

Human Free Will and God's Grace in the Early Church Fathers

Mako A. Nagasawa

Last modified: August 5, 2013

'Moreover although the Greek Fathers, above others, and especially Chrysostom, have exceeded due bounds in extolling the powers of the human will, yet all ancient theologians, with the exception of Augustine, are so confused, vacillating, and contradictory on this subject, that no certainty can be obtained from their writings.'

- John Calvin, *Institutes*, book 2, chapter 2, section 4

Below are a few of the many passages from the early theologians that demonstrate that Calvin was mistaken. They were not 'confused, vacillating, and contradictory.' In fact, on this subject, they were very clear, and there is a consensus among them about human free will. Two prominent church historians, Philip Schaff and J.N.D Kelly, write respectively:

'The Greek, and particularly the Alexandrian fathers, in opposition to the dualism and fatalism of the Gnostic systems, which made evil a necessity of nature, laid great stress upon human freedom, and upon the indispensable cooperation of this freedom with divine grace; while the Latin fathers, especially Tertullian and Cyprian, Hilary and Ambrose, guided rather by their practical experience than by speculative principles, emphasized the hereditary sin and hereditary guilt of man, and the sovereignty of God's grace, without, however, denying freedom and individual accountability. The Greek church adhered to her undeveloped synergism, which coordinates the human will and divine grace as factors in the work of conversion; the Latin church, under the influence of Augustine, advanced to the system of a divine monergism, which gives God all the glory, and makes freedom itself a result of grace; while Pelagianism, on the contrary, represented the principle of a human monergism, which ascribes the chief merit of conversion to man, and reduces grace to a mere external auxiliary. After Augustine's death, however the intermediate system of Semi-Pelagianism, akin to the Greek synergism, became prevalent in the West.'¹

'A point on which they (the Eastern Fathers) were all agreed was that man's will remains free; we are responsible for our acts. This was a vital article in their anti-Manichaeian propaganda, but it raised the question of man's need of divine grace. This issue is usually posed in the terms which the later Augustinian discussion is made familiar, and so viewed their position was that grace and free will co-operate. Our salvation comes, stated Gregory Nazianzen, both from ourselves and from God. If God's help is necessary for doing good and if the good will itself comes from Him, it is equally true that the initiative rests with man's free will... Although we have only cited these two (Ambrose and Ambrosiaster), there is little doubt that their views were representative (of the Western Fathers). On the related question of grace, the parallel truths of man's free will and his need of God's help were maintained, although we can discern increasing emphasis being laid on the latter. 'We must be and directed', wrote Hilary, 'by His grace'; but he makes it plain the initial move in God's direction lies at our own disposition. God's mercy, he points out elsewhere, does not exclude man's desert, and a man's own will must take the lead in lifting him from sin. 'It is for God to call', remarks Jerome, 'and for us to believe'. The part of grace, it would seem, is to perfect that which the will has freely determined; yet our will is only ours by God's mercy.'²

As one can easily see, Calvin's conclusion about the literary evidence is incorrect. Furthermore, Calvin is suggesting something which is historically implausible: That the earliest theologians, including those who reportedly knew the apostles personally, and including those who were one or two generations removed, completely fell away from them on this very central issue. Either the apostles themselves were so muddled in their communication, or the early church theologians were so dull of hearing, that this central truth was lost in quick order, and it took Augustine, who lived four hundred years after the fact, to 'rediscover' the truth about God's sole, overpowering, omnicausal will in what is now called 'monergism' (one will in the universe – that of God).

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* Vol.III, ch.9, sec.146 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1867)

² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1978), p.352, 356

This early church consensus stands against the Augustinian-Reformed monergist interpretation of (say) predestination in Romans 9 – 11. Humanity's free will was a central component of orthodox theology. Before Augustine's debates with the Pelagians, and arguably in Augustine himself (he did write *The Freedom of the Will*) there is no evidence that anyone interpreted Romans 9 – 11 to support a 'double predestination' or a 'sovereignty of God' view that is logically mutually exclusive with human free will. Even more damaging to the Augustinian monergist tradition is the fact that Augustine read and spoke Latin but not Greek. American Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart attributes Augustine's mistake about Paul's definition of 'predestination' to his unfamiliarity with Greek, which had a more flexible sense of the word than Latin. Greg Boyd notes, 'This in part explains why Calvin cannot cite ante-Nicene fathers against his libertarian opponents (e.g. Pighuis). Hence, when Calvin debates Pighuis on the freedom of the will, he cites Augustine abundantly, but no early church fathers are cited.'

This early church consensus laid the groundwork for St. John Cassian in the fifth century to disagree with the later Augustine, in debating Pelagius, on the question of monergism for not making sufficient space for human free will, and to claim that Augustine was defining 'predestination' and 'God's sovereignty' in ways that, until that point, had not been defined thus. Augustine, then, was known to have broken with the theological consensus of church tradition. This consensus also laid the foundation for the Eastern Orthodox to articulate the doctrine called synergism, in contrast to Augustine's monergism.

Clement of Rome (died circa 99 AD)

(Tradition has identified him with the Clement who is mentioned in Philippians 4:3, who would have thus known Peter and Paul personally. He was the third or fourth bishop of Rome.)

'For no other reason does God punish the sinner either in the present or future world, except because He knows that the sinner was able to conquer but neglected to gain the victory.' (Clement of Rome, *Recognitions* 111. 23, V. 8, IX. 30.)

The Epistle of 'Mathetes' to Diognetus (date 1st – 2nd century, once attributed to Justin Martyr)

(The true author is unknown, as 'Mathetes' was not a proper name but means 'a disciple.' Possibly he was a disciple of the apostles, because of this comment: 'I do not speak of things strange to me, nor do I aim at anything inconsistent with right reason; but having been a disciple of the Apostles, I am become a teacher of the Gentiles' - chapter 11, verse 1)

'As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; as to men He sent Him; as a Saviour He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us; for violence has no place in the character of God. As calling us He sent Him, not as vengefully pursuing us; as loving us He sent Him, not as judging us.' (*Epistle to Diognetus*, chapter 7, verse 4)

'And do not wonder that a man may become an imitator of God. He can, if he is willing.' (*Epistle to Diognetus*, chapter 10)

Ignatius of Antioch (30 – 107 AD, traditionally held to be a disciple of the Apostle John)

'...and there is set before us life upon our observance [of God's precepts], but death as the result of disobedience, and every one, according to the choice he makes, shall go to his own place, let us flee from death, and make choice of life.' (*The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, ch.5, long version)

'If any one is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but by his own choice.' (*The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, ch.5, long version)

The Shepherd of Hermas (circa 100 AD)

Comment from John Cassian: 'For it was not given only to David to think what is good of himself, nor is it denied to us naturally to think or imagine anything that is good. It cannot then be doubted that there are by nature some seeds of goodness in every soul implanted by the kindness of the Creator: but unless these are quickened by the assistance of God, they will not be able to attain to an increase of perfection, for, as the blessed Apostle says: 'Neither is he that planteth anything nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase.' *But that freedom of the will is to some degree in a man's own power is very clearly taught in the book termed the Pastor [i. e., the Shepherd of Hermas], where two angels are said to be attached to each one of us, i. e., a good and a bad one, while it lies at a man's own option to choose which to follow.* And therefore the will always remains free in man, and can either neglect or delight in the grace of God. For the Apostle would not have commanded saying: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,' had he not known that it could be advanced or neglected by us. But that men might not fancy that they had no need of Divine aid for the work of Salvation, he subjoins: 'For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.' And therefore he warns Timothy and says: 'Neglect not the grace of God which is in thee;' and again: 'For which cause I exhort thee to stir up the grace of God which is in thee...' (John Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII.12, emphasis added)

St. Justin Martyr (circa 100 – 165 AD):

'God's foreknowledge is intuitive, not active, and is caused by man's choices.' And also, 'We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions-whatever they may be... For neither would a man be worthy of reward or praise if he did not of himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for.' (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter 43)

