

Scriptures and Doctrine :: A Critique of Edwards on the Will**A Critique of Edwards on the Will, on: 2007/12/19 22:42****A CRITIQUE OF EDWARDS ON THE WILL**

Jonathon Edward argued that man has "natural ability", that is, that a man can perform his will. But that man does not have "moral ability", that is, that a man cannot determine what his will is. He argues a man's will is determined by external motives, specifically, by the strongest motive.

So man can perform his will, but man cannot determine his own will, because man's will is determined by the strongest motive.

However, 1Cor 10:13 says that no motive (temptation) is ever more than we are able to bear, so that God always provides a way of escape. In which case, Edwards entire system falls apart. Motives provide the occasion, but not the causation, of sin. No motive or temptation ever overpowers our will, or forces our will, but only tempt our will, and our will voluntarily obeys or disobeys. We always have the "way of escape" so that the strongest motive, or the strongest temptation, is never more than we are able to bear. But in Edward's concept, temptation itself could never truly exist, but only causation or necessitation could.

Really, in Edward's system men could not have moral character at all because men do not voluntarily choose anything; men are necessitated by the strongest motive. By denying that man has "moral ability" Edwards in effect must also deny that men have moral character. A man necessitated by the strongest motive can have no more character than a machine operated by another can have moral character. And if men do not have moral character, men have nothing to be morally accountable for.

Edward's argument is also a logical fallacy because it begs the entire question. His argument is that the will is not free, the will is not self-determining, because the will is determined by the strongest external motive. This of course is no argument at all, it assumes that the strongest motive necessitates the will, and then concludes that the will is not free or is not self-determining.

So Edward's wrongly assigns the cause of sin to the external motive, when the bible everywhere assigns the cause of sin to the will of man itself. The conclusion of Edward's system is that sin is merely the natural affect of external motives, rather than willful or voluntary rebel against God. The problem is not with men's voluntary will, but with external motives. In which system, God Himself would not and could not have freewill, but is Himself necessitated by the strongest motive. So the conclusion of the matter would be, according to Edward's system, that all is necessitated and we all live in a universe of fatalistic determinism, both God and man.

Re: A Critique of Edwards on the Will - posted by davyman, on: 2007/12/21 19:13

I've been reading "Freedom of the Will" on and off for the past four years. Your argument seemed very familiar. I'm posting an article available at desiringgod.org.

James D. Strauss' Critique of Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of the Will

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By John Piper November 1, 1976

In his article entitled "A Puritan in a Post-Puritan World" (in *Grace Unlimited*, ed., Clark H. Pinnock, Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975, pp. 243ff) Strauss argues first that "a central fallacy, if not a lethal fallacy, in Edwards' argument is the ambiguity of his definition of the determination of the will" (p. 252). Secondly, he argues that "Edwards' massive and brilliant effort actually generates a *reductio ad absurdum* of the claim that 'moral agency' is logically reconcilable with any form of radical determinism" (p. 253). Finally, he argues that Edwards' view of God's foreknowledge entailing the necessary occurrence of what He foreknows is invalid.

The thesis of Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* (ed., A. S. Kaufman, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969) is that moral responsibility is not inconsistent with God's determining disposal of all events of every kind (p. 258). Edwards rejects the Arminian notion that the will has a self-determining power (p. 39). What determines the will "is that motive which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest" (p. 9). By "motive" he means "the whole of that which moves, excites or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly" (p. 9). The "strongest motive" is "that which appears most inviting" (p. 10). Or as he puts it later: "the will always is as the greatest apparent good is" (p. 11f).

Edwards takes great pains to make his definitions clear. He says,

By determining the will. . . must be intended, causing that the act of the will or choice should be thus and not otherwise: and the will is said to be determined, when in consequence of some actions or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object (p. 8).

Then he defines "will" as "that by which the mind chooses anything. The faculty of the will is the faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing" (p. 4).

1. Strauss sees a "central fallacy" in "the ambiguity of definition of the determination of the will" (p. 252). I have great difficulty following Strauss' line of reasoning (the fourth and fifth lines from the bottom of p. 251 are unintelligible) but I will try to represent it fairly. Strauss says Edwards "has not demonstrated the 'necessity' of the connection between acts and motives but rather has committed the definitional fallacy by his a priori, i.e. tautological definition" (p. 252). What he means is that Edwards in the end treats the will and the strongest motive as identical: "Edwards' analysis of the will is simply that the will is the strongest motive or most powerful inclination of the mind" (p. 252). But Strauss sees that certain statements of Edwards don't fit this assessment; he quotes Edwards as follows: "If the acts of the will are excited by motives, those motives are the causes of those acts of the will: which makes the acts of the will necessary; as effects necessarily follow the efficiency of the cause" (p. 252), But then Strauss asks, "Is this description not in logical tension with Edwards' own account of the identification between strongest motives and acts of will?" (p. 252). Strauss thus accuses Edwards of logical inconsistency in that on the one hand, he treats the strongest motive and the will as identical and yet on the other hand, he treats the acts of will as effects and motives as causes.

It may be that there is some ambiguity in Edwards' definitions of will and motive and their relation. But ambiguity is not the same as fallacy as Strauss seems to imply (p. 252.2). If we stick to Edwards' clearest remarks the following picture emerges. Edwards does not treat will and strongest motive as identical. A motive is something "extant in the view or apprehension of the understanding" (FW, p. 9), That is, it is something distinct from the mind's volitional activity. It exists previous to this activity as the following quote shows: "Everything that is properly called a motive, excitement or inducement to a perceiving willing agent, has some sort and degree of tendency, or advantage to move or excite the will previous to the effect, or to the act of the will excited." (p. 10, my emphasis). This is an explicit denial of Strauss' charge that Edwards treats strongest motive and act of will as identical.

There is a sentence in Edwards which, if read carelessly, could lead one to Strauss' conclusion. Edwards writes,

I have rather chosen to express myself thus, that the will always is as the greatest apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable, is, than to say that the will is determined by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable; because an appearing most agreeable or pleasing to the mind, and the mind's preferring and choosing, seem hardly to be properly and perfectly distinct (p. 12f).

Edwards is quite consistent here. He earlier defined will as the "power of mind" by which it chooses or prefers (p. 4). Here he admits that the activity of the mind in viewing a thing as most pleasing is in fact indistinguishable from the act of willing. The mind's esteeming something as most agreeable is the mind's preferring or choosing that thing; and this is the act of willing.

But this is not the same as saying that the will and the strongest motive are the same thing. Motives are things external to the mind's apprehension which "move, excite or invite the mind to volition" (p. 9). The motive is not the same as the mind's judgment of it. The connection between motive and voluntary action is much more complex in Edwards than Strauss seems to see.

2. The reason Strauss oversimplifies and thus distorts Edwards' view is because he tries to reduce it to "a machine model" (p. 254). On the basis of his false identification of will and motive Strauss gives the following mechanistic caricature, "

Once a given motive (inducement) is strongest (it is not by choice that this is done), it causes a given bodily movement" (p. 253). His mechanistic conception of Edwards' view reveals itself in his restriction of responses to "bodily movement" and in his omission of the distinctively human links between motive and action.

Edwards was fully aware that his view elicited this common accusation. His rejoinder is completely overlooked by Strauss:

As to the objection against the doctrine which I have endeavored to prove, that it makes men no more than mere machines; I would say, that notwithstanding this doctrine, man is entirely, perfectly and unspeakably different from a mere machine, in that he has reason and understanding, and has a faculty of will, and so is capable of volition and choice; and in that his will is guided by the dictates or views of his understanding; and in that his external actions and behavior and in many respects also his thoughts, and the exercises of his mind, are subject to his will; so that he has liberty to act according to his choice, and do what he pleases; and by means of these things is capable of moral habits and moral acts... (FW, p. 212, my emphasis).

Nowhere does Strauss discuss the role of reason or perception as they relate to motive and will. That is, he overlooks the character of the willer which for Edwards is where virtue or vice (i.e. accountability) principally inheres (FW, pp. 16ff). Accordingly, Strauss makes the superficial statement that "There is plainly no place for both 'being influenced by moral inducements' and any agency of the self in the determination of the moral quality of its actions" (p. 253). This is not true because it is precisely the character of the willer (i.e. the way he perceives, reasons, feels) which will largely determine what sort of motives he responds to. The moral quality of his actions is determined in great measure by the kind of person he is. By overlooking the human links between motive and action (i.e. human character) Strauss oversimplifies and distorts Edwards' view. He thus falls far short of disproving Edwards' reconciliation of determinism and moral agency, because he does not even grapple with Edwards' explanation of moral agency as it inheres in the virtuous or vicious characters of men.

3. Strauss makes one final attack, namely against Edwards' argument that if God infallibly foreknows all future events, then those events are necessary and must occur, else God will be found in error in what he foreknows (FW, pp. 115ff). On p. 257 Strauss gives a long quote from Donald M. McKay's *The Clock Work Image* to show that Edwards' view of God's foreknowledge would involve God in a logical self-contradiction. I have tried and tried to make sense of these two paragraphs, but I can't. They are simply unintelligible to me, perhaps because I do not know their context. So I can not interact with McKay's argument.

