

God gathers his people.

The following Scripture passages, which are only a few examples, should suffice.

Deuteronomy 30:3, 4 Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you. 4Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back.

Isaiah 11:12 He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

Jeremiah 23:3 "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number."

Micah 2:12 "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob; I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel. I will bring them together like sheep in a pen, like a flock in its pasture; the place will throng with people."

Matthew 24:31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

To be scattered is to follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts.

Jeremiah 3:17 At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts.

We may also pray for the gathering of God's people:

Psalms 106:47 Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

HOW DOES THIS GATHERING TAKE PLACE?

They must desire to glorify God.

Because they were created to glorify God.

I Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

I Peter 4:11, "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ."

Listen to what God says when Nehemiah pleaded on behalf of Israel in chapter 1 verse 9:

Neh 1:9: if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.

There is a condition and a promise. Comply with the condition 'return to me and obey my commands' and a promise 'I will gather them from [the farthest horizon] and bring them to ... [the] dwelling for my Name'. There is freedom of choice to obey and enjoy the promise of reward, or disobey and lose the reward.

I Chronicles 29:18 David prays to God and in verse 17 and 18 he petitions God as follows,

I Chronicles 29:17 I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you. 18"O LORD, God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Israel, keep this desire in the hearts of your people forever, and keep their hearts loyal to you."

David does not pray for a miraculous change of habit but that the desire to glorify God must be retained. The change is miraculous through the merits of Christ, but the free will is the object of change and not the mere mechanical or irrational change of actions.

Psalms 51:6 Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.

Psalms 40:8, I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

Again the desire or free will to do God's will.

Listen to what Isaiah testifies about this desire, or free will, of the believer:

Isaiah 10:20 In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, (the elect) will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah 26:8, 9 Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. 9My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.

Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

Malachi 3:1, See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come.

I Corinthians 14:1, Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

II Corinthians, 8:10, And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so.

This desire to glorify God does not come natural to fallen man. Since the fall man's desires have been after evil and without the Holy Spirit there would be no hope of breaking with evil. There is, without doubt, no chance that man could, by the application of his corrupted desire, yearn for the holiness of God.

When we speak about the elect, they have only two kinds of desire, which are diametrically opposed to one another: either glorify God (bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit described in Gal 5:22) or deny God by performing the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:19).

Psa 37:4 Delight (free-will action) yourself in the LORD (ruling condition – must be unique and complete); And He will give you the desires of your heart (resultant promise).

So, the ruling condition is 'delight yourself in the LORD', and the consequence is that God will grant those desires that are an effect of the delight in the LORD. Also, there cannot be some desires godly and some ungodly because ungodly desires destroy any delight in the LORD. Therefore, it is inescapable that to have a delight in the LORD requires godly desires and only then will all those desires be satisfied.

Mark 4:19, "But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful."

So there can be no delight in the LORD if the desire is corrupt – some evil and some good.

But why would God be so concerned with preserving man's desire, or free will, to glorify Him?

Wouldn't it have been easier to just command the elect to glorify him and get it over? Why go through all of this misery, blasphemy, and struggle with evil, eventually ending up with the same thing? Surely God knows every one from before creation. If it is predestined that the elect should go to heaven, then why not merely will it?

Firstly, there is an error in the conclusion of the question: Changing man's heart to desire to glorify God and exercising the will so that man has no option but to glorify God does not end up with the same thing.

The answer lies with creation itself.

God made two distinct kinds of creation, namely, the rational and irrational creation. When God created all life other than man, we read that,

"God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good." (Gen 1:25).

But when God made man, we read that,

"God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...'" (Gen 1:26) and God "...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Gen 2:7.)

Since man is the only being that received the very breath of God, we conclude that the irrational creation is everything other than man. Nothing in the irrational creation has a free will such as that of man.

Everything that the creatures that belong to the irrational creation do is bound by their instinct and nothing they do can cause them to escape from their irrational state.

Man, on the other hand, is a rational being, able to reason, make choices, resist that which is good and that which is evil. He is able to bear the consequences of his actions. He is also able to respond to a conscience, feel guilt and repent.

If God had merely decreed man to glorify him, then the very element that sets man apart from the irrational creation would have been destroyed, namely his rationale, his free will.

Man has to either glorify or curse God by the expression of his free will - he can never be compelled to do so.

The irrational creation, on the other hand, cannot glorify God unless a rational being beholds the irrational, is struck by the awesome glory of God in what is witnessed, and expresses exaltations.

Similarly can the irrational creation not curse God. It is the rational creation, man, who looks at the irrational and finds nothing with which to glorify God and rather expresses contempt for or ignorance of God. For that rational being there is always insufficient evidence that God is the Creator.

In Psalm 68:16, David uses anthropomorphism to give the irrational creation life,

Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign..."

and Psalm 98:8,

"Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy;" and in many other places.

We know that in this poetry there is a strong message, namely, that without the poet there is no way that the mountains can glorify God. Without the rational creature beholding the beauty of God's creation and glorifying God, there can be no glorification.

We see this principle in many instances in Scripture, but perhaps the most startling to the Jews at the time was John the Baptist's declaration, "... out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." It was known at the time of John the Baptist that the Pharisees and Saducees were very proud to be recognized as descendents of Abraham and it was, to them, a sure sign of God's favor when one could prove to be a descendant of Abraham. So, John continued by addressing them on this issue, "And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'"

This rebuke cut to the heart of their belief. It exposed them as irrational believers and idolaters. What John in effect said to them is, "If God wanted children that are so irrational to believe that their salvation lies in their physical ancestry alone, then these stones would also suffice. God wants living, rational beings, freely glorifying Him to be His children."

Isaiah 29:13 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men."

Jude 1:10 Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals--these are the very things that destroy them.

Romans 1:21 - 23 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

II Peter 2:12 But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish.

The enemies of the true Christian faith oftentimes accuse the believer of irrational thinking when the free will of man is discussed.

They maintain that if God were a just God, He would have created man perfect and with the ability to praise and glorify him perfectly. That is partly true. God did create man perfect and with the ability to praise and glorify him perfectly; even out of the sincere desire of his heart. But man's free will, though capable, was not mature enough to withstand the storms and temptations of the outside world. Much like an infant could not be expected to survive in a snowstorm for very long without protection.

If God had made man's free will as rigid and captured as that of irrational animals, it would have made man a creature who praises God irrationally, which is exactly what God didn't want, as we have shown. And besides, God did create man able to praise and glorify him perfectly, but man chose to squander that privilege, further proof that he has a free will. Don't you think that God could have intervened, if He wanted to, before our First Parents destroyed everything? But He didn't. Jesus rebuked Simon Peter when he drew a sword against the high priest's servant saying:

Matthew 26:52 - 54 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, 53"Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

If God intervened in the fall of our First Parents, how would God's will be fulfilled that man must be refined in the furnace of affliction and so remain a rational being?

John the Baptist also pointed this out to the Pharisees when he rebuked them saying that if God merely wanted descendents of Abraham, He could raise up children for Abraham from stones. What they did not understand is that God created rational people, not robots, to praise Him.

So, we see that God created everything without a completely free will except man.