

Respecting Free Will: A Disciple's Guide

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1 Disclaimer

This leaflet offers insights on free will as an aspect of discipleship to Jesus Christ. Just like the Berean Jews in Acts 17:11 who checked the Scriptures to verify teachings, we invite you to do the same. Remember, Romans 14:5 says to be convinced in your own mind. So take what resonates with you and, as advised in Proverbs 4:7, aim to get wisdom and understanding. For what doesn't click, 1 Thessalonians 5:21 reminds us to 'Test everything; hold fast what is good. Leave the rest peacefully behind.

2 Introduction

Free will is the ability to make choices that are genuinely our own, free from external coercion. It's a foundational aspect of being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The Apostle Paul tells us, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). This implies that freedom, including the free will to make choices, is an integral part of a life led by the Spirit of God.

3 The Importance of Free Will in Discipleship

One of Jesus' foundational teachings is the commandment to love one another: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). Respecting another person's free will is a tangible way to love them. In fact, Galatians 5:13 reminds us,

*<https://anabaptist.ca> <https://x.com/aizvo>

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

4 God’s Gift of Free Will

Free will is not just a philosophical concept but a divine gift. It allows us the freedom to choose between good and evil, life and death. In Deuteronomy, we find this principle clearly outlined: ”I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Joshua also underlines the same idea, stating, ”Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

5 The Principle of Non-Coercion in Jesus’ Teachings

Jesus took a non-coercive approach in His teachings. He would often say, ”He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15), signifying that the choice to follow Him is voluntary. He invited people to come to Him of their own free will: ”Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). This is in line with James’ teaching that ”mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13), emphasizing the voluntary nature of following Christ.

6 Free Will and the Parables of Jesus

The parables Jesus told often emphasize the concept of free will. For instance, the parable of the Prodigal Son tells us that the Father respects his son’s freedom to make his own choices, even if those choices lead him away from home (Luke 15:11-32). When the son returns, the Father doesn’t chastise him but celebrates his decision to come back: ”But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around

him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). This underscores 1 Timothy 2:4, which says that God ”wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

7 Consequences and Responsibility

Although God gives us the gift of free will, the Bible makes it clear that our choices aren’t without consequences. Paul warns, ”Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Galatians 6:7). Free will is an awesome responsibility. As the Apostle Peter reminds us, ”Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s servants” (1 Peter 2:16).

8 Common Objections to Respecting Free Will and Scriptural Responses

8.1 Objection: ”If I don’t intervene, they’ll make a mistake!”

Scriptural Response: ”Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Discussion: It’s natural to want to prevent loved ones from making mistakes, but it’s crucial to remember that each person’s journey with the Lord is personal and unique. By trusting God, we leave room for divine guidance and intervention, both in our lives and the lives of others.

8.2 Objection: ”If it’s a matter of right and wrong, isn’t it my duty to enforce the right course of action?”

Scriptural Response: ”Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3)

Discussion: Before we rush to correct others, it's essential to examine our own lives and motives. This verse reminds us to focus on our own spiritual growth, which naturally equips us to help others in a more compassionate and effective manner.

8.3 Objection: "By allowing them free will, aren't I endorsing their potentially wrong choices?"

Scriptural Response: "Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another." (Romans 14:12-13)

Discussion: Respecting free will doesn't mean we endorse or agree with all the choices others make. It means we recognize the God-given dignity in each person to make their own choices and face their own consequences.

8.4 Objection: "If I truly love them, shouldn't I try to control the situation for their benefit?"

Scriptural Response: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Discussion: Genuine love isn't controlling. The Spirit of the Lord grants freedom, including the freedom to choose. Love allows for growth through experience, even if that involves making mistakes.

8.5 Objection: "But what if their choices lead them away from God?"

Scriptural Response: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

Discussion: God's desire is for everyone to come to repentance and salvation. This verse reminds us that God is patient and gives people time to return to Him. We must trust in God's timing and respect the spiritual journeys of others.

9 Legalist Objections to Respecting Free will and Scriptural Responses

These responses can serve as a rebuttal to legalistic objections and emphasize the New Testament's teachings on grace, freedom, and love as foundational to discipleship in Jesus Christ.

9.1 Objection: "The Old Testament prescribes punitive measures, even executions. Isn't that God's will?"

Scriptural Response: "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also." (Matthew 5:38-39)

Discussion: Jesus openly challenges the old "eye for an eye" paradigm and proposes a radical love that extends even to those who have wronged us. The new covenant emphasizes grace, love, and forgiveness over punitive justice.

9.2 Objection: "If we allow people to make their own choices, society will descend into chaos."

Scriptural Response: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law." (Romans 13:8)

Discussion: The law of love surpasses all other laws. When we act out of love, respect, and mutual aid, we establish a society that reflects God's kingdom here on Earth.

9.3 Objection: "We need to compel people to follow God's law; it's for their own good."

Scriptural Response: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23)

Discussion: God's Spirit cultivates virtues that no law can enforce. These virtues arise from a willing heart, not from external compulsion.