'...God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness; possessing reason, that they may know by whom they are created, and through whom they, not existing formerly, do now exist; and with a law that they should be judged by Him, if they do anything contrary to right reason: and of ourselves we, men and angels, shall be convicted of having acted sinfully, unless we repent beforehand. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God had created them so. So that if they repent, all who wish for it can obtain mercy from God...' (Justin Martyr, *Second Apology for the Christians addressed to the Roman Senate*, chapter CXLI)

'But lest some suppose, from what has been said by us, that we say that whatever happens, happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain. We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, and chastisements, and good rewards, are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Since if it be not so, but all things happen by fate, neither is anything at all in our own power. For if it be fated that this man, e.g., be good, and this other evil, neither is the former meritorious nor the latter to be blamed. And again, unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions, of whatever kind they be. But that it is by free choice they both walk uprightly and stumble, we thus demonstrate. We see the same man making a transition to opposite things. Now, if it had been fated that he were to be either good or bad, he could never have been capable of both the opposites, nor of so many transitions. But not even would some be good and others bad, since we thus make fate the cause of evil, and exhibit her as acting in opposition to herself; or that which has been already stated would seem to be true, that neither virtue nor vice is anything, but that things are only reckoned good or evil by opinion; which, as the true word shows, is the greatest impiety and wickedness. But this we assert is inevitable fate, that they who choose the good have worthy rewards, and they who choose the opposite have their merited awards. For not like other things, as trees and quadrupeds, which cannot act by choice, did God make man: for neither would he be worthy of reward or praise did he not of himself choose the good, but were created for this end; nor, if he were evil, would he be worthy of

punishment, not being evil of himself, but being able to be nothing else than what he was made.’ (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chapter XLIII)

‘For God, wishing both angels and men, who were endowed with free-will, and at their own disposal, to do whatever He had strengthened each to do, made them so, that if they chose the things acceptable to Himself, He would keep them free from death and from punishment; but that if they did evil, He would punish each as He sees fit.’ (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 88)

‘But yet, since He knew that it would be good, He created both angels and men free to do that which is righteous, and He appointed periods of time during which He knew it would be good for them to have the exercise of free-will; and because He likewise knew it would be good, He made general and particular judgments; each one's freedom of will, however, being guarded.’ (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapter 102)

‘In the beginning, He made the human race with the power of thought and of choosing the truth and doing right, so that all men are without excuse before God.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.177)

‘Unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not responsible for their actions.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.177)

‘We maintain that each man acts rightly or sins by his free choice...Since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free will, they will justly suffer in eternal fire the punishment of whatever sins they have committed.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.190)

‘It was God’s desire for both angels and men, who were endowed with free will...that if they choose the things acceptable to Him, He would keep them from death and from punishment. However, if they did evil, He would punish each as He sees fit.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.243)

‘He created both angels and men free to do that which is righteous. And He appointed periods of time during which He knew it would be good for them to have the exercise of free will.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.250)

‘I have proved in what has been said that those who were foreknown to be unrighteous, whether men or angels, are not made wicked by God’s fault. Rather, each man is what he will appear to be through his own fault.’ (Justin Martyr, 160 AD, 1.269)

Tertullian (110-165 AD)

‘...it is not the part of good and solid faith to refer all things to the will of God...as to make us fail to understand that there is something within our power.’ (Tertullian, *Exhortation on Chastity*, 2)

‘I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power...Man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance.’ (Tertullian, 207 AD, 3.300, 301)

‘You must necessarily correspond to the seed from which you sprang – if indeed it is true that the originator of our race and our sin, Adam, willed the sin which he committed.’ (Tertullian, 212 AD, 4.51)

Tatian (110 – 172 AD)

‘The Logos...before the creation of men, was the Framer of angels. And each of these two orders of creatures was made free to act as it pleased, not having the nature of good, which again is with God alone, but is brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice, in order that the bad man may be justly punished...but the just man be deservedly praised...Such is the constitution of things in reference to angels and men.’

Also, ‘...our free-will has destroyed us...Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness.’ (Tatian, *Address to the Greeks*)

Athenagoras (177 AD)

'Just as with men, who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice, so it is among the angels...Some free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which he had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them.' - A Plea for the Christians 24.