Strauss' own argument goes like this: "Scientifically, knowledge is imperative for predictive power but no one surely would say that the knowledge which enables scientists to predict future events, 'caused future events'" (p. 256). This, however, misses the point, for as Edwards says, "Whether prescience be the thing that makes the event necessary or no, it alters not the case. Infallible foreknowledge may prove the necessity of the event foreknown, and yet not be the thing which causes the necessity" (FW, p. 123). Indeed it can and, so far as I can see, it does. Strauss brings no clear argument to refute Edwards' detailed proof.

In sum, then, this article by Strauss succeeds in none of the three criticisms it levels against Jonathan Edwards' view of determinism, volition, and moral agency.

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Re., on: 2007/12/21 20:01

LECTURE XLVIII.

NATURAL ABILITY.

CHARLES G. FINNEY

We next proceed to the examination of the question of man's ability or inability to obey the commandments of God. This certainly must be a fundamental question in morals and religion; and as our views are upon this subject, so, if we are consistent, must be our views of God, of his moral government, and of every practical doctrine of morals and religion. This is too obvious to require proof. The question of ability has truly been a vexed question. In the discussion of it, I shall consider the elder President Edwards as the representative of the common Calvinistic view of this subject, because he has

stated it more clearly than any other Calvinistic author with whom I am acquainted. When, therefore, I speak of the Edwadean doctrine of ability and inability, you will understand me to speak of the common view of Calvinistic theological writers, as stated, summed up, and defended by Edwards.

In discussing this subject I will endeavour to show,--

I. PRESIDENT EDWARDS'S NOTION OF NATURAL ABILITY.

II. THAT THIS NATURAL ABILITY IS NO ABILITY AT ALL.

III. WHAT CONSTITUTES NATURAL INABILITY ACCORDING TO THIS SCHOOL.

IV. THAT THIS NATURAL INABILITY IS NO INABILITY AT ALL.

V. THAT NATURAL ABILITY IS PROPERLY IDENTICAL WITH FREEDOM OR LIBERTY OF WILL.

VI. THAT THE HUMAN WILL IS FREE, AND THEREFORE MEN ARE NATURALLY ABLE TO OBEY GOD.

I. I am to show what is President Edwards's notion of natural ability.

Edwards considers freedom and ability as identical. He defines freedom or liberty to consist in "the power, opportunity, or advantage, that any one has, to do as he pleases." "Or, in other words, his being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing or conducting in any respect as he wills."--Works, vol. ii., page 38.

Again, page 39, he says, "One thing more I should observe concerning what is vulgarly called liberty; namely, that power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he will, or according to his choice, is all that is meant by it; without taking into the meaning of the word anything of the cause of that choice; or at all considering how the person came to have such a volition; whether it was caused by some external motive, or internal habitual bias; whether it was determined by some internal antecedent volition, or whether it happened without a cause; whether it was necessarily connected with something foregoing, or not connected. Let the person come by his choice anyhow, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and exerting his will, the man is perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom." In the preceding paragraph, he says, "There are two things contrary to what is called liberty in common speech. One is, constraint; which is a person's being necessitated to do a thing contrary to his will: the other is, restraint, which is his being hindered, and not having power to do according to his will."

Power, ability, liberty, to do as you will, are synonymous with this writer. The foregoing quotations, with many like passages that might be quoted from the same author, show that natural liberty, or natural ability, according to him, consists in the natural and established connexion between volition and its effects. Thus he says in another place, "Men are justly said to be able to do what they can do, if they will." His definition of natural ability, or natural liberty, as he frequently calls it, wholly excludes the power to will, and includes only the power or ability to execute our volitions. Thus it is evident, that natural ability, according to him, respects external action only, and has nothing to do with willing. When there is no restraint or hindrance to the execution of volition, when there is nothing interposed to disturb and prevent the natural and established result of our volitions, there is natural ability according to this school. It should be distinctly understood, that Edwards, and those of his school, hold that choices, volitions, and all acts of will, are determined, not by the sovereign power of the agent, but are caused by the objective motive, and that there is the same connexion, or a connexion as certain and as unavoidable between motive and choice, as between any physical cause and its effect: "the difference being," according to him, "not in the nature of the connexion, but in the terms connected." Hence, according to his view, natural liberty or ability cannot consist in the power of willing or of choice, but must consist in the power to execute our choices or volitions. Consequently, this class of philosophers define free or moral agency to consist in the power to do as one wills, or power to execute one's purposes, choices, or volitions. That this is a fundamentally false definition of natural liberty or ability, and of free or moral agency, we shall see in due time. It is also plain, that the natural ability or liberty of Edwards and his school, has nothing to do with morality or immorality. Sin and holiness, as we have seen in a former lecture, are attributes of acts of will only. But this natural ability respects, as has been said, outward or muscular action only. Let this be distinctly borne in mind as we proceed.

II. This natural ability is no ability at all.

We know from consciousness that the will is the executive faculty, and that we can do absolutely nothing without will

ng. The power or ability to will is indispensable to our acting at all. If we have not the power to will, we have not power or ability to do anything. All ability or power to do resides in the will, and power to will is the necessary condition of ability to do. In morals and religion, as we shall soon see, the willing is the doing. The power to will is the condition of obligation to do. Let us hear Edwards himself upon this subject. Vol. ii. p. 156, he says, "The will itself, and not only those actions which are the effects of the will, is the proper object of precept or command. That is, such a state or acts of men's wills, are in many cases properly required of them by commands; and not only those alterations in the state of their bodies or minds that are the consequences of volition. This is most manifest; for it is the mind only that is properly and directly the subject of precepts or commands; that only being capable of receiving or perceiving commands. The motions of the body are matters of command only as they are subject to the soul, and connected with its acts. But the soul has no other faculty whereby it can, in the most direct and proper sense, consent, yield to, or comply with any command, but the faculty of the will; and it is by this faculty only that the soul can directly disobey or refuse compliance; for the very notions of consenting, yielding, accepting, complying, refusing, rejecting, &c., are, according to the meaning of terms, nothing but certain acts of will." Thus we see that Edwards himself held, that the will is the executive faculty, and that the soul can do nothing except as it wills to do it, and that for this reason a command to do is strictly a command to will. We shall see by and by, that he held also that the willing and the doing are identical, so far as moral obligation, morals, and religion are concerned. For the present, it is enough to say, whether Edwards or anybody else ever held it or not, that it is absurd and sheer nonsense to talk of an ability to do when there is no ability to will. Every one knows with intuitive certainty that he has no ability to do what he is unable to will to do. It is, therefore, the veriest folly to talk of a natural ability to do anything whatever, when we exclude from this ability the power to will. If there is no ability to will, there is, and can be no ability to do; therefore the natural ability of the Edwardean school is no ability at all.

Let it be distinctly understood, that whatever Edwards held in respect to the ability of man to do, ability to will entered not at all into his idea and definition of natural ability or liberty. But according to him, natural ability respects only the connection that is established by a law of nature between volition and its sequents, excluding altogether the inquiry how the volition comes to exist. This the foregoing quotations abundantly show. Let the impression, then, be distinct, that the Edwardean natural ability is no ability at all, and nothing but an empty name, a metaphysico-theological fiction.

III. What constitutes natural inability according to this school.

Edwards, vol. ii. p. 35, says, "We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing when we cannot do it if we will, because what is most commonly called nature, does not allow of it; or because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects." This quotation, together with much that might be quoted from this author to the same effect, shows that natural inability, according to him, consists in a want of power to execute our volitions. In the absence of power to do as we will, if the willing exists and the effect does not follow, it is only because we are unable to do as we will, and this is natural inability. We are naturally unable, according to him, to do what does not follow by a natural law from our volitions. If I will to move my arm, and the muscles do not obey volition, I am naturally unable to move my arm. So with anything else. Here let it be distinctly observed, that natural inability, as well as natural ability, respects and belongs only to outward action or doing. It has nothing to do with ability to will. Whatever Edwards held respecting ability to will, which will be shown in its proper place, I wish it to be distinctly understood that his natural inability had nothing to do with willing, but only with the effects of willing. When the natural effect of willing does not follow volition, its cause, here is a proper natural inability.

IV. This natural inability is no inability at all.

By this is intended that, so far as morals and religion are concerned, the willing is the doing, and therefore where the willing actually takes place, the real thing required or prohibited is already done. Let us hear Edwards upon this subject. Vol. ii. p. 164, he says, "If the will fully complies and the proposed effect does not prove, according to the laws of nature, to be connected with his volition, the man is perfectly excused; he has a natural inability to the thing required. For the will itself, as has been observed, is all that can be directly and immediately required by command, and other things only indirectly, as connected with the will. If, therefore, there be a full compliance of will, the person has done his duty; and if other things do not prove to be connected with his volition, that is not criminally owing to him." Here, then, it is manifest, that the Edwardean notions of natural ability and inability have no connection with moral law or moral government, and, of course, with morals and religion. That the Bible everywhere accounts the willing as the deed, is most manifest. Both as it respects sin and holiness, if the required or prohibited act of the will takes place, the moral law and the lawgiver regard the deed as having been done, or the sin committed, whatever impediment may have prevented the natural effect from following. Here, then, let it be distinctly understood and remembered that Edwards's natural inability is, so far as morals and religion are concerned, no inability at all. An inability to execute our volitions, is in no case an inability to do our whole duty, since moral obligation, and of course, duty, respect strictly only acts of will. A natural inability must consist, as we sha

It seems, in an inability to will. It is truly amazing that Edwards could have written the paragraph just quoted, and others to the same effect, without perceiving the fallacy and absurdity of his speculation--without seeing that the ability or inability about which he was writing, had no connection with morals or religion. How could he insist so largely that moral obligation respects acts of will only, and yet spend so much time in writing about an ability or inability to comply with moral obligation that respects outward action exclusively? This, on the face of it, was wholly irrelevant to the subject of morals and religion, upon which subjects he was professedly writing.

V. Natural ability is identical with freedom or liberty of will.

It has been, I trust, abundantly shown in a former lecture, and is admitted and insisted on by Edwards,--

1. That moral obligation respects strictly only acts of will.

2. That the whole of moral obligation resolves itself into an obligation to be disinterestedly benevolent, that is, to will the highest good of being for its own sake.

3. That willing is the doing required by the true spirit of the moral law.

Ability, therefore, to will in accordance with the moral law, must be natural ability to obey God. But,--

4. This is and must be the only proper freedom of the will, so far as morals and religion, or so far as moral law is concerned. That must constitute true liberty of will that consists in the ability or power to will, either in accordance with, or in opposition to the requirements of moral law. Or in other words, true freedom or liberty of will must consist in the power or ability to will in every instance either in accordance with, or in opposition to, moral obligation. Observe, moral obligation respects acts of will. What freedom or liberty of will can there be in relation to moral obligation, unless the will or the agent has power or ability to act in conformity with moral obligation? To talk of a man's being free to will, or having liberty to will, when he has not the power or ability, is to talk nonsense. Edwards himself holds that ability to do, is indispensable to liberty to do. But if ability to do be a *sine qua non* of liberty to do, must not the same be true of willing? that is, must not ability to will be essential to liberty to will? Natural ability and natural liberty to will, must then be identical. Let this be distinctly remembered, since many have scouted the doctrine of natural ability to obey God, who have nevertheless been great sticklers for the freedom of the will. In this they are greatly inconsistent. This ability is called a natural ability, because it belongs to man as a moral agent, in such a sense that without it he could not be a proper subject of command, of reward or punishment. That is, without this liberty or ability he could not be a moral agent, and a proper subject of moral government. He must then either possess this power in himself as essential to his own nature, or must possess power, or be able to avail himself of power to will in every instance in accordance with moral obligation. Whatever he can do, he can do only by willing; he must therefore either possess the power in himself directly to will as God commands, or he must be able by willing it to avail himself of power, and to make himself willing. If he has power by nature to will directly as God requires, or by willing to avail himself of power, so to will, he is naturally free and able to obey the commandments of God. Then let it be borne distinctly in mind, that natural ability, about which so much has been said, is nothing more nor less than the freedom or liberty of the will of a moral agent. No man knows what he says or whereof he affirms, who holds to the one and denies the other, for they are truly and properly identical.

VI. The human will is free, therefore men have power or ability to do all their duty.

1. The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God.

Every command, every threatening, every exhortation and denunciation in the Bible implies and assumes this. Nor does the Bible do violence to the human intelligence in this assumption; for,--

2. The human mind necessarily assumes the freedom of the human will as a first truth of reason.

First truths of reason, let it be remembered, are those that are necessarily assumed by every moral agent. They are assumed always and necessarily by a law of the intelligence, although they may seldom be the direct objects of thought or attention. It is a universal law of the intelligence, to assume the truths of causality, the existence and the infinity of space, the existence and infinity of duration, and many other truths. These assumptions every moral agent always and necessarily takes with him, whether these things are matters of attention or not. And even should he deny any one or all of the first truths of reason, he knows them to be true notwithstanding, and cannot but assume their truth in all his practical judgment.

gments. Thus, should any one deny the law and the doctrine of causality, as some in theory have done, he knows, and cannot but know,--he assumes, and cannot but assume, its truth at every moment. Without this assumption he could not so much as intend, or think of doing, or of any one else doing anything whatever. But a great part of his time, he may not, and does not, make this law a distinct object of thought or attention. Nor is he directly conscious of the assumption that there is such a law. He acts always upon the assumption, and a great part of his time is insensible of it. His whole activity is only the exercise of his own causality, and a practical acknowledgment of the truth, which in theory he may deny. Now just so it is with the freedom of the will, and with natural ability. Did we not assume our own liberty and ability, we should never think of attempting to do anything. We should not so much as think of moral obligation, either as it respects ourselves or others, unless we assumed the liberty of the human will. In all our judgments respecting our own moral character and that of others, we always and necessarily assume the liberty of the human will, or natural ability to obey God. Although we may not be distinctly conscious of this assumption, though we may seldom make the liberty of the human will the subject of direct thought or attention, and even though we may deny its reality, and strenuously endeavour to maintain the opposite, we, nevertheless, in this very denial and endeavour, assume that we are free. This truth never was, and never can be rejected in our practical judgments. All men assume it. All men must assume it. Whenever they choose in one direction, they always assume, whether conscious of the assumption or not, and cannot but assume, that they have power to will in the opposite direction. Did they not assume this, such a thing as election between two ways or objects would not be, and could not be so much as thought of. The very ideas of right and wrong, of the praise and blameworthiness of human beings, imply the assumption on the part of those who have these ideas, of the universal freedom of the human will, or of the natural ability of men as moral agents to obey God. Were not this assumption in the mind, it were impossible from its own nature and laws that it should affirm moral obligation, right or wrong, praise or blameworthiness of men. I know that philosophers and theologians have in theory denied the doctrine of natural ability or liberty, in the sense in which I have defined it; and I know, too, that with all their theorizing, they did assume, in common with all other men, that man is free in the sense that he has liberty or power to will as God commands. I know that, but for this assumption, the human mind could no more predicate praise or blameworthiness, right or wrong of man, than it could of the motions of a windmill. Men have often made the assumption in question without being aware of it, have affirmed right and wrong of human willing without seeing and understanding the conditions of this affirmation. But the fact is, that in all cases the assumption has laid deep in the mind as a first truth of reason, that men are free in the sense of being naturally able to obey God: and this assumption is a necessary condition of the affirmation that moral character belongs to man.

Re:, on: 2007/12/21 20:02

LECTURE XLIX.

MORAL ABILITY AND INABILITY.

CHARLES G. FINNEY

- I. WHAT CONSTITUTES MORAL INABILITY, ACCORDING TO EDWARDS AND THOSE WHO HOLD WITH HIM.
- II. THAT THEIR MORAL INABILITY TO OBEY GOD CONSISTS IN REAL DISOBEDIENCE AND A NATURAL INABILITY TO OBEY.
- III. THAT THIS PRETENDED DISTINCTION BETWEEN NATURAL AND MORAL INABILITY IS NONSENSICAL.
- IV. WHAT CONSTITUTES MORAL ABILITY ACCORDING TO THIS SCHOOL.
- V. THAT THEIR MORAL ABILITY TO OBEY GOD IS NOTHING ELSE THAN REAL OBEDIENCE, AND A NATURAL INABILITY TO DISOBEY.

I. What constitutes moral inability, according to Edwards and those who hold with him.

I examine their views of moral inability first in order, because from their views of moral inability we ascertain more clearly what are their views of moral ability. Edwards regards moral ability and inability as identical with moral necessity. Concerning moral necessity, he says, vol. ii., pp. 32, 33, "And sometimes by moral necessity is meant that necessity of connexion and consequence which arises from such moral causes as the strength of inclination or motives, and the connexion which there is in many cases between these and such certain volitions and actions. And it is in this sense that I shall use the phrase moral necessity in the following discourse. By natural necessity, as applied to men, I mean such necessity as men are under through the force of natural causes, as distinguished from what are called moral causes, such as habits and dispositions of the heart, and moral motives and inducements. Thus men placed in certain circumstances are th

e subjects of particular sensations by necessity. They feel pain when their bodies are wounded; they see the objects presented before them in a clear light when their eyes are open: so they assent to the truth of certain propositions as soon as the terms are understood; as that two and two make four, that black is not white, that two parallel lines can never cross one another; so by a natural necessity men's bodies move downwards when there is nothing to support them. But here several things may be noted concerning these two kinds of necessity. 1. Moral necessity may be as absolute as natural necessity. That is, the effect may be as perfectly connected with its moral cause, as a natural effect is with its natural cause. Whether the will is in every case necessarily determined by the strongest motive, or whether the will ever makes any resistance to such a motive, or can ever oppose the strongest present inclination or not; if that matter should be controverted, yet I suppose none will deny, but that, in some cases a previous bias and inclination, or the motive presented may be so powerful, that the act of the will may be certainly and indissolubly connected therewith. When motives or previous bias are very strong, all will allow that there is some difficulty in going against them. And if they were yet stronger, the difficulty would be still greater. And therefore if more were still added to their strength up to a certain degree, it might make the difficulty so great that it would be wholly impossible to surmount it, for this plain reason, because whatever power men may be supposed to have to surmount difficulties, yet that power is not infinite, and so goes not beyond certain limits. If a certain man can surmount ten degrees of difficulty of this kind, with twenty degrees of strength, because the degrees of strength are beyond the degrees of difficulty, yet if the difficulty be increased to thirty, or a hundred, or to a thousand degrees, and his strength not also increased, his strength will be wholly insufficient to surmount the difficulty. As therefore it must be allowed that there may be such a thing as a sure and perfect connexion between moral causes and effects; so this only is what I call by the name of moral necessity." Page 35, he says: "What has been said of natural and moral necessity may serve to explain what is intended by natural and moral inability. We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing when we cannot do it if we will, because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will, either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects. Moral inability consists not in any of these things, but either in a want of inclination, or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the act of the will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary. Or both these may be resolved into one, and it may be said in one word that moral inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination. For when a person is unable to will or choose such a thing, through a defect of motives or prevalence of contrary motives, it is the same thing as his being unable through the want of an inclination, or the prevalence of a contrary inclination in such circumstances, and under the influence of such views."

