



FREEDOM OR PREDESTINATION?

- Read the statements for discussion and decide whether or not you agree with or have a preference for them. The “Teachings from the Word” below may help you decide.
- If you favor it, go to the right side of the room. If you disagree, move to the left side of the room. You must take one side or the other, but you will be allowed to switch sides.
- On each side of the room is a speaker's chair. Only the person sitting in the chair can speak. Each side takes turns speaking.
- As speakers make their points, you may change sides any number of times.

Teachings from the Word:

It is well known in the church that the Lord desires the salvation of all, and the death of no one. Hence it may be seen that any predestination except to heaven is contrary to the Divine Love (*Divine Providence* 330).

Since the Lord foresees the state of all after death and also foresees the places in hell of those who do not desire to be saved, and the places in heaven of those who desire to be saved, it follows that He provides places for the wicked by permitting and withdrawing, and places for the good by leading. And unless this were done continually from the birth of everyone to the end of his life neither heaven nor hell would continue to exist, for without this foresight and Providence at the same time neither heaven nor hell would be anything but confusion (see *Divine Providence* 333).

All the future is present to the Lord and all the present is to Him eternal. The Divine Providence in everything it does has regard to the infinite and the eternal (see *Divine Providence* 333).

All things, nay, the least of all things, down to the least of leasts, are directed by the Lord's providence, even as to the very steps (*Arcana Coelestia* 6493).

Statement for Discussion:

Even though the Lord already knows that my life choices are leading me to heaven or hell, I am free to choose my own path in life.

If you think that people are not free to choose their own path, move to the right side of the room. If you think that people are free to choose their own path, go to the left side.

Further Discussion

If you would like to continue the discussion, you could consider the following statement:

If the Lord didn't know whether I will choose heaven or hell, He couldn't provide me with opportunities to make the choices that will lead me there.

Activity 3

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE DETAILS?



Read the following parts of a Greek myth. Think about how to sequence the parts so that the story makes sense. Put a number beside each part to indicate the correct sequence. (See the bottom of the page for answers.)

Arion stepped out of hiding. The sailors ran away in fear.	Arion made one last request, asking that he could play his harp for the sailors. The sailors were thrilled to hear Arion's beautiful music.
Just as Arion finished his song, he jumped overboard with his harp. A dolphin brought Arion up to the surface, and supporting him on his back, brought him to Corinth.	Arion sailed to Italy and Sicily and played his harp for the sailors and oarsmen on the ship.
Arion told everyone what had happened. Arion was held prisoner.	When the sailors arrived and were asked about Arion, they said that they had left him in Italy.
When the ship was in the open seas, the sailors plotted to take his wealth and throw Arion overboard.	Arion won large sums of money playing his harp. Arion set sail for Corinth.
Arion was an expert harper and composer who lived in Corinth, Greece, in ancient times. Because of his skill, the king asked Arion to travel far and wide and play for people.	Hearing music coming from the ship, dolphins swam along beside the ship, following it for miles.

Compare the way you sequenced the parts of the story with a partner. You may also compare your sequence to that of the story shown at the bottom of the page.

1. Did you sequence the stories in the same way?
2. Were there any significant differences?
3. Does your story differ from the one shown below?
4. Now, imagine that these events were not a myth, but the story of your own life. How would your life be different if the events you have experienced had all still happened—but in a different order?
5. Would you be the same person you are today?
6. What might this tell us about the care with which the Lord leads each person?

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TAKING IT HOME



Here are a variety of activities that can help you bring this lesson into your life.

Ideas for Journal Entries

Use one of these journal ideas to help you think about freedom.

- ◆ If each person did only what he or she wanted, what would the world be like? Would anyone be really free?
- ◆ In what ways is being free to choose what you do a good thing? In what ways might it be limiting? Is this genuine freedom?

For Reflection

- ◆ Would knowing where you will be living after death—in heaven or hell—affect how you would experience life here on earth? Would it limit your freedom?
- ◆ Does knowing that the Lord already sees whether you will choose heaven or hell make you feel less free?

Spiritual Task

by the Rev. David Roth

Free Choice

When the Lord is with someone, He leads him and makes provision so that all that happens, whether sad or joyful, may bring him what is good (Arcana Coelestia 6303).

We can see evidence of the Lord's Providence in the story of Joseph. He was hated by his brothers and thrown into a pit to die, but Midianite traders found him and sold him into slavery in Egypt. There he rose to second in command, and he saved Egypt during a terrible famine. When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, they thought he might retaliate. But he said, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

The Lord is constantly doing all in His power to assist us in making the right choices and leading us to eternal happiness. We, however, have free choice in spiritual things. We are free to choose to do evil rather than good, to choose hell rather than heaven. The Lord provides all things for our eternal benefit and foresees the bad choices we will make, permitting them if some good might come from them.

Task

Pay attention to the power of free choice in your life. You always have a choice as to how you will respond to situations. This week choose two things that you **WILL DO** personally to contribute to the promotion of the Lord's kingdom—on earth and in heaven. Do them.

Further Reading

FOUR KINDS OF FREEDOM

by the Rev. Daniel W. Goodenough

Everyone longs to be free. The Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church tell us this, and inside ourselves we know it is true. Today, perhaps more than ever, people are arguing about freedom, and in some countries they are even making war over freedom.

Freedom is so important because it lies at the very heart of everyone's life. Human beings have always struggled for freedom, and with good reason. But they usually haven't understood what freedom really is, or how you get it. Too often, people have fought only for the freedom to do what they wanted, without understanding that the really basic freedom is something spiritual that comes from God.

Free Will

The first and most basic kind of freedom is the Lord's gift of free will, or liberty. This is something He gives to all human beings. In fact, it is what makes us human. Everyone is given the ability by the Lord to choose freely between good and evil, right and wrong. You can love and think what is good or what is evil. Even if you can't do and say everything you think and will (or love), still no one can make you love something you don't wish to. We are even free to love and think the most awful, terrible things. We can choose to go to hell if we want to.

This freedom to will or love as we wish is the real reason we live forever, in heaven or hell. Animals do not have free will, but all humans have something of it. Even infants and small children have the beginning of freedom, and can choose, in limited ways, to do good or bad, depending on their maturity. The Lord gradually gives children and young people more free will as they mature and take responsibility. But it is only as adults that we are fully free to choose for ourselves whether we will love the goods of heaven or the evils of hell.

Many people today don't believe in this freedom. Some think God decides everything, including whether a person goes to heaven or hell. This is called predestination. Others believe you become only what your environment, education and experiences make you, as though we were slaves to all the things that happen to us.

But the Lord is love, and because He loves us He wants us to feel as full of life as possible. And we can only feel that life is our own if we are free—free to love good or evil. So the most important freedom of all is the freedom of our spirit to love and think the way we want to. In that freedom lies the very secret of all human life.

Heavenly Freedom

People use their free will to love all different kinds of things, good and bad. If throughout your life you use your free will to love what is good and to turn away from evil, the Lord gives you "heavenly freedom." This second kind of freedom is the freedom the angels have, and it is called "freedom itself" because there is nothing they can't do. That is because everything they want is good and useful

for others. No one stops them from doing these good things. In fact, everywhere they go they are encouraged to do what they want, because their life is to love others. This beautiful freedom comes only from a lifetime of seeking to live the Lord's way.

Hellish Freedom

A third kind of freedom is “infernal” freedom, and it is the freedom you get in hell. In hell, spirits can still go on loving and thinking the way they want to, but everywhere they turn, they are limited and hemmed in by various punishments and obstacles. Why? Because just about everything they want harms somebody else. And since they aren't allowed to damage other people (not even other evil spirits), they are constantly being frustrated by their own selfish loves. Hellish freedom is really slavery because evil spirits always want what they don't have. It's like being in a closed-in box they have built up around themselves, out of their own selfishness. Yet they are still you, free to want and think the way they choose. You get hellish freedom (rather than heavenly) by spending your life on earth trying to please yourself and make yourself happy, rather than working to make other people happy.

Freedom of Action

A fourth kind of freedom is the freedom to do and speak, freedom of action in the world. This freedom comes from the Lord, but it is limited (and should be) by conditions in the world. We are not as free to say and do, as we are free to will and think. There have to be limits on speaking and doing evil in the world. Otherwise evil people would constantly be doing terrible things to innocent victims. The purpose of governments and authority is to keep the freedom to do evil always within definite limits. Yet we always have some freedom of action. And even when we are not free to do and say everything we want, we are still free in our spirit to will and to think the way we want to. The first kind of freedom, free will, always remains with us because it is a direct gift from the Lord.

Freedom is the Lord's most wonderful gift. Even though people often use it badly, He goes right on keeping us free, trying always to lift us out of “hellish freedom” and into “heavenly freedom” while we are living in the natural world.