

God's Will vs Free Will – Can I Still Be Me?

We suspect the number one reason people refuse to believe in Jesus Christ is because they do not believe in God, or the Bible, or heaven and hell, or other similar Biblical teachings. We find this unusual given all the affirmative proof surrounding the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the impossibilities of the universe being created at random and without an intelligent design.

Perhaps what's really behind most people not wanting to believe in Jesus is that they fear they would have to surrender control of their life to someone they've never even met. Is having to surrender your life to Christ a valid concern? Well, if you have no idea what your life will look like once you choose to believe in Christ, then certainly giving your life over to Him will be a valid concern. We'd be fools to suggest otherwise. Which really is the whole purpose of our website – to provide you with the information on what a life believing in Christ looks like so that once you are informed, you'll be able to knowingly determine whether such a relationship will work for you.

So, let's reframe the question to bring it closer to home: If I choose to believe in Christ, can I still be me? For reasons we'll discuss in a moment, the answer is a resounding yes, and no. Yes, we can keep a lot of who we are, but if we want the benefits of having Christ in our life, then no, we cannot keep everything about ourselves because there are some changes we will need to make. We simply cannot have God's rewards and remain who we used to be. Why? Because humanity is sinful, and God cannot abide sin. Period! Fortunately, He is a very forgiving God.

Let us start with what we can keep about ourselves. Certainly, we will not need to change any of our physical characteristics – for example, if we have a beard, yep, we can keep it, and if we are overweight, no, we won't have to go on a diet. We won't need to change our family or our friends. Unless it is something illegal or immoral, we won't need to change our job, or our love of sports, or our favorite TV shows, or our favorite authors, or our favorite restaurants, etc. As you can see, we get to keep most of who we already are. Believing in Christ won't change any of that other than probably bringing new people into our lives.

But here are some things, if they apply, that we will have to give up: hatred, anger, sexual immorality, lying, stealing, frequent drunkenness, physical and substance abuse, and similar not-so-desirable behaviors. If none of these apply, we are well on our way to having a life in Christ without having to change much. If some do apply, we suspect you already feel you would like to give them up; choosing a life in Christ will help you do so.

At this point, you might be saying to yourself, this is too easy – I get to keep most of who I am and only have to give up either things I am not doing or things I really don't want to do anymore. Is that all it takes? There must be a catch somewhere. Well, there are two other items that we are going to have to absolutely change. The first is our priorities, and the second is our will. Before you panic, let's examine what giving up these two items really looks like.

Changing Our Priorities

Right now, it is probably safe to say that your number one priority is either your health, your family, your job (financial security), or pursuing your hobbies. Choosing to believe in Christ requires us to take our first priority, whatever it is, and make it our second priority, and to make Christ our first priority. Not our only priority, mind you, just our first priority. So no, we do not have to give everything else up for Christ.

And here's the good news. If we truly put Christ first in our lives, He will make sure all the other truly important things in our lives will be taken care of. Jesus assures us of this in the following Scripture verses:

“For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” Matthew 6:25

“Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’” Matthew 6:31

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matthew 6:33

If we choose a relationship with Christ by seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness as our top priority, He will take care of the rest. This is a promise from God, and God keeps His promises.

Changing Your Will

If you have never heard the Lord's Prayer, it begins: ***“Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.”*** (From Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, **Matthew 5:9-10**, emphasis added). As Biblical Christians, we acknowledge that God's will determines every outcome, certainly in heaven, but yes, even here on earth. By default, that means our will doesn't determine the outcome. Can we try to influence the outcome? Absolutely, and it is often our responsibility to do so. And yes, God often sides with the best prepared. But the key is to remember that in the end, all outcomes are up to God and will serve His purpose.