From these quotations, and much more that might be quoted to the same purpose, it is plain that Edwards, as the representative of his school, holds moral inability to consist, either in an existing choice or attitude of the will opposed to that which is required by the law of God, which inclination or choice is necessitated by motives in view of the mind, or in the absence of such motives as are necessary to cause or necessitate the state of choice required by the moral law, or to overcome an opposing choice. Indeed he holds these two to be identical. Observe, his words are, "Or these may be resolved into one, and it may be said in one word, that moral inability consists in opposition or want of inclination. For when a person is unable to will or choose such a thing, through a defect of motives, it is the same thing as his being unable through the want of an inclination, or the prevalence of a contrary inclination, in such circumstances and under the influence of such views," that is, in the presence of such motives. If there is a present prevalent contrary inclination, it is, according to him: 1. Because there are present certain reasons that necessitate this contrary inclination; and 2. Because there are not sufficient motives present to the mind to overcome these opposing motives and inclination, and to necessitate the will to determine or choose in the direction of the law of God. By inclination Edwards means choice or volition, as is abundantly evident from what he all along says in this connexion. This no one will deny who is at all familiar with his writings.

It was the object of the treatise from which the above quotations have been made, to maintain that the choice invariably is as the greatest apparent good is. And by the greatest apparent good he means, a sense of the most agreeable. By which he means, as he says, that the sense of the most agreeable, and choice or volition, are identical. Vol. ii., page 20, he says, "And therefore it must be true in some sense, that the will always is as the greatest apparent good is." "It must be observed in what sense I use the term 'good,' namely, as of the same import with agreeable. To appear good to the mind, as I use the phrase, is the same as to appear agreeable, or seem pleasing to the mind." Again, pp. 21, 22, he says: "I have rather chosen to express myself thus, that the will always is as the greatest apparent good is, or as what appears most agreeable, than to say that the will is determined by the greatest apparent good, or by what seems most agreeable; because an appearing most agreeable to the mind and the mind's preferring, seem scarcely distinct. If strict propriety of speech be insisted on, it may more properly be said, that the voluntary action, which is the immediate consequence of the mind's choice, is determined by that which appears most agreeable, than the choice itself." Thus it appears that the sense of the most agreeable, and choice or volition, according to Edwards, are the same things. Indeed, Edwards throughout confounds desire and volition, making them the same thing. Edwards regarded the mind as possessing but two primary faculties--the will and the understanding. He confounded all the states of the sensibility with acts of will. The strongest desire is with him always identical with volition or choice, and not merely that which determines choice. When there

is a want of inclination or desire, or the sense of the most agreeable, there is a moral inability according to the Edwardean philosophy. This want of the strongest desire, inclination, or sense of the most agreeable, is always owing; 1. To the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite desire, choice, &c.; and 2. To the want of such objective motives as shall awaken this required desire, or necessitate this inclination or sense of the most agreeable. In other words, when volition or choice, in consistency with the law of God, does not exist, it is, 1. Because an opposite choice exists, and is necessitated by the presence of some motive; and 2. For want of sufficiently strong objective motives to necessitate the required choice or volition. Let it be distinctly understood and remembered, that Edwards held that motive, and not the agent is the cause of all actions of the will. Will, with him, is always determined in its choice by motives as really as physical effects are produced by their causes. The difference with him in the connexion of moral and physical causes and effects "lies not in the nature of the connexion, but in the terms connected."

"That every act of the will has some cause, and consequently (by what has already been proved) has a necessary connection with its cause, and so is necessary by a necessity of connection and consequence, is evident by this, that every act of the will whatsoever is excited by some motive, which is manifest; because, if the mind, in willing, after the manner it does, is excited by no motive or inducement, then it has no end which it proposes to itself, or pursues in so doing; it aims at nothing, and seeks nothing. And if it seeks nothing, then it does not go after anything, or exert any inclination or preference towards anything; which brings the matter to a contradiction; because for the mind to will something, and for it to go after something by an act of preference and inclination, are the same thing.

"But if every act of the will is excited by a motive, then that motive is the cause of the act. If the acts of the will are excited by motives, then motives are the causes of their being excited; or, which is the same thing, the cause of their existence. And if so, the existence of the acts of the will is properly the effect of their motives. Motives do nothing, as motives or inducements, but by their influence; and so much as is done by their influence is the effect of them. For that is the notion of an effect, something that is brought to pass by the influence of something else.

"And if volitions are properly the effects of their motives, then they are necessarily connected with their motives. Every effect and event being, as was proved before, necessarily connected with that which is the proper ground and reason of its existence. Thus it is manifest that volition is necessary, and is not from any self-determining power in the will."--Vol. ii., pp. 86, 87.

Moral inability, then, according to this school, consists in a want of inclination, desire, or sense of the most agreeable, or the strength of an opposite desire or sense of the most agreeable. This want of inclination, &c., or this opposing inclination, &c., are identical with an opposing choice or volition. This opposing choice or inclination, or this want of the required choice, inclination, or sense of the most agreeable is owing, according to Edwards, 1. To the presence of such motives as to necessitate the opposing choice; and 2. To the absence of sufficient motives to beget or necessitate them. Here then we have the philosophy of this school. The will or agent is unable to choose as God requires in all cases, when, 1. There are present such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice; and, 2. When there is not such a motive or such motives in the view of the mind, as to determine or necessitate the required choice or volition; that is, to awaken a desire, or to create an inclination or sense of the agreeable stronger than any existing and opposing desire, inclination, or sense of agreeable. This is the moral inability of the Edwardeans.

II. Their moral inability to obey God consists in real disobedience and a natural inability to obey.

1. If we understand Edwardeans to mean that moral inability consists,--

(1.) In the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice; and,--

(2.) In the want or absence of sufficient motives to necessitate choice or volition, or, which is the same thing, a sense of the most agreeable, or an inclination, then their moral inability is a proper natural inability.

Edwards says, he "calls it a moral inability, because it is an inability of will." But by his own showing, the will is the only executive faculty. Whatever a man can do at all, he can accomplish by willing, and whatever he cannot accomplish by willing he cannot accomplish at all. An inability to will then must be a natural inability.

We are, by nature, unable to do what we are unable to will to do. Besides, according to Edwards, moral obligation respects strictly only acts of will, and willing is the doing that is prohibited or required by the moral law. To be unable to will then, is to be unable to do. To be unable to will as God requires, is to be unable to do what he requires, and this surely is a proper, and the only proper natural inability.

2. But if we are to understand this school, as maintaining that moral inability to obey God, consists in a want of the inclination, choice, desire, or sense of the most agreeable that God requires, or in an inclination or existing choice, volition, or sense of the most agreeable, which is opposed to the requirement of God, this surely is really identical with disobedience, and their moral inability to obey consists in disobedience. For, be it distinctly remembered, that Edwards holds, as we have seen, that obedience and disobedience, properly speaking, can be predicated only of acts of will. If the required state of the will exists, there is obedience. If it does not exist, there is disobedience. Therefore, by his own admission and express holding, if by moral inability we are to understand a state of the will not conformed, or, which is the same thing, opposed to the law and will of God, this moral inability is nothing else than disobedience to God. A moral inability to obey is identical with disobedience. It is not merely the cause of future or present disobedience, but really constitutes the whole of present disobedience.

3. But suppose that we understand his moral inability to consist both in the want of an inclination, choice, volition, &c., or in the existence of an opposing state of the will, and also,--

(1.) In the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice, and,--

(2.) In the want of sufficient motives to overcome the opposing state, and necessitate the required choice, volition, &c., then his views stand thus: moral inability to choose as God commands, consists in the want of this choice, or in the existence of an opposite choice, which want of choice, or, which is the same thing with him, which opposite choice is cause:--

(i.) By the presence of such motives as to necessitate the opposite choice, and,--

(ii.) By the absence of such motives as would necessitate the required choice.

Understand him which way you will, his moral inability is real disobedience, and is in the highest sense a proper natural inability to obey. The cause of choice or volition he always seeks, and thinks or assumes that he finds, in the objective motive, and never for once ascribes it to the sovereignty or freedom of the agent. Choice or volition is an event, and must have some cause. He assumed that the objective motive was the cause, when, as consciousness testifies, the agent is himself the cause. Here is the great error of Edwards.

Edwards assumed that no agent whatever, not even God himself, possesses a power of self-determination. That the will of God and of all moral agents is determined, not by themselves, but by an objective motive. If they will in one direction or another, it is not from any free and sovereign self-determination in view of motives, but because the motives or inducements present to the mind, inevitably produce or necessitate the sense of the most agreeable, or choice.

If this is not fatalism or natural necessity, what is?

III. This pretended distinction between natural and moral inability is nonsensical.

What does it amount to? Why this:--

1. This natural inability is an inability to do as we will, or to execute our volitions.

2. This moral inability is an inability to will.

3. This moral inability is the only natural inability that has, or can have, anything to do with duty, or with morality and religion; or, as has been shown,--

4. It consists in disobedience itself. Present moral inability to obey is identical with present disobedience, with a natural inability to obey!

It is amazing to see how so great and good a man could involve himself in a metaphysical fog, and bewilder himself and his readers to such a degree, that an absolutely senseless distinction should pass into the current phraseology, philosophy, and theology of the church, and a score of theological dogmas be built upon the assumption of its truth. This nonsensical distinction has been in the mouth of the Edwardean school of theologians, from Edwards's day to the present. Both saints and sinners have been bewildered, and, I must say, abused by it. Men have been told that they are as really u

nable to will as God directs, as they were to create themselves; and when it is replied that this inability excuses the sinner, we are directly silenced by the assertion, that this is only a moral inability, or an inability of will, and, therefore, that it is so far from excusing the sinner, that it constitutes the very ground, and substance, and whole of his guilt. Indeed! Men are under moral obligation only to will as God directs. But an inability thus to will, consisting in the absence of such motives as would necessitate the required choice, or the presence of such motives as to necessitate an opposite choice, is a moral inability, and really constitutes the sinner worthy of an "exceeding great and eternal weight" of damnation! Ridiculous! Edwards I revere; his blunders I deplore. I speak thus of this Treatise on the Will, because, while it abounds with unarrantable assumptions, distinctions without a difference, and metaphysical subtleties, it has been adopted as the text-book of a multitude of what are called Calvinistic divines for scores of years. It has bewildered the head, and greatly embarrassed the heart and the action of the church of God. It is time, high time, that its errors should be exposed, and so exposed, that such phraseology should be laid aside, and the ideas which these words represent should cease to be entertained.

IV. What constitutes moral ability according to this school.

It is of course the opposite of moral inability.

Moral ability, according to them, consists in willingness with the cause of it. That is, moral ability to obey God consists in that inclination, desire, choice, volition, or sense of the most agreeable, which God requires together with its cause. Or it consists in the presence of such motives as do actually necessitate the above-named state or determination of the will. Or, more strictly, it consists in this state caused by the presence of these motives. This is as exact a statement of their views as I can make. According to this, a man is morally able to do as he does, and is necessitated to do, or, he is morally able to will as he does will, and as he cannot help willing. He is morally able to will in this manner, simply and only because he is caused thus to will by the presence of such motives as are, according to them, "indissolubly connected" with such a willing by a law of nature and necessity. But this conducts us to the conclusion,--

V. That their moral ability to obey God is nothing else than real obedience, and a natural inability to disobey.

Strictly, this moral ability includes both this state of will required by the law of God, and also the cause of this state, to wit, the presence of such motives as necessitate the inclination, choice, volition, or sense of the most agreeable, that God requires. The agent is able thus to will because he is caused thus to will. Or more strictly, his ability, and his inclination or willing, are identical. Or still further, according to Edwards, his moral ability thus to will and his thus willing, and the presence of the motives that cause this willing, are identical. This is a sublime discovery in philosophy; a most transcendental speculation! I would not treat these notions as ridiculous, were they not truly so, or if I could treat them in any other manner, and still do them anything like justice. If, where the theory is plainly stated, it appears ridiculous, the fault is not in me, but in the theory itself. I know it is trying to you, as it is to me, to connect anything ridiculous with so great and so revered a name as that of President Edwards. But if a blunder of his has entailed perplexity and error on the church, surely his great and good soul would now thank the hand that should blot out the error from under heaven.

Thus, when closely examined, this long established and venerated fogbank vanishes away; and this famed distinction between moral and natural ability and inability, is found to be "a thing of nought."

Re:, on: 2007/12/21 20:05

LECTURE L.

INABILITY.

CHARLES G. FINNEY

THERE are yet other forms of the doctrine of inability to be stated and considered before we have done with this subject. In the consideration of the one before me, I must--

I. STATE WHAT I CONSIDER TO BE THE FUNDAMENTAL ERRORS OF EDWARDS AND HIS SCHOOL ON THE SUBJECT OF ABILITY.

II. STATE THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SCHEME OF INABILITY WHICH WE ARE ABOUT TO CONSIDER.

III. CONSIDER ITS CLAIMS.

I. I am to state what I consider to be the fundamental errors of Edwards and his school upon the subject of ability.

1. He denied that moral agents are the causes of their own actions. He started, of course, with the just assumption, that at every event is an effect, and must have some cause. The choices and volitions of moral agents are effects of some cause. What is that cause? He assumes that every act of will must have been caused by a preceding one, or by the objective motive. By the *reductio ad absurdum*, he easily showed the absurdity of the first hypothesis, and consequently assumed the truth of the last. But how does he know that the sovereign power of the agent is not the cause? His argument against self-determination amounts to nothing; for it is, in fact, only a begging of the whole question. If we are conscious of anything, we are of the rational affirmation that we do, in fact, originate our own choices and volitions. To call this in question, is to question the validity of the intuitions of reason. But if the testimony of this faculty can deceive us, we can be certain of nothing. But it cannot deceive us, and no man can practically doubt the intuitions of the reason. All moral agents do, and always must, in all their practical judgments, assume and admit the truth of all the rational intuitions. Edwards, as really as any other man, believed himself to originate and be the proper cause of his own volitions. In his practical judgment he assumed his own causality, and the proper causality of all moral agents, or he never could have had so much as a conception of moral agency and accountability. But in theory, he adopted the capital error of denying the proper causality of moral agents. This error is fundamental. Every definition of a moral agent that denies or overlooks, his proper causality, is radically defective. It drops out of the definition the very element that we necessarily affirm to be essential to liberty and accountability. Denying, as he did, the proper causality of moral agents, he was driven to give a false definition of free agency, as has been shown. Edwards rightly regarded the choices and volitions of moral agents as effects, but he looks in the wrong direction for the cause. Instead of heeding the rational affirmation of his own mind that causality, or the power of self-determination, is a *sine qua non* of moral agency, he assumed, in theorizing, the direct opposite, and sought for the cause of choice and volition out of the agent, and in the objective motive; thus, in fact, denying the validity of the testimony of the pure reason, and reducing moral agents to mere machines, and stultifying the whole subject of moral government, moral action, and just retribution. No wonder that so capital an error, and defended with so much ability, should have led one of his own sons into scepticism. But the piety of the president was stronger than even his powerful logic. Assuming a false major premise, his straightforward logic conducted him to the dogma of a universal necessity. But his well-developed reason, and deep piety of heart, controlled his practical judgment, so that few men have practically held the doctrines of accountability and retribution with a firmer grasp.

2. Edwards adopted the Lockean philosophy. He regarded the mind as possessing but two primary faculties, the understanding and the will. He considered all the desires, emotions, affections, appetites, and passions as voluntary, and as really consisting in acts of will. This confounding of the states of the sensibility with acts of the will, I regard as another fundamental error of his whole system of philosophy, so far as it respects the liberty of the will, or the doctrine of ability. Being conscious that the emotions, which he calls affections, the desires, the appetites and passions, were so correlated to their appropriate objects, that they are excited by the presence or contemplation of them, and assuming them to be voluntary states of mind, or actions of the will, he very naturally, and with this assumption, necessarily and justly concluded, that the will was governed or decided by the objective motive. Assuming as he did that the mind has but two faculties, understanding and will, and that every state of feeling and of mind that did not belong to the understanding, must be a voluntary state or act of will, and being conscious that his feelings, desires, affections, appetites and passions, were excited by the contemplation of their correlated objects, he could consistently come to no other conclusion than that the will is determined by motives, and that choice always is as the most agreeable is.

Had he not sat down to write with the assumption of the Lockean school of philosophy in his mind, his *Treatise on the Will*, in anything like its present form, could never have seen the light. But assuming the truth of that philosophy, a mind like his could arrive at no other conclusions than he did. He took upon trust, or assumed without inquiry, an error that vitiated his whole system, and gave birth to that injurious monstrosity and misnomer, "Edwards on the Freedom of the Will." He justly held that moral law legislates and can strictly legislate only over acts of will, and those acts that are under the control of the will. This he, with his mental development, could not deny, nor think of denying. Had he but given or assumed a correct definition of the will, and excluded from its acts the wholly involuntary states of the sensibility, he never could have asserted that the will is always and necessarily determined by the objective motive. Assuming the philosophy of Locke, and being conscious that the states of his sensibility, which he called acts of will, were controlled or excited by motives, or by the consideration of their correlated objects, his great soul laboured to bring about a reconciliation between the justice of God and this real, though not so called, slavery of the human will. This led him to adopt the distinction which we have examined between a moral and a natural inability. Thus, as a theologian, he committed a capital error in suffering himself to take upon trust another man's philosophy. Happy is the man who takes the trouble to examine for himself, whatever is essential to his system of opinion and belief.

II. I am to state the philosophy of the scheme of inability which we are about to consider.

1. This philosophy properly distinguishes between the will and the sensibility. It regards the mind as possessing three primary departments, powers, or susceptibilities--the intellect, the sensibility, and the will. It does not always call these departments or susceptibilities by these names, but if I understand them, the abettors of this philosophy hold to their existence, by whatever name they may call them.

