

# Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 22

Scripture: Psalm 115:3

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Date: February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018

## *The Freedom of God*

**Psalm 115** (ESV) Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Our God is in the heavens; **he does all that he pleases.**

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.

They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.

Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

O Israel, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

The LORD has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the LORD, both the small and the great.

May the LORD give you increase, you and your children!

May you be blessed by the LORD, who made heaven and earth!

The heavens are the LORD'S heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man.

The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any who go down into silence.

But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the LORD!

**Introduction** As we have celebrated the Lord's Table today, tracking back to what our faith is all about—Jesus' death and atoning sacrifice, and His actual resurrection from being dead, for us—we proclaim our faith and complete dependence on the historicity of those two things. We love the cross and we insist on the empty tomb. Period. Not everybody trusts in these two things. They say “those are quaint but outdated beliefs.” So be it. We fly past the whimsical

fancies of time and trendy affections with what-the-hipster-scholars-think, to timeless beliefs. We freely chose to believe them. They are the air we breathe...

But today is also a kind of special for people who consider themselves “patriots”...



In fact, I find we use the word “freedom” a lot in many human scenarios:

1. Two of my favorite old songs are these two little, short ones:

“My country ‘tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim’s pride, from every mountainside let freedom ring... let freedom ring.” [1989, David Crosby]

“Find the cost of freedom, buried in the ground--Mother earth will swallow you, lay your body down.” [1970, Stephen Stills]

2. Frederick Douglass said, “I am a republican, a black, dyed in the wool republican, and I never intend to be a member of any other party than the party of freedom and progress.”
3. Trafficked slaves want to be free of pimps and johns and a hopeless despair.
4. Employees want to be free of restrictions.
5. Teens want to be free of rules.
6. Prisoners want to be free of jail.
7. In sports we have “free agents.”
8. We hear a lot, I am glad, about “freedom from harassment, bondage, oppression, addiction.”
9. We speak about providing opportunity to all people so that all people are “free to become all they can be.” In some circles people rage “I demand to be free to be me”, especially in the homosexual community. Freedom can mean lots of things. It can be liberation from being restricted or pent-up or hidden. It can mean liberty to just do anything self-indulgent you want, with no rules or anyone to object—and freedom from any guilt.
10. It *can* mean emancipation from true physical or political danger and therefore the joy of relaxing in safety.

11. We have even fantasized about people on other planets embracing the same concepts. In episode 23 of the original *Star Trek* series, season 2 (*The Omega Glory*) there is an interesting jail scene. Two residents of a planet (Omega IV, in case you are wondering) are jailed along with Captain Kirk. The two residents do not speak and they fight with Captain Kirk in the jail cell until all are exhausted. Mr. Spock is locked in an adjoining prison cell, next to them. Kirk asks Spock to keep talking to him so that he won't doze off, and he tells Spock, who has loosened a window bar, to keep working on loosening the bar so they can regain their "freedom." The male alien, "Cloud William", then speaks for the first time, noting Kirk's use of the word "freedom." He says, "Freedom? Freedom? That is a worship word. Yang worship. You will not speak it."



"Freedom" is a great passion today and a great passion in human history—so much so that ANY discussion of freedom revolves around human freedom. But today I want to talk about someone else's "free will." I want to talk about the freedom of God.

**Wayne Grudem** says that God's FREEDOM IS THAT ATTRIBUTE WHEREBY HE DOES WHATEVER HE PLEASES.<sup>1</sup>

In Psalm 115:1-3 we read ***Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.***

וְאֱלֹהֵינוּ בַּשָּׁמַיִם -- כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-חָפֵץ עָשָׂה.

U-alei-nu bshميم kl ashhr chphtz oshé

*and Elohim-of-us, in the heavens, all which He desires He does*

The old Southern Baptist theologian **J.P. Boyce** adds that

<sup>1</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 216.

“HE DOES HIS OWN WILL, NOT THAT OF ANOTHER. HE CHOOSES WHAT, AND WHOM HE WILL CREATE, AND THE TIMES, PLACES AND CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE WILL PLACE THOSE HE CREATES. HE MARKS OUT TO ALL INTELLIGENT CREATURES THE PATHS OF THEIR LIVES. HE USES THEM FOR HIS PURPOSES.” He also says--BUT “GOD DOES NOT ‘WILL’ FREELY IN THE SENSE OF WILLING ARBITRARILY. HE IS NOT INDIFFERENT AS TO WHAT HE WILL DO.”<sup>2</sup>

**Lewis Sperry Chafer**, the founder of the seminary which I attended wrote, “THE WILL OF GOD IS *FREE*. IT ACTS IN THE WAY OF WISDOM, IS EXERCISED BY INFINITE POWER, AND UPHOLDS ONLY HIS RIGHTEOUS PURPOSES AND WAYS; YET IT IS FREE IN THE SENSE THAT IT IS INDEPENDENT OF ALL HIS CREATURES AS WELL AS THEIR ACTIONS.”<sup>3</sup>

And you would be well within your rights to ask does the Bible describe God as “free”? I would say, plainly, yes:

Romans 9:16 So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

Ephesians 1:11 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,

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

Ephesians 2:7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Isaiah 45:9 Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles?’