In other words, if we think we are in charge, we'll have to give up that notion if we want a sincere relationship with Christ. (We have also discussed this in our PDF document, [“Who Do You Think Is in Control?”](#))

Even during His greatest suffering, when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion, as He prayed over being separated from God, His Father, and for having to take on our sins, Jesus acknowledged this:

“And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, ‘Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.’” **Luke 22:41-42**

Yes, even Jesus Christ knew that God's will reigned supreme. When we submit ourselves to God, realizing that it is not our responsibility to control the outcome but rather His, a great burden is removed from our shoulders. Yes, we are still accountable for our behaviors and cannot, without consequences, shirk our responsibilities – but the outcome is always up to God. Two verses from Proverbs chapter 15 confirm this:

“The mind of man plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.” **Proverbs 15:9**

“The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the Lord.” **Proverbs 15:33**

But please note: Sometimes it may be God's will to favor the best prepared, and sometimes it just may be God's will to let the outcome determine itself. But these are always God's choices, not ours. And whatever God chooses will come to pass.

Yes, God's outcomes also include things we may consider to be, at best, unfortunate, and at worst, downright devastating. But you must remember, while we think moment to moment, God thinks from beginning to end. What might appear to us as horrible, could just be one step in God's bigger plan. Take for instance the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. God sacrificed His only begotten Son to be cursed, whipped, spat upon, and nailed to a cross to die. In the moment, one might logically conclude “How cruel is that?” But here was God's bigger picture. He raised His flesh Son from the dead on the third day to demonstrate for us the possibility of eternal life, and He decreed His Son's sinless blood sacrifice (remember, Jesus was God in the flesh) was sufficient to pay the penalty for all of humanity's sins, once and forever. God loves us and He gave up His only begotten Son to prove it.

*One should never question God's motives – He always has a purpose, and it is always for our good. The Bible tells us this in Romans 8:28: **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”** Believing in Christ as our Lord and Savior and knowing that His death saves us from our sins so that we will spend eternity with Him in heaven, we now thank God with all our hearts for His loving sacrifice.*

If we are being asked to place God's will before our own, you probably want to know, what exactly is God's will? Here are four Bible verses that help define God's will:

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification [that you be made holy]; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”
1Thessalonians 4:3 – 4:8

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” **Romans 12:2** (emphasis added)

“I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the [sin-natured] world produces death.” **2 Corinthians 7:9 – 7:10**

“For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.” **1 Peter 2:15**

We are God's children, and He wants us in His kingdom; but to get there, we need to demonstrate that we are worthy. God's will is that we choose to be worthy of His kingdom. Fortunately for us, God knows that we can never be sin-free. But we can want to be that way, and we can strive with all our strength to be that way, and that is what God wants to see in us. And He can look into our hearts and know if we truly mean it.

You may ask, if God's will reigns supreme, why, then, did He give us our own free will? This has always been one of those questions where we can only guess at the answer. We think that God wants us to be free to choose His sinless ways over all others. It is also our choice to have a believing relationship with Christ and to seek His righteousness. These are indeed our choices, and neither would be possible if we did not possess our own free will.

Why Is All This Important?

Why is it important to have a life in Christ and to accept that God's will is the only will that always gets done first? Well, there's good news and bad news. The good news is, if we choose a sincere relationship with Christ and we accept that it is God's will that rules, then while our relationship with Christ endures, we will enjoy the Fruit of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) in our lives, and at our death we will enjoy eternal life in God's kingdom of heaven. The bad news is, if we don't choose a sincere relationship with Christ and we try to wrestle with God for control, we will most likely continue to experience our current struggles, and at death we will eventually spend an eternal spiritual death with the devil, in a lake of fire with a lot of "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

So, let's vote. I'll get all the good stuff (Fruit of the Holy Spirit and an eternal life in heaven), and I still get to continue to have most of the things I have now, and all I have to do is give up behaviors I either already don't do or know I shouldn't do, adjust my priorities so that God/Christ come first, and I get to free myself from the heavy burden of having to always be in control. Alternatively, if I turn away from Christ and continue to think and feel that I'm in charge and God isn't, I lose all the "good stuff" and get only the "bad stuff (spending eternity in hell with the weeping and gnashing of teeth)". Oh, yes, but I get to keep my sinful ways – doing the things I really don't want to do or know I shouldn't do – you know, those things that always get me in trouble. Please explain to us why this isn't a slam dunk, easy choice.