2. This philosophy also holds, that the states of the intellect and of the sensibility are passive and involuntary.

3. It holds that freedom of will is a condition of moral agency.

4. It also teaches that the will is free, and consequently that man is a free moral agent.

5. It teaches that the will controls the outward life and the attention of the intellect, directly, and many of the emotions, desires, affections, appetites, and passions, or many states of the sensibility, indirectly.

6. It teaches that men have ability to obey God so far as acts of will are concerned, and also so far as those acts and states of mind are concerned that are under the direct or indirect control of the will.

7. But they hold that moral obligation may, and in the case of man at least, does extend beyond moral agency and beyond the sphere of ability; that ability or freedom of will is essential to moral agency, but that freedom of will or moral agency does not limit moral obligation; that moral agency and moral obligation are not coextensive; consequently that moral obligation is not limited by ability or by moral agency.

8. This philosophy asserts that moral obligation extends to those states of mind that lie wholly beyond or without the sphere or control of the will; that it extends not merely to voluntary acts and states, together with all acts and states that come within the direct or indirect control of the will, but, as was said, it insists that those mental states that lie wholly beyond the will's direct or indirect control, come within the pale of moral legislation and obligation; and that therefore obligation is not limited by ability.

9. This philosophy seems to have been invented to reconcile the doctrine of original sin in the sense of a sinful nature, or of constitutional moral depravity with moral obligation. Assuming that original sin in this sense is a doctrine of divine revelation, it takes the bold and uncompromising ground already stated, namely, that moral obligation is not merely co-extensive with moral agency and ability, but extends beyond both into the region of those mental states that lie entirely without the will's direct or indirect control.

10. This bold assertion the abettors of this philosophy attempt to support by an appeal to the necessary convictions of men and to the authority of the Bible. They allege that the instinctive judgments of men, as well as the Bible, everywhere assume and affirm moral obligation and moral character of the class of mental states in question.

11. They admit that a physical inability is a bar to or inconsistent with moral obligation; but they of course deny that the inability to which they hold is physical.

III. This brings us to a brief consideration of the claims of this philosophy of inability.

1. It is based upon a *petitio principii*, or a begging of the question. It assumes that the instinctive or irresistible and universal judgments of men, together with the Bible, assert and assume that moral obligation and moral character extend to the states of mind in question. It is admitted that the teachings of the Bible are to be relied upon. It is also admitted that the first truths of reason, or what this philosophy calls the instinctive and necessary judgments of all men, must be true. But it is not admitted that the assertion in question is a doctrine of the Bible or a first truth of reason. On the contrary both are denied. It is denied, at least by me, that either reason or divine revelation affirms moral obligation or moral character of any state of mind, that lies wholly beyond both the direct and the indirect control of the will. Now this philosophy must not be allowed to beg the question in debate. Let it be shown, if it can be, that the alleged truth is either a doctrine of the Bible or a first truth of reason. Both reason and revelation do assert and assume, that moral obligation and moral character extend to acts of will, and to all those outward acts or mental states that lie within its direct or indirect control. "But further these deponents say not." Men are conscious of moral obligation in respect to these acts and states of mind, and of guilt when they fail in these respects to comply with moral obligation. But who ever blamed himself for pain, when, without his fault, he received a blow, or was seized with the tooth-ache, or a fit of bilious cholera?

2. Let us inquire into the nature of this inability. Observe, it is admitted by this school that a physical inability is inconsistent with moral obligation--in other words, that physical ability is a condition of moral obligation. But what is a physical inability? The primary definition of the adjective physical, given by Webster, is, "pertaining to nature, or natural objects." A physical inability then, in the primary sense of the term physical, is an inability of nature. It may be either a material or a mental inability, that is, it may be either an inability of body or mind. It is admitted by the school whose views we are canvassing, that all human causality or ability resides in the will, and therefore that there is a proper inability of nature to perform anything that does not come within the sphere of the direct or indirect causality of, or control of the will. It is plain, therefore, that the inability for which they contend must be a proper natural inability, or inability of nature. This they fully admit and maintain. But this they do not call a physical inability. But why do they not? Why, simply because it would, by their own admissions, overthrow their favourite position. They seem to assume that a physical inability must be a material inability. But where is the authority for such an assumption? There is no authority for it. A proper inability of nature must be a physical inability, as opposed to moral inability, or there is no meaning in language. It matters not at all whether the inability belongs to the material organism, or to the mind. If it be constitutional, and properly an inability of nature, it is nonsense to deny that this is a physical inability, or to maintain that it can be consistent with moral obligation. It is in vain to reply that this inability, though a real inability of nature, is not physical but moral, because a sinful inability. This is another begging of the question.

The school, whose views I am examining, maintain, that this inability is founded in the first sin of Adam. His first sin plunged himself and his posterity, descending from him by a natural law, into a total inability of nature to render any obedience to God. This first sin of Adam entailed a nature on all his posterity "wholly sinful in every faculty and part of soul and body." This constitutional sinfulness that belongs to every faculty and part of soul and body, constitutes the inability of which we are treating. But mark, it is not physical inability, because it is a sinful inability! Important theological distinction!--as truly wonderful, surely, as any of the subtleties of the Jesuits. But if this inability is sinful, it is important to inquire, Whose sin is it? Who is to blame for it? Why to be sure, we are told that it is the sin of him upon whom it is thus entailed by the natural law of descent from parent to child without his knowledge or consent. This sinfulness of nature, entirely irrespective of and previous to any actual transgression, renders its possessor worthy of and exposed to the wrath and curse of God for ever. This sinfulness, observe, is transmitted by a natural or physical law from Adam, but it is not a physical inability. It is something that inheres in, and belongs to every faculty and part of soul and body. It is transmitted by a physical law from parent to child. It is, therefore, and must be a physical thing. But yet we are told that it cannot be a physical inability, because first, it is sinful, or sin itself; and, secondly, because a physical inability is a bar to, or inconsistent with, moral obligation. Here, then, we have their reasons for not admitting this to be a physical inability. It would in this case render moral obligation an impossibility; and, besides, if a bar to moral obligation, it could not be sinful. But it is sinful, it is said, therefore it cannot be physical. But how do we know that it is sinful? Why, we are told, that the instinctive judgments of men, and the Bible everywhere affirm and assume it. We are told, that both the instinctive judgments of men and the Bible affirm and assume, both the inability in question and the sinfulness of it; "that we ought to be able, but are not;" that is, that we are so much to blame for this inability of nature entailed upon us without our knowledge or consent by a physical necessity, as to deserve the wrath and curse of God for ever. We are under a moral obligation not to have this sinful nature. We deserve damnation for having it. To be sure, we are entirely unable to put it away, and had no agency whatever in its existence. But what of that? We are told, that "moral obligation is not limited by ability;" that our being as unable to change our nature as we are to create a world, is no reason why we should not be under obligation to do it, since "moral obligation does not imply ability of any kind to do what we are under obligation to do!" . . . I was about to expose the folly and absurdity of these assertions, but hush! It is not allowable, we are told, to reason on this subject. We shall deceive ourselves if we listen to the "miserable logic of our understandings." We must fall back, then, upon the intuitive affirmations of reason and the Bible. Here, then, we are willing to lodge our appeal. The Bible defines sin to be a transgression of the law. What law have we violated in inheriting this nature? What law requires us to have a different nature from that which we possess? Does reason affirm that we are deserving of the wrath and curse of God for ever, for inheriting from Adam a sinful nature?

What law of reason have we transgressed in inheriting this nature? Reason cannot condemn us, unless we have violated some law which it can recognize as such. Reason indignantly rebukes such nonsense. Does the Bible hold us responsible for impossibilities? Does it require of us what we cannot do by willing to do it? Nay, verily; but it expressly affirms, that "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not." The plain meaning of this passage is, that if one wills as God directs, he has hereby met all his obligation; that he has done all that is naturally possible to him, and therefore nothing more is required. In this passage, the Bible expressly limits obligation by ability. This we have repeatedly seen in former lectures. The law also, as we have formerly seen, limits obligation by ability. It requires only that we should love the Lord with all our strength, that is, with all our ability, and our neighbour as ourselves.

Does reason hold us responsible for impossibilities, or affirm our obligation to do, or be, what it is impossible for us to do and be? No indeed. Reason never did and never can condemn us for our nature, and hold us worthy of the wrath and curse of God for ever for possessing it. Nothing is more shocking and revolting to reason, than such assumptions as are made by the philosophy in question. This every man's consciousness must testify.

But is it not true that some, at least, do intelligently condemn themselves for their nature, and adjudge themselves to be worthy of the wrath and curse of God for ever for its sinfulness? The framers of the Presbyterian Confession of Faith made this affirmation in words, at least; whether intelligently or unintelligently, we are left to inquire. The reason of a moral agent condemning himself, and adjudging himself worthy of the wrath and curse of God for ever, for possessing a nature entailed on him by a natural law, without his knowledge or consent! This can never be.

