” So, actually, you don’t yet know, at least not in detail, who you are. But I can tell you this, you’re not Darth Vader but you are a unique, particular image of God our father. So, in order to obey God, in order to like yourself the way he likes you, you’re gonna’ have to trust him. And so, this is the Word, he likes you, believe the gospel, in Jesus’ name and he’ll show you who you are, amen.

Endnotes

ⁱ [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord.” – 1 Corinthians 1:30 RSV

ⁱⁱ Saved from what? So far in Romans, he’s mentioned “wrath” but didn’t specify who’s wrath, God’s wrath or our own wrath.

And he’s spoken about being saved from his body of sin and death.

The angel said to Joseph, “Call him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins”—that’s their bad choices.

ⁱⁱⁱ Romans 1:16

^{iv} Barth

^v Romans 2:13

^{vi} Romans 3:10

^{vii} Romans 3:22-24. This is a direct quote from the ESV with Young’s Literal Translation in brackets.

^{viii} Romans 4:22

^{ix} Romans 5:18 ESV with Young’s Literal Translation in brackets

^x Romans 6:16-18

^{xi} See Romans 7:22-23

^{xii} Romans 1:18, Barth

^{xiii} Romans 8:10

^{xiv} Romans 9:26 “In the very place it was said to them ‘you are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

^{xv} Romans 9:16

^{xvi} The noun, *dikaioσune* is normally translated “righteousness.” The verb, *dikaioo*, from the same root is normally translated “justify.”

^{xvii} Every alcoholic is trying to make themselves right with a drink. Every time we covet, lust, or lie we’re trying to make ourselves right with a thing, or some sex, or by twisting some truth. And every time a person does some good because they think they have to in order to be “righteous,” they’re doing just the same thing with their own “will and exertion.”

^{xviii} Then our good Lord Jesus Christ asked me: "Are you well satisfied that I suffered for you?" I said: "Yes, good Lord, and I thank you very much. Yes, good Lord, may you be blessed." Then Jesus our good Lord said: "If you are satisfied, I am satisfied. To have ever suffered the Passion for you is for me a great joy, a bliss, an endless delight; and if I could suffer more I would do so." - *Julian of Norwich: Journeys into Joy*, selected spiritual writings introduced and edited by John Nelson (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press), p. 72

'Look how I loved you. Look and see that I loved you so much before I died for you that I was willing to die for you; and now I have died for you, and willingly suffered as much as I can for you. And now all my bitter torment and painful hardship has changed into endless joy and bliss for me and for you. How could it now be that you could make any request that pleased me that I would not very gladly grant you? For my pleasure is your holiness and your endless joy and bliss with me.' This is the meaning, as simply as I can explain it, of these blessed words, 'Look how much I loved you.' Our good Lord revealed this to make us glad and joyful. - Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 76

^{xix} John 10:18

^{xx} Hopefully next week we’ll be able to talk about this in more detail, but in the Garden of Gethsemane, after Jesus has given us his body and blood, and taken on our “body of sin and death,” he prays “Father if it be your will, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.” This is utterly wonderful and mysterious, but Jesus (who had only willed what his Father willed, for he is the will of the Father) wills what he doesn’t will. In this moment the Good Will of God descends into the bad will of Adam, and wills what we could not will: to surrender our will. I think we call that “faith, hope or love (sacrificial love).”

^{xxi} If I think I have to kiss my wife, it reveals that I don't want to kiss my wife and only kiss my wife for some reason other than my wife; I'm using my wife, which is raping her soul—sorry to be so blunt, but that's what it is: prostitution.

^{xxii} Paul Tillich

^{xxiii} “The righteousness which comes of the faithfulness of God”—Barth

^{xxiv} Deuteronomy 30:14

^{xxv} See Ephesians 2:8-9

^{xxvi} Isaiah 28:16, 49:23

^{xxvii} Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21

^{xxviii} Isaiah 52:7

^{xxix} Isaiah 53:1. Isaiah 52 through 54 is a stunning prophecy of the work of the messiah, “the righteous one... [who] makes many righteous (53:11),” and everything that St. Paul is preaching in Romans.

^{xxx} Isaiah 65:2

^{xxxi} This is an emphatic exclamation in Greek, which should be translated “Hell No!” according to my old Greek Language Professor.

^{xxxii} Revelation 12:1