

The Salem Leader
Educationally Speaking
Justin Harter
April 16, 2007

Does Free Will Really Exist?

Last week I was driving into work and a stoplight malfunctioned at a busy intersection approaching downtown Indianapolis. The intersection then required motorists to treat it as a four-way stop, ultimately destroying what little flow the traffic normally has and cars began packing in front of and behind me for about 15 miles. Also during this past week five people have been killed driving the wrong direction on I-465, the bypass that surrounds Indianapolis, in three separate incidents. Some reports from the Indianapolis Star indicate that as many as fifty 911 calls were reported to police during one incident at 3 AM and that one of the cars passed at least 5 “Wrong Way” signs while driving backwards against six, sometimes eight, lanes of oncoming traffic. It made me wonder, “How on earth do you get on the wrong side of 465? The only way is to drive up an exit ramp the wrong direction from a street that I-465 exits off onto because there are large concrete barricades in the median around the entire bypass. Then I thought, “What if this is what was meant to happen?”

I’d like to think out loud with you for a moment. For the most part, there are two basic thoughts that one likely has about an incident involving what happens and to who; whether it is a person driving the wrong way on I-465, a technology failure or the Iraq debacle. One thought is that this is God’s will. This is the way the Christian God planned this event or situation. Another thought is that who or what ever is at fault was merely random chance and there’s nothing we can do about it until it’s over. We can learn from it, possibly repair some of it, or enact safeguards to prevent something like this from happening again. But what strikes me as odd is that in both of these situations no one person seems to have any control. You can’t say they wanted to die. No one wants to die – not even people that want to go to Heaven want to die to get there. No one can stop the stoplight from failing and no one seems capable of stopping George W. Bush’s policy in Iraq.

It makes me wonder if free will really exists. Do we really have control over anything? It doesn’t seem like we can have what the Christian Bible claims and what we as people claim to have in terms of our own free will. Think about this and assume that there really is some form of an omnipotent God: If God is omnipotent like the Bible says He is and He knows what the future holds for each of us, like the Bible says, then how can we have the ability to choose what we do tomorrow? Take this scenario: Let’s say tomorrow you plan on going to the grocery store. God, being all knowing, knew before he created you that you were going to the grocery store tomorrow. Then did you really choose to go to the grocery store tomorrow, or did God choose for you? If God chose, free will is an illusion. If we chose then we can choose not to go at any time, or to go to a different store. Therefore, God can’t know that ahead of time. Thus, he can’t know the future. Does God let us make up our own minds? Does evil? Either way, you or someone can’t know the future. Before you claim, “God knew I would change my mind.” Realize if he

knows you were going to change your mind and not go to the store, he must have planned it that way, or at least planned on you changing your mind. Therefore, free will is an illusion that we as people can't get past.

Now take it one step further. Pick either side to the debate I just presented – either God *does* know the future and we don't have our own free will and we're like puppets; or, God *doesn't* know our future and we do have free will. Either way, the Christian Bible is saying something that can't be true. You can't have it both ways. It's impossible. Take it one step further and maybe there isn't even a god behind it at all. Maybe the random events that take place in our life like a malfunctioning stoplight are just that – random – and randomness is often on the side of those who believe the universe started with a cataclysmic explosion and that there is no God.

I welcome any feedback on this issue. I know everyone has an opinion on this topic, I'm sure. So, without using a Bible verse or claiming, "God said 'bang' and it happened", what do you think? Are you forming an opinion yourself, or is a god forming it for you?