

- Q12. What special act of providence did God exercise towards man in the estate wherein he was created?
- A12. **When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.**

Scripture References: Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 5:12-14, 10:5; Luke 12:25-28; Galatians 3:12

DQ1: What did God allow man to do in the Garden of Eden?

DQ2: What did God prohibit man from doing?

DQ3: What does it mean to be obedient?

DQ4: What is a covenant of life?

DQ5: What is a covenant?

DQ6: What capacity did God give to man regarding discernment?

DQ7: What did God say about how He would deal with disobedience?

DQ8: What is death?

Notes:

God gave Adam and Eve the right of will and to choose to freely eat of all of the trees of the Garden as well as the right of will and to choose to freely not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:16-17) "Freewill" of man is established only when there is an opportunity for choose from different choices. Before the fall of man, God gave man such freewill. "Free to eat" and "must not eat" are the choices given to Adam and Eve. They had freedom to choose.

True freedom does not exist where there are no choices. Therefore, true freedom can exist only if there are choices of "free to do" and "not free to do" something. If all you have is "free to do," then there is no choice. Freewill and choices cannot be understood without the other.

Let us not turn our attention to the understanding of "freedom" and "freewill." What is freedom? It is most true sense of the word "freedom" can only be ascribed to God. God alone is truly free. Biblical and theological use of this word is quite different from how it is used outside of these contexts. When people think of freedom, they are ascribing the term as it applies to human beings, not God.

Freedom is an attribute of God that "God is able to do all that He wills." If we cannot do all that we will like could, then we do not have true freedom. In this sense, God has unlimited freedom whereas we have limited freedom. Human beings simply do not have or enjoy the same freedom that God has or enjoys. It does not mean that human beings do not have freedom. It simply means that human beings do not have the freedom of God.

God's freedom is not only unlimited in His choices. God is able to freely choose from all varieties of consequences. Human beings, on the other hand, cannot always choose the consequences of making choices even though they are capable of choosing from different choices in the first place. God's providence provides clues to man's limited ability to choose from the consequences. In the Garden, God had already determined the consequence of man's choices. "When you eat of it you will surely die." This is also true of today. If you commit a murder, then you will be punished. You may very well have the freedom to choose to kill or not kill. But the consequence of your choices is limited and you can no longer choose. This is how God designed human freedom.

Nonetheless, God gave man freedom although man's freedom is bound by the rule of God and, indeed, the rule of man. This "limited" nature of man's freedom is easily seen in creation itself. This "limited" freedom is not derogatory or bad in any way. The creation quite clearly distinguishes between the Creator and the creatures. This "limited" freedom also points to the reality of such a distinction. God gave man freedom to choose to eat or not to eat. However, the consequences of the choices were quite different. To eat was to die and to not eat was to live. These were the choices given to man. So, man was free.

We do not need to be disturbed or pained over the fact that man's freedom is limited compared to God's freedom. If only man would recognize and acknowledge God as who He is and man as who he is, then the limited nature man's freedom would not bother us a bit. The minute we forget the true identities of God and man, we will struggle with our limited freedom and seek after unlimited freedom which is not attainable.

Man, in his heart, can be filled with numerous vain dreams that could not be fulfilled. Such dreams soon encounter the reality of man's limitations and man is then awakened from repeated lapses and mistaken imaginations of being like God.

There is clear evidence that shows that freedom given to man is a limited freedom in the sense discussed earlier. That evidence is the fact that God demanded obedience from man. God's prohibition in the Garden not only speaks to a choice available to man but that also speak to the required obedience. God desired man to be obedient in the way he exercised his freedom. For God knew that man could not choose the consequence of his choice.

Freewill deals with man's capacity to enjoy freedom and the limits of it. God gave man this freewill. If man is endowed with limited freedom, then his freewill also is limited. God gave man both the capacity to be free and to be bound by limitations. In other words, God gave man freedom and freewill to be obedient or disobedient to his Word.

It is useful to consider the true freedom in the context of the God's creation. True freedom speaks to man's freewill to choose rightly and exercise his freedom rightly. Unless the right choice is not made, true freedom does not exist. The question is: could man be happy and content with the choice of disobedience as much as it is considered to be within his freewill to make such a choice?

As you come upon a busy highway, you have a choice of being careful about watching and waiting for a break in the streams of traffic in both directions or crossing the highway without

any care thinking that you are proud of the choice you have made in doing so. Depending upon the choice you make, however, it is very possible that your choice could land you in the hospital and sustain a serious injury for life. How wrong would it be for you to consider your losing your legs is a worthy trophy for the exercise of your freewill!

