

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Lesson # 29
Objections to the Doctrine of Predestination - It is Inconsistent with the Free Agency and Moral
Responsibility of Man (cont)

WCF Chapter 3, God's Eternal Decree

3.1. God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

III. Certainty is Consistent with Free Agency

Nor does it follow from the absolute certainty of a person's acts that he could not have acted otherwise. He could have acted otherwise if he had chosen to have done so. Oftentimes a man has power and opportunity to do that which it is absolutely certain he will not do, and to refrain from doing that which it is absolutely certain he will do. That is, no external influence determines his actions. Our acts are in accordance with the decrees, but not necessarily so we can do otherwise and often should.

On other grounds also it may be shown that certainty is consistent with free agency. We are often absolutely certain how we will act under given conditions so far as we are free to act at all. A parent may be certain that he will rescue a child in distress, and that in doing so he will act freely. God is a free agent, yet it is certain that He will always do right...A father often knows how his son will act under given circumstances and by controlling these he determines beforehand the course of action which the son follows, yet the son acts freely...In the same manner and to an infinitely greater extent God controls our actions so that they are certain although we act freely. His decree does not produce the event, but only renders its occurrence certain; and the same decree which determines the certainty of the action at the same time determines the freedom of the agent in the act.

IV. Man's Natural Will is Enslaved to Evil

Strictly speaking we may say man has free will only in the sense that he is not under any outside compulsion which interferes with his freedom of choice or his just accountability. In his fallen state he only has what we may call "the freedom of slavery." He is in bondage to sin and spontaneously follows Satan. He does not have the ability or incentive to follow God. Now, we ask, is this a thing worthy the name "free"? and the answer is, No. Not freewill but self-will would more appropriately describe man's condition since the fall. It is to be remembered that man was not created a captive to sin but that he has come into that condition by his own fault; and a loss which he has brought upon himself does not free him from responsibility.

This, therefore, is also essentially necessary and wholesome for Christians to know: that God foreknows nothing by contingency, but that He foresees, purposes and does all things according to his immutable, eternal, and infallible will. By this thunderbolt, Free-will is thrown prostrate, utterly dashed to piecesIt follows unalterably, that all things which we do, although they may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently, and even may be done thus contingently by us, are yet, in reality, done necessarily and immutably, with respect to the will of God. For the will of God is effective and cannot be hindered; because the very power of God is natural to Him, and His wisdom is such that He cannot be deceived. - Luther

V. God Controls the Minds of Men and Gives His People the Will to Come

In accordance with this we believe that, without destroying or impairing the free agency of men, God can exercise over them a particular providence and work in them through His Holy Spirit so that they will come to Christ and persevere in His service. We believe further that none have this will and desire except those whom God has previously made willing and desirous; and that He gives this will and desire to none but His own elect.

Perhaps some idea of the manner in which the Divine and human agencies harmonize to produce one work may be gained from a consideration of the way in which the Scriptures were written. These are, in the highest sense, and at the same time, the words of God and also the words of men. It is not merely certain parts or elements which are to be assigned to God or to men; but rather the whole of Scripture in all of its parts, in form of expression as well as in substance of teaching, is from God, and also from men. Although the writers were so influenced by the Holy Spirit that they wrote what God wanted written, and were fully preserved from error, they retained their free agency, and we should recognize both the divine and the human side of Scripture.

Unless God could thus govern the minds of men He would be constantly engaged in devising new expedients to offset the effects of the influences introduced by the millions of His creatures. If men actually had free will, then in attempting to govern or convert a person, God would have to approach him as a man approaches his fellowmen, with several plans in mind so that if the first proves unsuccessful he can try the second, and if that does not work, then the third, and so on. If the acts of free agents are uncertain, God is ignorant of the future except in a most general way. He is then surprised times without number and daily receives great accretions of knowledge. But such a view is dishonoring to God, and is both unreasonable and unscriptural. Unless God's omniscience is denied we must hold that He knows all truth, past, present, and future; and that while events may appear uncertain from our human view-point, from His view-point they are fixed and certain. This argument is so conclusive that its force is generally admitted. The weaker objection, which is sometimes urged that God voluntarily wills not to know some of the future acts of men in order to leave them free, has no support either in Scripture or in reason. Furthermore, it represents God as acting like the father of a lot of bad boys who goes and hides because he is afraid he will see them do something of which he would not approve. If God is limited either by an outside force or by His own acts, we have only a finite God.

VI. The Way in Which the Will is Determined

Since man is a rational agent there must always be a sufficient cause for his acting in a particular way. For the will to decide in favor of the weaker motive and against the stronger, or without motives at all, is to have an effect without a sufficient cause. Conscience teaches us that we always have reasons for the things we do, and that after acting we are conscious that we might have acted differently had other views or feelings been present. The reason for a particular act may not be strong and it may even be based on a false judgment, but in each particular instance it is strong enough to control. Scales will swing in the opposite direction only when there is a cause adequate to the effect. A person may choose that which in some respects is disagreeable; but in each case some other motive is present which influences the person to a choice which otherwise would not have been made. For instance, a person may willingly have a tooth pulled out; but he will not do so unless some inducement is present which for the time being at least makes this the stronger inclination.

Man's volitions are, in fact, governed by his own nature, and are in accordance with the desires, dispositions, inclinations, knowledge, and character of the person. Man is not independent of God, nor of mental and physical laws, and all of these exert their particular influences in his choices. He always acts in the way in which the strongest inclinations or motives lead; and conscience tells us that the things which appeal to us most powerfully at the time are the things which determine our volitions.

Unless a person's volitions were based on and determined by his character they would not really be his, and he could not be held responsible for them. In our relations with our fellow men we instinctively assume that their good or bad volitions are determined by good or bad character, and we judge them accordingly. "By their fruits ye shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but the corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit . . . Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them," Matt. 7:16-20. And again, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." The tree is not free to produce good or bad fruit at random, but is governed by its nature. It is not the goodness of the fruit which causes the goodness of the tree, but the reverse. And according to the parable of Jesus, the same is true of man. And unless conduct does reveal character, how are we to know that the man who does good acts is really a good man, or that the man who does evil acts is really an evil man? While some for the sake of argument may insist that the will is free, in every day life all men assume that the will is both a

product and a revelation of the person's nature. When a man exerts a volition which results in robbery or murder, we instinctively conclude that this is a true indicator of character and deal with him accordingly.

The person who has not given the matter any special thought assumes that he has great freedom. But when he comes to examine this boasted freedom a little more closely he finds that he is much more limited than at first appeared. He is limited by the laws of the physical world, by his particular environment, habits, past training, social customs, fear of punishment or disapproval, his present desires, ambitions, etc., so that he is far from being the absolute master of his actions. At any moment he is pretty much what his past has made him. But so long as he acts under the control of his own nature and determines his actions from within, he has all the liberty of which a creature is capable..

Furthermore, if we admit free will in the sense that the absolute determination of events is placed in the hands of man, we might as well spell it with a capital F and a capital W; for then man has become like God, —a first cause, an original spring of action,—and we have as many semi-Gods as we have free wills. Unless the sovereignty of God be given up, we cannot allow this independence to man.

VII. Scripture Proofs

Acts 4:27-28 For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

Acts 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

Acts 3:18 But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

Acts 13:27-29 For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28 And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. 29 Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb.