

Determinism, indeterminism and the grace of God

One of the most difficult concepts for most people to understand is that of determinism, and for this reason, most people find it difficult to understand why God saves us by grace rather than merit. The life review that frequently occurs during the Near Death Experience illustrates this. During the life review, the subject relives all of the important details of his/her life from his/her own perspective and also from the perspective of those who were positively or negatively affected by his/her actions. Although the subject may feel remorse for those actions, God is not the one doing the judging. The subject is his/her own judge. God and those who are overseeing the life review dispense only unconditional love. The life review is a process of evaluation, but not judgment. In other words, the subject is held accountable for his/her actions, but there is no animosity involved on the part of God or other observers.

The experience of being a sinner saved by grace is extremely important to the learning process. The subject learns first-hand what it is like to be on the receiving end of their misdeeds, and actually experiences the physical and emotional pain of those whose lives their actions have affected. They also experience the happiness and gratitude of others that have resulted from their good deeds. At the same time, they experience God's unconditional love and forgiveness. They understand more completely than before how their actions affect others and the importance of love and forgiveness.

During our earthly walk, we have difficulty dispensing this same kind of unconditional, Godly love towards people, especially our enemies. Why is this so? Because we do not completely understand why people behave the way they do. This brings me to the subject of determinism and indeterminism. The determinist believes that everything that happens (including every life choice) is determined or caused by prior events. The indeterminist believes that life events, although caused, cannot be predicted. The same cause can have any one of an infinite number of completely different long-lasting results, according to Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty. If you observe the position and/or velocity of any given particle, there is no way you can exactly predict its future position and/or velocity. In most cases, your approximations will be correct, but those results will fall only within a range of probabilities. When you multiply this unpredictability of the motion of a single particle by total number of interacting particles involved in each human event or decision, what you end up with is total and complete unpredictability.

Most Christians confuse indeterminism (ie. unpredictability) with free will. That is, they believe our decisions are freely made, and because of this, we are justly condemned to Hell for all eternity by God for our sinful actions, unless we repent. In truth, the penalty for sin is not consignment to a place called Hell for all eternity. Instead, the penalty is spiritual death, which I would define as the experience of estrangement from God. This estrangement, or separation, from God is only an illusion. God never leaves us nor forsakes us. We only think this is the case. The negative experience of estrangement from God is real, but not actual. And the experience is only temporary. If we are not reconciled with God (ie. saved) before we die, we will be after death, though not always immediately after death.

God holds us accountable for our sins, but He does not punish us for them. God's judgments during our physical existence on earth take the form of negative life experiences, and after death they take the form of the life review. The purpose of God's judgments is correction and purification, not retribution. One of the reasons we do not receive divine retribution for our sins is that our sinful condition was not self-caused. According to the Bible, our sinful condition results from our carnal, fleshly, nature and we are freed from it only by the power of God's Holy Spirit within. We literally cannot help ourselves. Our sinful nature and actions were determined by God, who placed us in these physical bodies. At the same time, the results of the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives cannot be predicted. Each one of us has a unique set of DNA and life circumstances, and because of this we all respond differently to the wooing and influence of the Holy Spirit. Even if we were identical twins, with the exact same DNA and life experiences, we would be making different life choices. We are all free to make our own life choices. At the same time, however, those choices are not technically self-caused.