Irenaeus (120 – 202 AD)

'For He who makes the chaff and He who makes the wheat are not different persons, but one and the same, who judges them, that is, separates them. But the wheat and the chaff, being inanimate and irrational, have been made such by nature. But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff. Wherefore also he shall be justly condemned because, having been created a rational being, he lost the true rationality, and living irrationally, opposed the righteousness of God, serving all lusts; as says the prophet, 'Man, being in honor, did not understand: he was assimilated to senseless beasts, and made like to them.' (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 4, 3)

'1. This expression [of our Lord], 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldest not,' set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because *God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests (ad utendum sententia) of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually.* And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious, but poured contempt upon His super-eminent goodness. Rejecting therefore the good, and as it were spewing it out, they shall all deservedly incur the just judgment of God, which also the Apostle Paul testifies in his Epistle to the Romans, where he says, 'But dost thou despise the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, being ignorant that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.' 'But glory and honour,' he says, 'to every one that doeth good.' *God therefore has given that which is good, as the apostle tells us in this Epistle, and they who work it shall receive glory and honour, because they have done that which is good when they had it in their power not to do it; but those who do it not shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good when they had it in their power so to do.*

'2. *But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made [originally]. But since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good; and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it,--some do justly receive praise even among men who are under the control of good laws (and much more from God), and obtain deserved testimony of their choice of good in general, and of persevering therein; but the others are blamed, and receive a just condemnation, because of their rejection of what is fair and good. And therefore the prophets used to exhort men to what was good, to act justly and to work righteousness, as I have so largely demonstrated, because it is in our power so to do, and because by excessive negligence we might become forgetful, and thus stand in need of that good counsel which the good God has given us to know by means of the prophets.*

'3. For this reason the Lord also said, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.' And, 'Take heed to yourselves, lest perchance your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and worldly cares.' And, 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He returns from the wedding, that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open to Him. Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall find so doing.' And

again, 'The servant who knows his Lord's will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.' And, 'Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?' And again, 'But if the servant say in his heart, The Lord delayeth, and begin to beat his fellow-servants, and to eat, and drink, and to be drunken, his Lord will come in a day on which he does not expect Him, and shall cut him in sunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites.' *All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man, and at the same time the counsel which God conveys to him, by which He exhorts us to submit ourselves to Him, and seeks to turn us away from [the sin of] unbelief against Him, without, however, in any way coercing us.*

'4. No doubt, if any one is unwilling to follow the Gospel itself, it is in his power [to reject it], but it is not expedient. For *it is in man's power to disobey God, and to forfeit what is good*; but [such conduct] brings no small amount of injury and mischief. And on this account Paul says, 'All things are lawful to me, but all things are not expedient;' referring both to the liberty of man, in which respect 'all things are lawful,' God exercising no compulsion in regard to him; and [by the expression] 'not expedient' pointing out that we 'should not use our liberty as a cloak of maliciousness,' for this is not expedient. And again he says, 'Speak ye every man truth with his neighbour.' And, 'Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor scurrility, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.' [4406] And, 'For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk honestly as children of the light, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in anger and jealousy. And such were some of you; but ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified in the name of our Lord.' *If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things, and to abstain from others? But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created, advice is always given to him to keep fast the good, which thing is done by means of obedience to God.*

'5. And not merely in works, but also in faith, has God preserved the will of man free and under his own control, saying, 'According to thy faith be it unto thee;' thus showing that there is a faith specially belonging to man, since he has an opinion specially his own. And again, 'All things are possible to him that believeth;' and, 'Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' Now all such expressions demonstrate that man is in his own power with respect to faith. And for this reason, 'he that believeth in Him has eternal life while he who believeth not the Son hath not eternal life, but the wrath of God shall remain upon him.' In the same manner therefore the Lord, both showing His own goodness, and *indicating that man is in his own free will and his own power*, said to Jerusalem, 'How often have I wished to gather thy children together, as a hen [gathereth] her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Wherefore your house shall be left unto you desolate.'

