

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 44

God Is Not Holding People Hostage To His Will

By Sharon K. Griffiee

Throughout the years I have been in prison ministry, a persistent belief about the nature of God and how He deals with His creation, has been expressed by inmates through the following statements; you may have heard them expressed many times yourself.

I will be released from prison when the Lord says I'll be released from prison.

Everything is in God's hands.

I believe the Lord has a hand in everything that happens. When He wills it, I will be released from prison and not before.

If we look carefully at the *belief system* behind these statements, there is a common link. It is the underlying belief that the Lord God is controlling everything that happens in a person's life, good or bad. If a person is sent to prison, the assumption is made that God sent them there. If a person is released from prison, it is assumed that God is responsible for getting them out. This *belief system* couldn't be further from the truth. What's wrong with this thinking? It's an excuse. It's an attempt to make God responsible for our problems, taking the responsibility off *our own* shoulders. People get a lot of comfort from supposing their tragedies are the "*will of God*". They think they can cope better, if they believe it is God's will. It is much harder to cope, if the tragedy was caused by their own action, or by another person, and not by the will of God. If someone can believe their hardship is God's will for them, then they can "*suck it up*" and deal with it! However, this is taking refuge in a lie. Facing the truth about the choices we've made is costly, but only the truth can set us free (**John 8:31-36**).

Consider this, if God is controlling everything that happens in our life, then our actions are irrelevant and our efforts are totally meaningless. Standing before God in Judgment to give an account of our

lives, will have no meaning whatsoever if God is controlling us.

Revelation 20:12-13 (KJV) - *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead, which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead, which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.*

If we are simply pawns and God is manipulating our life to fulfill His purposes, to ensure that everything comes out the way *He* wants it; then He is flat out holding people *hostage* to His will. The scary part? If God is controlling everything that happens in our lives, then He is also controlling everything that happens in other people's lives. Where would that leave us? It would leave us with no say, no opportunity to change. All we can do is drift from day to day as helpless creatures, helpless slaves, mumbling, "*what ever will be, will be.*"

Not so! God has far more respect for His creation than that! In fact, God has so much respect for His creation that He created humankind with the ability to think and to reason – to make their own decisions. God has given us the most precious gift imaginable – the freedom to choose!

God has a perfect plan for every person's life (**Jeremiah 29:11**), and He seeks to reveal that plan to those who will listen. He constantly encourages us to follow His direction. Because we are free moral agents with the ability to choose, He tells us through His Holy Spirit (and through His written Word) what the right choices are. But, God doesn't make those choices for us, nor does He override (neutralize) the consequences of our choices. There are lessons we must learn along the way, such as,

Proverbs 19:19 (NIV) - *A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.*

It is our right choices that bring blessings upon us. It is our wrong choices that bring adversity upon us. The Lord God simply enforces (puts into effect) the *consequences* of people's own choices.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (NIV) – *“This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life...”*

Our Heavenly Father created us in order that we might love Him freely and truly. That means we must be able to accept or reject His plans for us. When God asks us to do something, He needs our full cooperation for it to come to pass.

Many years ago God asked me to write an inspirational article that was on His heart. Someone needed to hear what God wanted to say to him or her through that article. I felt good about it, I had listened to His voice and I knew what He wanted me to do. So I went into my office to begin. Guided by His Spirit, I began writing.

About halfway through the article I decided I wanted to take a break. It was summertime after all, and since things were flowing so well with the article, it wouldn't matter if I took a few days off to enjoy the summer sunshine. I soon found out that my carnal, human, reasoning didn't line up with God's plans. Accustomed to hearing God's voice speak directly into my spirit, He gave me a firm alternative. It was an alternative I will never forget and it was my choice to make.

He said, *“Sharon, if you don't finish that article, I will not give you any more.”*

I knew immediately this was an urgent matter. Not only did the article need to be finished promptly, but also God was laying my response to Him on the line. And, He was spelling out the consequences. He wanted to know if He could trust me with future assignments. Given that my personal relationship with God is the most important thing in my life, *He*

is my life, I didn't waste time getting back into my office to finish the article. My priorities were now in place. The positive feedback I received from the finished article, revealed to me the tremendous joy of partnering with God to fulfill His purposes on earth. What if I had said “no”? Refusing to obey would have had dire consequences, resulting in frustration, loneliness and separation from God.

The Bottom Line: God is not controlling everything that happens in our life. He is not holding people *hostage* to His will. Because God has given us the most precious gift imaginable – the freedom to choose, we have the God-given right to control our own destiny. That means we must be able to accept or reject God's plan for us. He constantly encourages us to follow His direction. But, God will not make our choices for us, nor will He override the consequences of our choices. It's up to us! I bear witness that God has never asked me to do anything, without first of all asking me if I would be willing to do it. It is in *doing*, when our will lines up with God's will, that we truly find life.

Questions for personal or group study:

1. For what reason do people believe that God is controlling everything that happens in a person's life? How is this taking refuge in a lie?
2. Jesus wants us to face the truth about the choices we've made. What instruction does Jesus give us to break free from being a slave to sin and finding the truth that will set us free? (**John 8:31-36**)
3. As free moral agents, God has given us the freedom to choose our own destiny. If we choose to walk away from God, will He override (neutralize) the consequences of that choice?
4. When God asks us to do something, what does He require from us for it to come to pass?
5. What does it do to our relationship with God when we don't finish what He asked us to do? How does this affect future assignments He might want to give us?
6. God is not holding people hostage to His will. How does this release your faith to come to Him of your own free will? (**Revelation 22:17**)