9.4 Objection: "Jesus drove out the money changers from the temple; doesn't that justify using force to uphold God's laws?"

Scriptural Response: "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'" (John 18:36)

Discussion: Jesus' act in the temple was a unique prophetic act, not a general model for enforcing religious laws. His kingdom is not of this world and does not rely on worldly methods of enforcement.

9.5 Objection: "We need to do blood sacrifices in order to please God."

Scriptural Response: Hebrews 10:10 states, "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." This verse makes clear that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the definitive sacrifice for humanity's sins. With His sacrifice, the era of needing blood offerings to atone for sins was concluded.

Discussion: If we believe in Jesus and His teachings, then we should understand that His sacrifice on the cross was the culmination and completion of all previous sacrificial systems. To continue with blood sacrifices after Jesus' sacrifice negates the profound meaning and effect of His act.

10 Objections from Authoritarians such as War-Mongers and Conscripters

These responses aim to directly address the justifications often used for war, conscription, and violence, by contrasting them with the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament.

10.1 Objection: "The Book of Joshua describes God-commanded wars; isn't war justified if it's for a righteous cause?"

Scriptural Response: "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword." (Matthew 26:52)

Discussion: While the Old Testament includes accounts of divinely-commanded wars, the teachings of Jesus mark a significant departure from this approach. Jesus advocates for non-violence and teaches us to love our enemies.

10.2 Objection: "If we don't fight, how can we protect our faith and our freedoms?"

Scriptural Response: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world." (2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

Discussion: The battle for faith and freedom is not won through worldly warfare but through spiritual means. The Apostle Paul teaches that our true weapons are spiritual in nature, designed to tear down strongholds of wrong thinking rather than human enemies.

10.3 Objection: "God gives governments the authority to conscript soldiers. Isn't it our duty to comply?"

Scriptural Response: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21)

Discussion: While governments have authority in worldly matters, our primary allegiance is to God and His teachings. Jesus' teaching highlights the distinction and suggests that our moral and spiritual obligations transcend legal duties.

10.4 Objection: "The Old Testament allowed for enslavement of enemies; isn't that permissible?"

Scriptural Response: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Discussion: The New Testament teaches equality and unity among all people in Christ, contradicting any justifications for enslavement or subjugation based on Old Testament practices.

10.5 Objection: "By not going to war, aren't we disobeying God's command to take dominion over the Earth?"

Scriptural Response: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Discussion: The dominion that Jesus speaks of is not one of force, coercion, or violence. He praises peacemakers and teaches a form of dominion based on love, service, and reconciliation.

11 Objections from Authoritarian Family Advocates

These scriptural teachings emphasize the importance of mutual respect and individual agency within a family setting, thereby endorsing the principle of free will as being compatible with Christian discipleship.

11.1 Objection: "Children should obey their parents in everything, without question."

Scriptural Response: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4)

Discussion: While children are indeed encouraged to honor and obey their parents, parents are also instructed not to provoke

their children. This calls for a balanced relationship where the agency and feelings of the child are respected. Free will is not negated; it's refined in the context of a loving and nurturing environment.

11.2 Objection: "Wives should submit to their husbands in all matters."

Scriptural Response: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21)

Discussion: The Apostle Paul speaks of mutual submission within the Christian community, and by extension within the family. Submission is not a one-way directive but a mutual act of love and respect. It recognizes the free will of each party and does not seek to suppress or control it.

11.3 Objection: "The head of the household has the final say in all matters; no one else has a say."

Scriptural Response: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

Discussion: The ethos of Christian community, including family, is built on humility and considering the interests of others. This flies in the face of autocratic rule within the family and advocates for an environment where free will is respected and decisions are made collaboratively.

12 Objections from Corporate Interests

Corporate interests often prioritize profit and efficiency over individual freedom and well-being. This can sometimes be framed in language that suggests that surrendering one's free will is necessary for the "greater good" of economic prosperity. Here are some common objections from this viewpoint, with scriptural responses:

12.1 Objection: "Employees should do as they are told for the good of the company, even if it goes against their values."

Scriptural Response: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters." (Colossians 3:23)

Discussion: The Scripture encourages people to work diligently, but it also suggests that the ultimate authority we answer to is not a corporate structure but the Lord. This passage can be interpreted as advocating for ethical work that aligns with one's values and the principles of Christian discipleship, including free will.

12.2 Objection: "Profit should be the ultimate goal, even if it means exploiting workers or consumers."

Scriptural Response: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:24)

Discussion: This teaching from Jesus underscores that devotion to profit cannot be the ultimate goal in a life committed to spiritual principles. Exploiting others does not align with the respect for free will and human dignity espoused in Christian teachings.

12.3 Objection: "Corporate policies must be followed without question."

Scriptural Response: "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29)

Discussion: While policies are essential for organizational structure, they should not override ethical or spiritual obligations. This teaching from the Book of Acts emphasizes the importance of aligning one's actions with divine law when human laws are in conflict with it.

These scriptural responses provide a counterpoint to the idea that corporate interests should override free will, advocating instead for a balanced approach that respects

individual agency while still valuing communal goals.