'6. Those, again, who maintain the opposite to these [conclusions], do themselves present the Lord as destitute of power, as if, forsooth, He were unable to accomplish what He willed; or, on the other hand, as being ignorant that they were by nature 'material,' as these men express it, and such as cannot receive His immortality. 'But He should not,' say they, 'have created angels of such a nature that they were capable of transgression, nor men who immediately proved ungrateful towards Him; for they were made rational beings, endowed with the power of examining and judging, and were not [formed] as things irrational or of a [merely] animal nature, which can do nothing of their own will, but are drawn by necessity and compulsion to what is good, in which things there is one mind and one usage, working mechanically in one groove (*inflexibiles et sine judicio*), who are incapable of being anything else except just what they had been created.' *But upon this supposition, neither would what is good be grateful to them, nor communion with God be precious, nor would the good be very much to be sought after, which would present itself without their own proper endeavour, care, or study, but would be implanted of its own accord and without their concern. Thus it would come to pass, that their being good would be of no consequence, because they were so by nature rather than by will, and are possessors of good spontaneously, not by choice; and for this reason they would not understand this fact, that good is a comely thing, nor would they take pleasure in it. For how can those who are ignorant of good enjoy it? Or what credit is it to those who have not aimed at it? And what crown is it to those who have not followed in pursuit of it, like those victorious in the contest?'*

'7. On this account, too, did the Lord assert that the kingdom of heaven was the portion of 'the violent;' and He says, 'The violent take it by force;' that is, those who by strength and earnest striving are on the watch to snatch it away on the moment. On this account also Paul the Apostle says to the Corinthians, 'Know ye not, that they who run in a racecourse, do all indeed run, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. Every one also who engages in the contest is temperate in all things: now these men [do it] that they may obtain a corruptible crown, but

we an incorruptible. But I so run, not as uncertainty; I fight, not as one beating the air; but I make my body livid, and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, when preaching to others, I may myself be rendered a castaway.’ This able wrestler, therefore, exhorts us to the struggle for immortality, that we may be crowned, and may deem the crown precious, namely, that which is acquired by our struggle, but which does not encircle us of its own accord (sed non ultro coalitam). And the harder we strive, so much is it the more valuable; while so much the more valuable it is, so much the more should we esteem it. And indeed those things are not esteemed so highly which come spontaneously, as those which are reached by much anxious care. Since, then, this power has been conferred upon us, both the Lord has taught and the apostle has enjoined us the more to love God, that we may reach this [prize] for ourselves by striving after it. For otherwise, no doubt, this our good would be [virtually] irrational, because not the result of trial. Moreover, the faculty of seeing would not appear to be so desirable, unless we had known what a loss it were to be devoid of sight; and health, too, is rendered all the more estimable by an acquaintance with disease; light, also, by contrasting it with darkness; and life with death. Just in the same way is the heavenly kingdom honourable to those who have known the earthly one. But in proportion as it is more honourable, so much the more do we prize it; and if we have prized it more, we shall be the more glorious in the presence of God. The Lord has therefore endured all these things on our behalf, in order that we, having been instructed by means of them all, may be in all respects circumspect for the time to come, and that, having been rationally taught to love God, we may continue in His perfect love: for God has displayed long-suffering in the case of man’s apostasy; while man has been instructed by means of it, as also the prophet says, ‘Thine own apostasy shall heal thee;’ God thus determining all things beforehand for the bringing of man to perfection, for his edification, and for the revelation of His dispensations, that goodness may both be made apparent, and righteousness perfected, and that the Church may be fashioned after the image of His Son, and that man may finally be brought to maturity at some future time, becoming ripe through such privileges to see and comprehend God.’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, chapter 37, paragraphs 1 – 7)

‘In the previous books I have set forth the causes for which God permitted these things to be made, and have pointed out that all such have been created for the benefit of that human nature which is saved, ripening for immortality that which is [possessed] of its own free will and its own power, and preparing and rendering it more adapted for eternal subjection to God.’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 29)

Clement of Alexandria (153 – 217 AD)

‘So in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins...punishments are rightly inflicted.’ - Stromata 1:17.