Matthew 11:25,26 At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; Yes Father for such was Your gracious will.

The problem we see with this doctrine is not that it exists—that people believe God to be “free” of any higher power or principle than Himself. The

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<sup>2</sup> J.P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, 1887, p. 110

<sup>3</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol.1, 1948, p. 209

problem is, that *we don't like it*. We—people in general, and even believers in Christ—don't really *want* God to be free. We want Him to be subordinate to us.

That is because we're not sure that if we authorized Him to be completely free and independent, that He would manage that freedom responsibly.

It is a problem because *we* want to be the free ones (as we showed earlier).

It is a problem because we're not sure that a completely free God will know what to do in the future when things might really get rough (aliens and meteors and massive pandemics and nuclear holocausts.)

It is a problem because if God is really the ONLY one who is completely free and who can really exercise a pure and holy and righteous free will, He would be sovereign. That's what "sovereign" means!

It is a problem philosophically because if is free and untethered to any other rules than His own glory, then where does that leave all the other religions and "Hey, I have some nice friends who don't acknowledge a free Judeo-Christian God" and so I need to accommodate them.

It is a problem because I seem to have this raging, deep-down urge—it's in my mind, my will, my affections, my habits, my family history, my choices—to deny Him His real position, although I don't mind singing about His uniqueness and wonderfulness because when I sing about it, I do feel better.

- But our God has always and does always and shall always exercise His plan and decisions with no "checking in for approval" to anyone else's plan.
- He isn't subject to any rule of physics, submitted to some overarching political necessity to be in partnership with the gods of other religions,
- nor is He subject to any other higher ontological reality.

Can you see why this is so very politically incorrect today? ("Geepers Wally, if we said God is free that would make Him God!")

But He is the King and He rules sovereignly.

He is also a charitable and kind and patient King.

And He offers citizenship in His kingdom freely to anyone who will come it. He doesn't drag new citizens into His kingdom kicking and screaming. He woos new citizens to ***come now and let us reason together, though your sins be as***

**scarlet they shall be as white as snow.** (Isaiah 1:18). He delighted to make the offer 2,700 years ago, and He still makes the offer today through the Gospel.

I can't imagine wanting a God who is anything LESS than completely free. In fact, I don't think I could believe in a God who was anything less than free.

It is true that He doesn't feel the need to REVEAL everything about why and how He freely does whatsoever He wishes. We will have to wait for explanations. We may have to hang in there while we wait. But the day will come when we will be with Him, in glory, in blazing light and joy, and if then we need to extract from Him WHY He did this or that or *didn't* do this or that back here, then I believe He will say, "Ok, here's how it was."

Do you love a free God?

Let's sing about it.

I love You, Lord

Laurie Klein 1978

And I lift my voice—to worship You,

O my soul, rejoice

Take joy my King, in what You hear

May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear...<sup>4</sup>

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Posted Feb 5, 2015 at 4:07 PM

By age 24, Laurie Brendemuehl had met and married Bill Klein, and the Lord had given them their first child, a little girl. Bill was a student at Central Oregon Community College studying Forest Technology, and... well, let me have Laurie tell you the story, as she told it to me:

"It was a dark time in my life. We had no extra money, no friends nearby, no church home and my husband was busy all of the time with his studies. I didn't drive, so I couldn't get away. We lived on a highway in a mobile home, so I couldn't even put the baby in a stroller and go for a walk. Our only neighbors were people long retired and tired of life. When I needed some encouragement there was no extra money for long distance calls to family or friends. I was lonely. The only thing I was committed to was trying to get up each morning before our baby, then a toddler, and spend some time with Jesus. I knew that was where the 'life' was."

"The day the song came, I had gotten up early and was sitting with my Bible and my guitar. I realized that I didn't have anything in me to sing to Jesus. I just didn't have anything in me to offer Him. I was so empty. So, I prayed and said to the Lord, 'If you want to hear me sing, would you give me something that you would like to hear?'"

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“I started strumming on the guitar and the first words came out of my mouth with absolutely no effort. I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You. I scribbled them on a piece of paper, just in case I would want to remember them, and sing them again. Those words meant a lot to me.”

“I wondered if I could play the melody again - if I would even remember. I played and sang the two lines again. They were still there, in my mind. The last two lines just followed as effortlessly as the first two had come. It was a gift from God that just wrote itself.”

“Though it is a very simple song, it changed everything for me, and it still is changing life for me. When you are in a dark valley and the Lord gives you light, it makes all the difference, and you keep growing.”

Then Laurie shared with me this heartwarming story:

“The most meaningful time that I ever heard anyone sing my song was in the fall of 2000 while my husband and I were in a Discipleship Training School. Late one night in the dormitory, I heard a baby crying. I slipped down the hall to the outside of the door just to pray for the baby, that it would be able to sleep. As I was praying outside the door, I heard the mother singing a song, but the little one kept crying. She then began to sing “I Love You Lord,” and while she was singing, the baby fell asleep. The mother had no idea that the one who wrote the song was just outside the door.”

“We love Him, because he first loved us.” - I John 4:19