13 Objections from Material Determinists

Material Determinists often argue that human behavior is determined by physical or environmental factors, minimizing or outright denying the role of free will. Below are some objections from this standpoint, with scriptural counterpoints:

13.1 Objection: "Free will is an illusion; everything is predetermined by our biology or environment."

Scriptural Response: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Discussion: This scripture makes it clear that choice is an inherent part of the human experience. While environment and biology play roles in shaping us, they do not rob us of our ability to choose between different paths.

13.2 Objection: "Your destiny is fixed; there's no point in trying to exercise free will."

Scriptural Response: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

Discussion: This passage suggests that transformation and change are possible through renewing our minds. If destiny were fixed, there would be no point in the call to transformation and discernment.

13.3 Objection: "Free will is irrelevant when compared to the greater forces of nature or society."

Scriptural Response: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17)

Discussion: This text acknowledges the importance of freedom and by implication, free will, as an integral part of spiritual life. The presence of God's Spirit is equated with freedom, counteracting the deterministic view that larger forces negate the importance of individual free will.

Through these scriptural responses, we see a validation of the role of free will in the context of a Christian worldview, even when faced with arguments that lean heavily on deterministic perspectives.

14 Objections from Pre-destinationalists, Fatalists, and Believers in Fate

Through these scriptural perspectives, the emphasis remains on individual moral agency and choice, even when framed against deterministic religious or philosophical beliefs.

14.1 Objection: "God has predestined everything; your actions can't change His plans."

Scriptural Response: "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:11-12)

Discussion: While the Bible talks about predestination, it does not imply that human actions are inconsequential. The focus is often on God's ultimate purposes and glory, not on a mechanistic unfolding of predetermined events at the expense of human free will.

14.2 Objection: "Fate controls our lives; we can't escape it."

Scriptural Response: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Discussion: While the concept of fate seems deterministic, the scriptural emphasis is on a loving God who has positive intentions for His creation. This leaves room for human agency to align with divine purposes. Hope remains in the realm of possibility and not certainty.

14.3 Objection: "It's all in the stars/destined by cosmic forces; individual choice is meaningless."

Scriptural Response: "You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you." (Nehemiah 9:6)

Discussion: According to the Bible, God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, including the "starry host." While cosmic forces may exist, they are subordinate to God, who values individual choice and moral responsibility.

15 Loving and Forgiving Those Who Disagree

The dialogue about free will can often become a contentious issue, provoking strong opinions on all sides. However, the teachings of Jesus and the broader message of the Bible provide clear guidance on how we should approach those who disagree with us—even on fundamental topics like free will.

Quote: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," (Matthew 5:44)

Discussion: Love is not reserved just for those who agree with us or share our perspectives. Jesus calls us to extend love even to our "enemies," or those with whom we are in deep disagreement.

Quote: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

Discussion: Being kind and tenderhearted should be the default attitude towards everyone, including those who hold differing opinions. Forgiveness is not just an action; it's an attitude—one modeled by Christ Himself.

Quote: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

Discussion: The defining mark of being a disciple of Jesus is love for others. This includes those who may disagree with us on issues that we consider essential or fundamental.

Quote: "And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them." (Luke 6:31)

Discussion: Known as the Golden Rule, this command from Jesus encourages us to interact with others—including those who disagree with us—in the manner that we would want to be treated. **Quote:** "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." (Colossians 3:13)

Discussion: Forgiveness is not just a one-time action but an ongoing process. Just as the Lord continually forgives us, we are to continually forgive those around us, regardless of our differences.

In all interactions about free will or any other contentious issue, we are called to approach others with love, kindness, and forgiveness, honoring the example set for us in the life and teachings of Jesus.

16 Conclusion

Understanding and respecting free will is not just a philosophical exercise but a significant aspect of discipleship to Jesus. As we are

told in John's Gospel, "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Paul also encourages us to "Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). In respecting free will, we align ourselves more closely with the teachings of Jesus, living out our calling to love one another and enjoying the freedom that comes from a life in Christ.

17 Further Resources

If you found this pamphlet enlightening and wish to delve deeper into the topics of free will, discipleship, and Anabaptist teachings, additional resources are available for you.

More Leaflets: Visit anabaptist.ca to access a range of pamphlets like this one, each exploring different facets of Anabaptist beliefs and practices.

Bible Study Guides: Many Anabaptist communities offer Bible study sessions that focus on key tenets like free will, discipleship, and community living. Check your local congregation for details.

Books and Articles: For those interested in scholarly perspectives, numerous books and articles have been published on the Anabaptist interpretation of free will and discipleship.

Online Communities: There are various online forums and social media groups where you can discuss these topics with like-minded individuals.

Local Congregations: Nothing beats face-to-face interactions for spiritual growth. Visit your nearest Anabaptist congregation to learn more, participate in discussions, and deepen your understanding of these crucial issues.

Thank you for taking the time to read this pamphlet. May you continue to explore, respect, and honor the free will that God has bestowed upon us as you journey in your discipleship to Jesus Christ.