But is it not true, as is affirmed, that men instinctively and necessarily affirm their obligation to be able to obey God, while they at the same time affirm that they are not able? I answer, no. They affirm themselves to be under obligation simply, and only, because deeply in their inward being lies the assumption that they are able to comply with the requirements of God. They are conscious of ability to will, and of power to control their outward life directly, and the states of the intellect and of their sensibility, either directly or indirectly, by willing. Upon this consciousness they found the affirmation of obligation, and of praise and blame-worthiness in respect to these acts and states of mind. But for the consciousness of a bility, no affirmation of moral obligation, or of praise or blame-worthiness, were possible.

But do not those who affirm both their inability and their obligation, deceive themselves? I answer, yes. It is common for persons to overlook assumptions that lie, so to speak, at the bottom of their minds. This has been noticed in former lectures, and need not be here repeated.

It is true indeed that God requires of men, especially under the gospel, what they are unable to do directly in their own strength. Or more strictly speaking, he requires them to lay hold on his strength, or to avail themselves of his grace, as the condition of being what he requires them to be. With strict propriety, it cannot be said that in this, or in any case, he requires directly any more than we are able directly to do. The direct requirement in the case under consideration, is to avail ourselves of, or to lay hold upon his strength. This we have power to do. He requires us to lay hold upon his grace and strength, and thereby to rise to a higher knowledge of himself, and to a consequent higher state of holiness than would be otherwise possible to us. The direct requirement is to believe, or to lay hold upon his strength, or to receive the Holy Spirit, or Christ, who stands at the door, and knocks, and waits for admission. The indirect requirement is to rise to a degree of knowledge of God, and to spiritual attainments that are impossible to us in our own strength. We have ability to obey the direct command directly, and the indirect command indirectly. That is, we are able by virtue of our nature, together with the proffered grace of the Holy Spirit, to comply with all the requirements of God. So that in fact there is no proper inability about it.

But are not men often conscious of there being much difficulty in the way of rendering to God all that we affirm ourselves under obligation to render? I answer, yes. But strictly speaking, they must admit their direct or indirect ability, as a condition of affirming their obligation. This difficulty, arising out of their physical depravity (See distinction between moral and physical depravity, Lecture XXXVIII. II), and the power of temptation from without, is the foundation or cause of the spiritual warfare of which the Scriptures speak, and of which all Christians are conscious. But the Bible abundantly teaches, that through grace we are able to be more than conquerors. If we are able to be this through grace, we are able to avail ourselves of the provisions of grace, so that there is no proper inability in the case. However great the difficulties may be, we are able through Christ to overcome them all. This we must and do assume as the condition of the affirmation of obligation.

Re:, on: 2007/12/21 20:06

LECTURE LII.

THE NOTION OF INABILITY

PROPER METHOD OF ACCOUNTING FOR IT.

CHARLES G. FINNEY

I have represented ability, or the freedom of the will, as a first truth of reason. I have also defined first truths of reason to be those truths that are necessarily known to all moral agents. From these two representations the inquiry may natura

ly arise, How then is it to be accounted for that so many men have denied the liberty of the will, or ability to obey God? That these first truths of reason are frequently denied is a notorious fact. A recent writer thinks this denial a sufficient refutation of the affirmation, that ability is a first truth of reason. It is important that this denial should be accounted for. That mankind affirm their obligation upon the real, though often latent and unperceived assumption of ability, there is no reasonable ground of doubt. I have said that first-truths of reason are frequently assumed, and certainly known without being always the direct object of thought or attention; and also that these truths are universally held in the practical judgments of men, while they sometimes in theory deny them. They know them to be true, and in all their practical judgments assume their truth, while they reason against them, think they prove them untrue, and not unfrequently affirm, that they are conscious of an opposite affirmation. For example, men have denied, in theory, the law of causality, while they have at every moment of their lives acted upon the assumption of its truth. Others have denied the freedom of the will, who have, every hour of their lives, assumed, and acted, and judged, upon the assumption that the will is free. The same is true of ability, which, in respect to the commandments of God, is identical with freedom. Men have often denied the ability of man to obey the commandments of God, while they have always, in their practical judgments of themselves and of others, assumed their ability, in respect to those things that are really commanded by God. Now, how is this to be accounted for?

1. Multitudes have denied the freedom of the will, because they have loosely confounded the will with the involuntary powers--with the intellect and the sensibility. Locke, as is well known, regarded the mind as possessing but two primary faculties, the understanding and the will. President Edwards, as was said in a former lecture, followed Locke, and regarded all the states of the sensibility as acts of the will. Multitudes, nay the great mass of Calvinistic divines, with their hearers, have held the same views. This confounding of the sensibility with the will has been common for a long time. Now everybody is conscious, that the states of the sensibility or mere feelings cannot be produced or changed by a direct effort to feel thus or thus. Everybody knows from consciousness that the feelings come and go, wax and wane, as motives are presented to excite them. And they know also that these feelings are under the law of necessity and not of liberty; that is, that necessity is an attribute of these feelings, in such a sense, that under the circumstances, they will exist in spite of ourselves, and that they cannot be controlled by a direct effort to control them. Everybody knows that our feelings, or the states of our sensibility can be controlled only indirectly, that is, by the direction of our thoughts. By directing our thoughts to an object calculated to excite certain feelings, we know that when the excitability is not exhausted, feelings correlated to that object will come into play, of course and of necessity. So when any class of feelings exist, we all know that by diverting the attention from the object that excites them, they subside of course, and give place to a class correlated to the new object that at present occupies the attention. Now, it is very manifest how the freedom of the will has come to be denied by those who confound the will proper with the sensibility. These same persons have always known and assumed, that the actions of the will proper were free. Their error has consisted in not distinguishing in theory between the action of the proper will, and the involuntary states of the sensibility. In their practical judgments, and in their conduct, they have recognized the distinction which they have failed to recognize in their speculations and theories. They have every hour been exerting their own freedom, have been controlling directly their attention and their outward life, by the free exercise of their proper will. They have also, by the free exercise of the same faculty, been indirectly controlling the states of their sensibility. They have all along assumed the absolute freedom of the will proper, and have always acted upon the assumption, or they would not have acted at all, or even attempted to act. But since they did not in theory distinguish between the sensibility and the will proper, they denied in theory the freedom of the will. If the actions of the will be confounded with desires and emotions, as President Edwards confounded them, and as has been common, the result must be a theoretical denial of the freedom of the will. In this way we are to account for the doctrine of inability, as it has been generally held. It has not been clearly understood that moral law legislates directly, and, with strict propriety of speech, only over the will proper, and over the involuntary powers only indirectly through the will. It has been common to regard the law and the gospel of God, as directly extending their claims to the involuntary powers and states of mind; and, as was shown in a former lecture, many have regarded, in theory, the law as extending its claims to those states that lie wholly beyond, either the direct or indirect control of the will. Now, of course, with these views of the claims of God, ability is and must be denied. I trust we have seen in past lectures, that, strictly and properly speaking, the moral law restricts its claims to the actions of the will proper, in such a sense that, if there be a willing mind, it is accepted as obedience; that the moral law and the lawgiver legislate over involuntary states only indirectly, that is, through the will; and that the whole of virtue, strictly speaking, consists in good-will or disinterested benevolence. Sane minds never practically deny, or can deny, the freedom of the will proper, or the doctrine of ability, when they make the proper discriminations between the will and the sensibility, and properly regard moral law as legislating directly only over the will. It is worthy of all consideration, that those who have denied ability, have almost always confounded the will and the sensibility; and that those who have denied ability, have always extended the claims of moral law beyond the pale of proper voluntariness; and many of them even beyond the limits of either the direct or the indirect control of the will.

But the inquiry may arise, how it comes to pass that men have so extensively entertained the impression, that the moral law legislates directly over those feelings, and over those states of mind which they know to be involuntary? I answer,

that this mistake has arisen out of a want of just discrimination between the direct and indirect legislation of the law, and of the lawgiver. It is true that men are conscious of being responsible for their feelings and for their outward actions, and even for their thoughts. And it is really true that they are responsible for them, in so far as they are under either the direct or indirect control of the will. And they know that these acts and states of mind are possible to them, that is, that they have an indirect ability to produce them. They, however, loosely confound the direct and indirect ability and responsibility. The thing required by the law directly and presently is benevolence or good-will. This is what, and all that the law strictly, presently or directly requires. It indirectly requires all those outward and inward acts and states that are connected directly and indirectly with this required act of will, by a law of necessity; that is, that those acts and states should follow as soon as by a natural and necessary law they will follow from a right action of the will. When these feelings, and states, and acts do not exist, they blame themselves generally with propriety, because the absence of them is in fact owing to a want of the required act of the will. Sometimes, no doubt, they blame themselves unjustly, not considering that, although the will is right, of which they are conscious, the involuntary state or act does not follow, because of exhaustion, or because of some disturbance in the established and natural connection between the acts of the will and its ordinary sequents. When this exhaustion or disturbance exists, men are apt, loosely and unjustly, to write bitter things against themselves. They often do the same in hours of temptation, when Satan casts his fiery darts at them, lodging them in the thoughts and involuntary feelings. The will repels them, but they take effect, for the time being, in spite of himself, in the intellect and sensibility. Blasphemous thoughts are suggested to the mind, unkind thoughts of God are suggested, and in spite of one's self, these abominable thoughts awaken their correlated feelings. The will abhors them and struggles to suppress them, but for the time being, finds itself unable to do anything more than to fight and resist.