God gave Adam freedom and freewill that perfectly fit the man who was created in God's image and likeness. God gave man an ability to choose for himself. God also told man about the consequence of his choices. Alas, Adam abused his freedom to rightly choose for at least two reasons. First, Adam was unable to distinguish between God's unlimited freedom and man's limited freedom. Second, Adam became doubtful about the consequences of his choices. For these reasons, Adam became disobedient.

We also need to reflect upon the reasons why we become disobedience and will realize that the above two reasons apply to us just they did to Adam. First, inability to distinguish between unlimited freedom and limited freedom suggests that the identities of God and man are being confused. When we do not acknowledge God as God and man as man, we fall into sin. Second, when we become doubtful about God's predetermined consequences, we fall into sin. We sometimes doubt by thinking "how could this be?" or "the consequences do not make much sense." Some would ask "why do bad things happen to good people?"

The role of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is critical to God's creation. It addresses the obedience issue which is critical between the Creator and the creature. Obedience has to be a proper consequence of the relationship between the two. To be disobedient to God is akin to a son beating up his own father. How could this be? This is not within the realm of possibility as considered in the old eastern thoughts. This would be what is considered "against the heaven" in the eastern thought or anathema in the western thought. What took place in the Garden was something that was unthinkable. Man complains that if God did not create the tree of knowledge of good and evil, then there would not have been the original sin. Yet, the tree played a critical role in God's providence.

First, the very existence of the tree proves that God treated man with a high degree of honor and dignity. God literally made man as his covenant partner. While it was a unilateral covenant, God bestowed upon man His the right and capacity to take on the responsibility of the covenant. But, man was not a good steward of God's covenant and fell into sin.

Second, the very existence of the tree was the means by which God would measure man's obedience. Without the requirement of obedience, there could not be a rightful relationship between the Creator and the creature. It is through the tree that God clearly reminded that man was made. The reason why man sinned was because he allowed his heart to become blinded to the fact that he was made. Man soon discovered that he committed the sin of disobedience.

To be obedient to God is, first, to acknowledge God as the Creator, second, to be obedient to God's providence and third, to know and enjoy freedom found in the providence of God. For this reason, there is no true freedom outside of obedience. This is why God has required obedience of man. In order that man might become obedient by his freewill, God planted the tree and prohibited man from eating of it.

What is covenant? Covenant is “an unchangeable, divinely imposed legal agreement between God and man that stipulates the conditions of their relationships.” (Wayne Grudem) There are numerous notable covenants in the Bible. We will discuss them at length in the later studies.

What is the covenant (agreement) of life? The covenant of life is the same as the covenant of works which is found in Genesis 2:16-17. This unilateral covenant was made between God and Adam and requires obedience as a condition of the contract that would bestow upon man blessings of God (or life), i.e., works of man as in obedience. The covenant of life or works demands obedience. Adam and Eve disobeyed, made a wrong choice and ended up facing death rather than life.

The very nature of the covenant is that God’s condition has to be met and such a condition is not met the disobedient man could not escape death. To avoid death was to be obedience. If God had only given us the covenant of life or works, man could not possibly have attained to salvation. Thankfully, God gave man a new covenant called the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace has nothing to do with the works of man. The condition of the covenant of grace can only be met by faith in Jesus Christ. It does not mean that works are not required at all. It means that any and all works of man since the fall of man is woefully inadequate to satisfy the condition of the covenant of grace. So, what could possibly satisfy the condition of the covenant of grace? It requires the perfect works of Jesus Christ who is alone able to become fully obedient to God. With the perfect obedience of Christ, the covenant of grace has forever been satisfied, sealed and cannot be changes. Therefore, if we remain in Christ and Christ remains in us, we receive all of the benefits of the covenant of grace. This is the only way man could invoke the rights to the covenant of grace.

God gave Adam the covenant of life in the Garden of Eden. And Adam enjoyed the relationship with God completely in the Garden. This relationship is life. But, Adam chose death over life, leading him to become separated from the relationship with God which he had so much enjoyed.

Amazingly, those in Christ experience the fully restored or redeemed relationship with God through physical deaths. The physical deaths of Christians and non-Christians lead to complete opposite results. To non-Christians, physical death means the moment that they encounter their eternal damnation. To Christians, on the other hand, physical death means the moment that they enter into a perfect union with God which was held back by the sinfulness of the flesh. At that precise moment, we will experience true freedom as children of God. And only then, will we truly understand what it is like to have and enjoy freedom.

DQ10: What did Prophet Samuel teach King Saul? (1 Samuel 15:22)

DQ11: What did Jesus accomplish by his obedience? (Romans 5:19)

God’s providence is for us to be free in Christ. (Galatians 5:1-2)