Also, ‘This was the law from the first, that virtue should be the object of voluntary choice.’ - Stromata 7:2.

‘A man by himself working and toiling at freedom from sinful desires achieves nothing. But if he plainly shows himself to be very eager and earnest about this, he attains it by the addition of the power of God. God works together with willing souls. But if the person abandons his eagerness, the spirit from God is also restrained. To save the unwilling is the act of one using compulsion; but to save the willing, that of one showing grace.’ - Salvation of the Rich Man chap. 21

‘Neither praise nor condemnation, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary.’ Miscellanies bk. 1, chap. 17

We...have believed and are saved by voluntary choice.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.217)

Each one of us who sins with his own free will, chooses punishment. So the blame lies with him who chooses. God is without blame.
(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.226)

Neither praises nor censures, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of inclination and disinclination and if evil is involuntary.... In no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins,...punishments are justly inflicted.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.319)

We have heard from the Scriptures that self-determining choice and refusal have been given by the Lord to men. Therefore, we rest in the infallible criterion of faith, manifesting a willing spirit, since we have chosen life.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.349)

To obey or not to obey is in our own power, provided we do not have the excuse of ignorance.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.353)

Sin, then, is voluntary on my part.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.362)

The Lord clearly shows sins and transgressions to be in our own power, by prescribing modes of cure corresponding to the maladies.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.363)

Their estrangement is the result of free choice.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.426)

Believing and obeying are in our own power.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.527)

Nor will he who is saved be saved against his will, for he is not inanimate. But above all, he will speed to salvation voluntarily and of free choice.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.534)

Choice depended on the man as being free. But the gift depended on God as the Lord. And He gives to those who are willing, are exceedingly earnest, and who ask. So their salvation becomes their own. For God does not compel.

(Clement of Alexandria, 195 AD, 2.593)

Origen (185 – 255 AD)

In response to a claim (much like the Calvinist doctrine of God's exhaustive sovereignty) that 'whatever happens in the universe, whether it be the work of God, of angels [or] of other demons...is regulated by the law of the Most High God,' Origen says, 'This is...incorrect; for we cannot say that transgressors follow the law of God when they transgress; and Scripture declares that it is not only wicked men who are transgressors, but also wicked demons and wicked angels...When we say that 'the providence of God regulates all things,' we utter a great truth if we attribute to that providence nothing but what is just and right. But if we ascribe to the providence of God all things whatsoever, however unjust they may be, then it is no longer true that the providence of God regulates all things.' Against Celsus 7:68.

'He makes Himself known to those who, after doing all that their powers will allow, confess that they need help from Him.' Against Celsus bk. 7, chap. 42

Let us begin, then, with those words which were spoken to Pharaoh, who is said to have been hardened by God, in order that he might not let the people go; and, along with his case, the language of the apostle also will be considered, where he says, 'Therefore He has mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardens.' For it is on these passages chiefly that the heretics rely, asserting that salvation is not in our own power, but that souls are of such a nature as must by all means be either lost or saved; and that in no way can a soul which is of an evil nature become good, or one which is of a virtuous nature be made bad. (De Principiis Book III, Chapter I: On the Freedom of the Will VIII)

This is also clearly defined in the teaching of the church, that every rational soul has free will and volition....we are not forced by any necessity to act either rightly or wrongly.

(Origen, 225 AD, 4.240)

It seems a plausible thing that rational natures, from whom the faculty of free will is never taken away, may be again subjected to movements of some kind.
(Origen, 225 AD, 4.272)

Since those rational creatures themselves... were endowed with the power of free will, this freedom of the will incited each one to either progress (by imitation of God), or else it reduced a person to failure through negligence.
(Origen, 225 AD, 4.292)

In the preaching of the church, there is included the doctrine concerning a just judgment of God. When this teaching is believed to be true, it incites those who hear it to live virtuously and to shun sin by all means. For they clearly acknowledge that things worthy of praise and blame are within our own power.
(Origen, 225 AD, 4.302)

Tatian the Assyrian

Each of these two orders of creatures [men and angels] was made free to act as it pleased. They did not have the nature of good, which again is with God alone. However, it is brought to perfection in men through their freedom of choice. In this manner, the bad man can be justly punished, having become depraved through his own fault. Likewise, the just man can be deservedly praised for his virtuous deeds, since in the exercise of his free choice, he refrained from transgressing the will of God.
(Tatian, 160 AD, 2.67)

We were not created to die. Rather, we die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us. We who were free have become slaves. We have been sold through sin. Nothing evil has been created by God. We ourselves have manifested wickedness. But we, who have manifested it, are able again, to reject it.
(Tatian, 160 AD, 2.69)

Melito of Sardis

There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner of life, because you are a free man.
(Melito, 170 AD, 8.754)

Hippolytus

God, who created [the world], did not nor does not, make evil...Now, man (who was brought into existence) was a creature endowed with a capacity of self-determination, yet he did not possess a sovereign intellect....Man, from the fact of his possessing a capacity for self-determination, brings forth evil....Since man has free will, a law has been given him by God, for a good purpose. For a law will not be laid down for an animal devoid of reason. Only a bridle and whip will be given it. In contrast, man has been given a commandment to perform, coupled with a penalty.
(Hippolytus, 225 AD, 5.151)

The Word promulgated the divine commandments by declaring them. He thereby turned man from disobedience. He summoned man to liberty through a choice involving spontaneity – not by bringing him into servitude by force of necessity.
(Hippolytus, 225 AD, 5.152)

Man is able to both will and not to will. He is endowed with power to do both.
(Hippolytus, 225 AD, 5.152)

Novatian (circa 200 – 258 AD)

When he had given man all things for his service, he willed that man alone should be free. And lest an unbounded freedom would lead man into peril, He had laid down a command, in which man was taught that there was no evil in the fruit of the tree. Rather, he was forewarned that evil would arise if man were to exercise his free will in contempt of the law that had been given him....As a result, he could receive either worthy rewards or a just punishment. For he had in his own power that which he might choose to do.
(Novatian, 235 AD, 5.612)

Cyprian (died 258 AD)

The liberty of believing or not believing is placed in free choice. In Deuteronomy, it says, 'Look! I have set before your face life and death, good and evil. Choose for yourself life, that you may live.'
(Cyprian, 250 AD, 5.547)

Archelaus (250 – 300 AD)

'All the creatures that God made, He made very good. And He gave to every individual the sense of free will, by which standard He also instituted the law of judgment...And certainly whoever will, may keep the commandments. Whoever despises them and turns aside to what is contrary to them, shall yet without doubt have to face this law of judgment...There can be no doubt that every individual, in using his own proper power of will, may shape his course in whatever direction he pleases.' - Disputation With Manes 32, 33

Methodius of Olympus (died 311 AD)

Man was made with a free will...on account of his capacity of obeying or disobeying God. For this was the meaning of the gift of free will.
(Methodius, 290 AD, 6.362)

I say that God – purposing to honor man in this manner and to grant him an understanding of better things – has given man the power of being able to do what he wishes. He commends the use of his power for better things. However, it is not that God deprives man again of free will. Rather, He wishes to point out the better way. For the power is present with man, and he receives the commandment. But God exhorts him to turn his power of choice to better things.
(Methodius, 290 AD, 6.362)

I do not think that God urges man to obey His commandments, but then deprives him of the power to obey or disobey.... He does not give a command in order to take away the power that he has given. Rather, He gives it in order to bestow a better gift...in return for his rendered obedience to God. For man had power to withhold it. I say that man was made with free will.
(Methodius, 290 AD, 6.362)

[Methodius] says that it is in our power to do, or to avoid doing, evil. Otherwise, we would not be punished for doing evil nor be rewarded for doing good.
(Methodius, 290 AD, 6.370, as quoted by Photius)

'Those [pagans] who decide that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils.' - The Banquet of the Ten Virgins discourse 8, chap. 16

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (circa 312 – 386 AD)