Well, the reason it is not such an easy choice is usually a thing called repentance. Ultimately, we can choose a life given by sin or a life defined by righteousness. There is no middle ground; there is no fence to sit on. We must choose one or the other as our master. Unfortunately, we were automatically born into a sin-natured world. We must choose repentance to let go of our sin-natured world so that we can spend a new life with Christ.

Repentance

Webster's dictionary defines "to repent" as: *"to turn from sin and dedicate oneself to the amendment of one's life, to feel regret or contrition, or to change one's mind"*. In essence, to repent simply means giving up our old, sinful behaviors and changing our minds to behave in a non-sinful way. Sounds easy, but have you ever tried to lose weight or give up smoking? Regardless of how great the rewards are, the process is never easy, and repenting, which means giving up sin and adopting Christ's righteousness, isn't easy either. If it were, we'd all be Biblical Christians. The truth is, most people simply like their sins (lust, lying, drunkenness, drugs, etc.) too much.

Fortunately, if we choose a life of repentance, there are four things that will help keep us on our repentant path:

1. In this world, thanks to Adam and Eve, everyone is born a sinner. So, it is not like we are going to be the only smoker in the room or the only overweight person in the gym. Nope, welcome to the club, we are all sinners. Fortunately, we will never have to feel alone in trying to give up sinful ways. As Romans 3:23 tells us:

"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (emphasis added). Yes, that means all of us are in the same boat. When we choose a relationship with Christ, we join a fellowship of believers all engaged in the same endeavor of avoiding sinful behavior, with all willing to help each other in this effort.

2. In Romans 6:23, we are also told:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The good news – and "gospel" means "good news" – is that God gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross to forgive the sins of mankind once and for all. Jesus said, right before He died, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30). So actually, if we choose a life in Christ, our sins have already been paid for. We know this from Acts 26:15 – 18 when a resurrected Jesus spoke to Saul (later renamed by Jesus to become the Apostle Paul):

“And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’”

Yes, once we have committed to a sincere relationship with Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and our job becomes simply to stay the course and start working to become more like Him.

3. Because of our sin nature, God knows we are going to sin again and again. If we genuinely confess our sins and ask God for forgiveness, He has promised to forgive them. We know this from 1 John 1:5-9:

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

And because He can read our hearts, God knows if our request for forgiveness is genuine.

“You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” Luke 15:16

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”
1 Samuel 16:7

“Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, ‘Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?’” Mark 2:8

4. If we have repented and accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit (the Helper) will be there to help us keep our promise to renounce sin and sustain our sincere relationship with Christ. Jesus tells us this Himself:

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”
John 15:26-27

“These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling.” John 16:1

The Apostle Peter also confirms this when he tells the brethren:

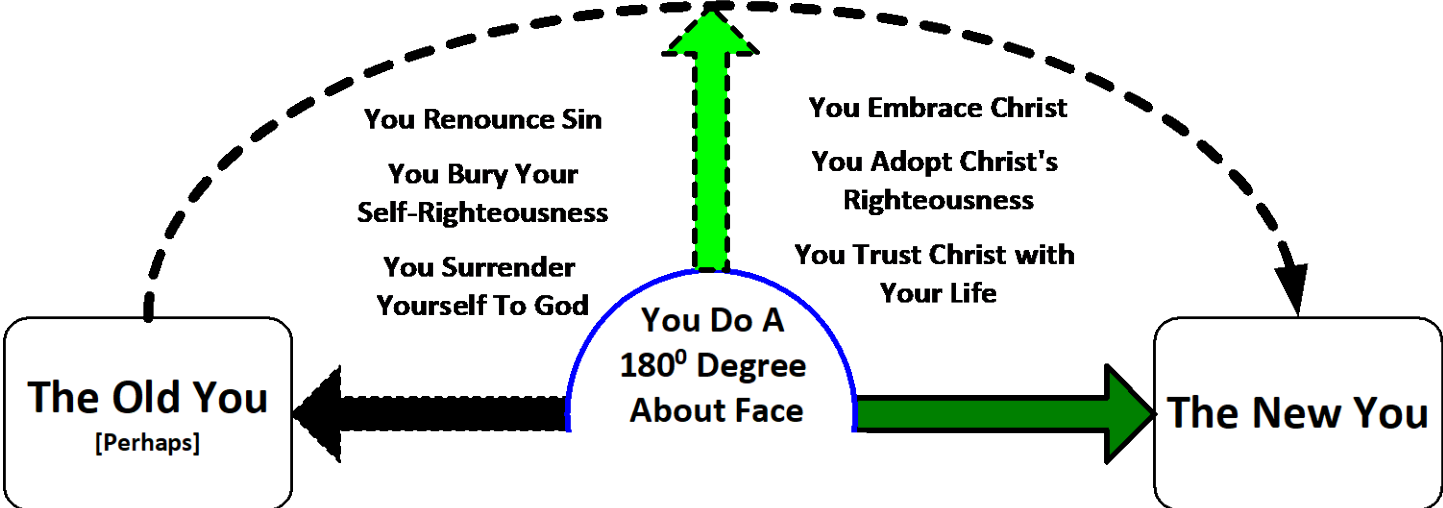
“Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 2:38

Since our repentance is the manifestation of our choosing to have a believing relationship with Christ, we have prepared a diagram on the next page to help you fully understand what is involved when we decide to repent and choose Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, i.e., we now believe Jesus was God in the flesh (Lord) and that He died to save us from our sins so we could enjoy eternal life in heaven (Savior). As you review the chart please remember, choosing repentance is a decision, but fulfilling that decision often is a lifelong process. How long it takes is not relevant. What’s relevant is our commitment to the process, and remember, God always knows what is in our hearts.

You may ask, if we are all sinners and God cannot abide sin, and if we do sin and sincerely ask God for forgiveness and it is granted, how is it that we will be “perfect” on that day we are taken to heaven? First, through God’s grace and our faith in His Son, our sins – past, present, and future – have already been forgiven. Second, our sanctification (purification) is a process – and it is a process that is only completed when we are given our imperishable bodies that will last for eternity. We cannot complete this process on our own because we are sinners, but God can and will because He can read our hearts and know that we are sincere in our beliefs.

Once sincerely committed, unless we permanently fall away from Christ, the gifts of believing in Him – eternal life, having the Holy Spirit to guide us in adopting Christ’s righteousness, and the enjoyment of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as we live our commitment – are ours. Once we commit, how strongly we honor our commitment will determine our rewards in heaven.

What Repentance Looks Like



- Ignored God**
- Was Self-Centered**
- Was Self-Righteous**
- Ignored The Gospel**
- Was Sinful**
- Was Rebellious**
- Was Alone**
- Was Stingy**
- Ignored Commandments**
- Was Unforgiving & Arrogant**
- Was Angry & Bitter**



- Glorifies God**
- Is God-Centered**
- Is Christ-Righteous**
- Believes In The Gospel**
- Is Conscious of Sin**
- Is In God's Word**
- Is In Fellowship**
- Gives Generously**
- Keeps Christ's Commandments**
- Is Forgiving & Humble**
- Is Happy & Content**

Repentance is not a one and done phenomena.

It is something you declare for yourself and then strive to fulfill in all your daily behavior.

So, can you have a life in Christ and still be you? No, not entirely. Sorry, it just doesn't work that way. Your priorities will need to be adjusted so that God comes first; you'll need to let go and acknowledge it is God's will that works, not yours; and you will need to repent – renouncing sin, and where applicable, giving up your old ways and adopting new ways that align with Christ's righteousness. The rewards are great, and you will be a better, happier person for it. We commit to the process; God commits to the destination.