The soul is self-governed: and though the devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to you the thought of fornication: if you will, you accept it; if you will not, you reject. For if you were a

fornicator by necessity, then for what cause did God prepare hell? If you were a doer of righteousness by nature and not by will, wherefore did God prepare crowns of ineffable glory? The sheep is gentle, but never was it crowned for its gentleness: since its gentle quality belongs to it not from choice but by nature. (Catechetical Lectures IV)

St. Basil of Caesarea (circa 300 – 379 AD)

If the origin of our virtues and of our vices is not in ourselves, but is the fatal consequence of our birth, it is useless for legislators to prescribe for us what we ought to do, and what we ought to avoid; it is useless for judges to honour virtue and to punish vice. The guilt is not in the robber, not in the assassin: it was willed for him; it was impossible for him to hold back his hand, urged to evil by inevitable necessity. Those who laboriously cultivate the arts are the maddest of men. The labourer will make an abundant harvest without sowing seed and without sharpening his sickle. Whether he wishes it or not, the merchant will make his fortune, and will be flooded with riches by fate. As for us Christians, we shall see our great hopes vanish, since from the moment that man does not act with freedom, there is neither reward for justice, nor punishment for sin. Under the reign of necessity and of fatality there is no place for merit, the first condition of all righteous judgment. But let us stop. You who are sound in yourselves have no need to hear more, and time does not allow us to make attacks without limit against these unhappy men. (Hexaemeron - Homily VI, Chap VII)

John of Damascus

‘We ought to understand that while God knows all things beforehand, yet He does not predetermine all things. For He knows beforehand those things that are in our power, but He does not predetermine them. For it is not His will that there should be wickedness nor does He choose to compel virtue... Bear in mind, too, that virtue is a gift from God implanted in our nature, and that He Himself is the source and cause of all good, and without His co-operation and help we cannot will or do any good thing. But we have it in our power either to abide in virtue and follow God, Who calls us into ways of virtue, or to stray from paths of virtue, which is to dwell in wickedness, and to follow the devil who summons but cannot compel us. For wickedness is nothing else than the withdrawal of goodness, just as darkness is nothing else than the withdrawal of light. While then we abide in the natural state we abide in virtue, but when we deviate from the natural state, that is from virtue, we come into an unnatural state and dwell in wickedness.’ (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 2, chapter 30, ‘Concerning Prescience and Predestination’)

‘We hold, therefore, that free-will comes on the scene at the same moment as reason, and that change and alteration are congenital to all that is produced. For all that is produced is also subject to change. For those things must be subject to change whose production has its origin in change. And change consists in being brought into being out of nothing, and in transforming a substratum of matter into something different. Inanimate things, then, and things without reason undergo the aforementioned bodily changes, while the changes of things endowed with reason depend on choice. For reason consists of a speculative and a practical part. The speculative part is the contemplation of the nature of things, and the practical consists in deliberation and defines the true reason for what is to be done. The speculative side is called mind or wisdom, and the practical side is called reason or prudence. Every one, then, who deliberates does so in the belief that the choice of what is to be done lies in his hands, that he may choose what seems best as the result of his deliberation, and having chosen may act upon it. And if this is so, free-will must necessarily be very closely related to reason. For either man is an irrational being, or, if he is rational, he is master of his acts and endowed with free-will. Hence also creatures without reason do not enjoy free-will: for nature leads them rather than they nature, and so they do not oppose the natural appetite, but as soon as their appetite longs after anything they rush headlong after it. But man, being rational, leads nature rather than nature him, and so when he desires aught he has the power to curb his appetite or to indulge it as he pleases. Hence also creatures devoid of reason are the subjects neither of praise nor blame, while man is the subject of both praise and blame. Note also that the angels, being rational, are endowed with free-will, and, inasmuch as they are created, are liable to change. This in fact is made plain by the devil who, although made good by the Creator, became of his own free-will the inventor of evil, and by the powers who revolted with him, that is the demons, and by the other troops of angels who abode in

goodness.’ (John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, book 2, chapter 27, ‘Concerning the reason of our endowment with free will’)