Now, it is very common for souls in this state to write the most bitter accusations against themselves. But should it be hence inferred that they really are as much in fault as they assume themselves to be? No, indeed. But why do ministers, of all schools, unite in telling such tempted souls, You are mistaken, my dear brother or sister, these thoughts and feelings, though exercises of your own mind, are not yours in such a sense that you are responsible for them. The thoughts are suggested by Satan, and the feelings are a necessary consequence. Your will resists them, and this proves that you are unable, for the time being, to avoid them. You are therefore not responsible for them while you resist them with all the power of your will, any more than you would be guilty of murder should a giant overpower your strength, and use your hand against your will to shoot a man. In such cases it is, so far as I know, universally true, that all schools admit that the tempted soul is not responsible or guilty for those things which it cannot help. The inability is here allowed to be a bar to obligation; and such souls are justly told by ministers, You are mistaken in supposing yourself guilty in this case. The like mistake is fallen into when a soul blames itself for any state of mind whatever that lies wholly and truly beyond the direct or indirect control of the will, and for the same reason, inability in both cases is alike a bar to obligation. It is just as absurd, in the one case as in the other, to infer real responsibility from a feeling or persuasion of responsibility. To hold that men are always responsible, because they loosely think themselves to be so is absurd. In cases of temptation, such as that just supposed, as soon as the attention is directed to the fact of inability to avoid those thoughts and feelings, and the mind is conscious of the will's resisting them, and of being unable to banish them, it readily rests in the assurance that it is not responsible for them. Its own irresponsibility in such cases appears self-evident to the mind, the moment the proper inability is considered, and the affirmation of irresponsibility attended to. Now if the soul naturally and truly regarded itself as responsible, when there is a proper inability and impossibility, the instructions above referred to could not relieve the mind. It would say, To be sure I know that I cannot avoid having these thoughts and feelings, any more than I can cease to be the subject of consciousness, yet I know I am responsible notwithstanding. These thoughts and feelings are states of my own mind, and no matter how I come by them, or whether I can control or prevent them or not. Inability, you know, is no bar to obligation; therefore, my obligation and my guilt remain. Woe is me, for I am undone. The idea, then, of responsibility, when there is in fact real inability, is a prejudice of education, a mistake.

The mistake, unless strong prejudice of education has taken possession of the mind, lies in overlooking the fact of a real and proper inability. Unless the judgment has been strongly biased by education, it never judges itself bound to perform impossibilities, nor even conceive of such a thing. Who ever held himself bound to undo what is past, to recall past time, or to substitute holy acts and states of mind in the place of past sinful ones? No one ever held himself bound to do this; first, because he knows it to be impossible; and secondly, because no one that I have heard of ever taught or asserted any such obligation; and therefore none have received so strong a bias from education as loosely to hold such an opinion. But sometimes the bias of education is so great, that the subjects of it seem capable of believing almost anything, however inconsistent with the intuitions of the reason, and consequently in the face of the most certain knowledge. For example, President Edwards relates of a young woman in his congregation, that she was deeply convicted of being guilty for Adam's first sin, and deeply repented of it. Now suppose that this and like cases should be regarded as conclusive proof that men are guilty of that sin, and deserve the wrath and curse of God for ever for that sin; and that all men will suffer the pains of hell for ever, except they become convinced of their personal guilt for that sin, and repent of it as in dust and ashes! President Edwards's teaching on the subject of the relation of all men to Adam's first sin, it is well known, was

calculated in a high degree to pervert the judgment upon that subject; and this sufficiently accounts for the fact above alluded to. But apart from education, no human being ever held himself responsible for, or guilty of, the first or any other sin of Adam, or of any other being, who existed and died before he himself existed. The reason is that all moral agents naturally know, that inability or a proper impossibility is a bar to moral obligation and responsibility; and they never conceive to the contrary, unless biassed by a mystifying education that casts a fog over their primitive and constitutional convictions.

2. Some have denied ability because they have strangely held, that the moral law requires sinners to be just in all respects what they might have been had they never sinned. That is, they maintain that God requires of them just as high and perfect a service as if their powers had never been abused by sin; as if they had always been developed by the perfectly right use of them. This they admit to be a natural impossibility; nevertheless they hold that God may justly require it, and that sinners are justly bound to perform this impossible service, and that they sin continually in coming short of it. To this sentiment I answer, that it might be maintained with as much show of reason, and as much authority from the Bible, that God might and does require of all sinners to undo all their acts of sin, and to substitute holy ones in their places, and that he holds them as sinning every moment by the neglect to do this. Why may not God as well require one as the other? They are alike impossibilities. They are alike impossibilities originating in the sinner's own act or fault. If the sinner's rendering himself unable to obey in one case does not set aside the right of God to command, so does it not for the same reason in the other. If an inability resulting from the sinner's own act cannot bar the right of God to make the requisition in the one case, neither can it for the same reason in the other. But every one can see that God cannot justly require the sinner to recall past time, and to undo past acts. But why? No other reason can be assigned than that it is impossible. But the same reason, it is admitted, exists in its full extent in the other case. It is admitted that sinners, who have long indulged in sin, or who have sinned at all, are really as unable to render as high a degree of service as they might have done had they never sinned, as they are to recall past time, or to undo all their past acts of sin. On what ground, then, of reason or revelation does the assertion rest, that in one case an impossibility is a bar to obligation, and not in the other? I answer, there is no ground whatever for the assertion in question. It is a sheer and an absurd assumption, unsupported by any affirmation of reason, or any truth or principle of revelation.

But to this assumption I reply again, as I have done on a former occasion, that if it be true, it must follow, that no one on earth or in heaven who has ever sinned will be able to render as perfect a service as the law demands; for there is no reason to believe, that any being who has abused his powers by sin will ever in time or eternity be able to render as high a service as he might have done had he at every moment duly developed them by perfect obedience. If this theory is true, I see not why it does not follow that the saints will be guilty in heaven of the sin of omission. A sentiment based upon an absurdity in the outset, as the one in question is, and resulting in such consequences as this must, is to be rejected without hesitation.

3. A consciousness of the force of habit, in respect to all the acts and states of body and mind, has contributed to the loose holding of the doctrine of inability. Every one who is at all in the habit of observation and self-reflection is aware, that for some reason we acquire a greater and greater facility in doing anything by practice or repetition. We find this to be true in respect to acts of will as really as in respect to the involuntary states of mind. When the will has been long committed to the indulgence of the propensities, and in the habit of submitting itself to their impulses, there is a real difficulty of some sort in the way of changing its action. This difficulty cannot really impair the liberty of the will. If it could, it would destroy, or so far impair, moral agency and accountability. But habit may, and, as every one knows, does interpose an obstacle of some sort in the way of right willing, or, on the other hand, in the way of wrong willing. That is, men both obey and disobey with greatest facility from habit. Habit strongly favours the accustomed action of the will in any direction. This, as I said, never does or can properly impair the freedom of the will, or render it impossible to act in a contrary direction; for if it could and should, the actions of the will, in that case, being determined by a law of necessity in one direction, would have no moral character. If benevolence became a habit so strong that it were utterly impossible to will in an opposite direction, or not to will benevolently, benevolence would cease to be virtuous. So, on the other hand, with selfishness. If the will came to be determined in that direction by habit grown into a law of necessity, such action would and must cease to have moral character. But, as I said, there is a real conscious difficulty of some sort in the way of obedience, when the will has been long accustomed to sin. This is strongly recognized in the language of inspiration and in devotional hymns, as well as in the language of experience by all men. The language of scripture is often so strong upon this point, that, but for a regard to the subject-matter of discourse, we might justly infer a proper inability. For example, Jer. xiii. 23: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." This and similar passages recognize the influence of habit. "Then may ye who are accustomed to do evil:" custom or habit is to be overcome, and, in the strong language of the prophet, this is like changing the Ethiop's skin or the leopard's spots. But to understand the prophet as here affirming a proper inability were to disregard one of the fundamental rules of interpreting language, namely, that it is to be understood by reference to the subject of discourse. The latter part of the sev

enth chapter of Romans affords a striking instance and an illustration of this. It is, as has just been said, a sound and most important rule of interpreting all language, that due regard be had to the subject-matter of discourse. When "cannot," and such like terms, that express an inability are applied to physical or involuntary actions or states of mind, they express a proper natural inability; but when they are used in reference to actions of free will, they express not a proper impossibility, but only a difficulty arising out of the existence of a contrary choice, or the law of habit, or both. Much question has been made about the seventh of Romans in its relation to the subject of ability and inability. Let us, therefore, look a little into this passage, Romans vii. 15-23: "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Now, what did the Apostle mean by this language? Did he use language here in the popular sense, or with strictly philosophical propriety? He says he finds himself able to will, but not able to do. Is he then speaking of a mere outward or physical inability? Does he mean merely to say, that the established connexion between volition and its sequents was disturbed, so that he could not execute his volitions? This his language, literally interpreted, and without reference to the subject-matter of discourse, and without regard to the manifest scope and design of the writer, would lead us to conclude. But whoever contended for such an interpretation? The apostle used popular language, and was describing a very common experience. Convicted sinners and backslidden saints often make legal resolutions, and resolve upon obedience under the influence of legal motives, and without really becoming benevolent, and changing the attitude of their wills. They, under the influence of conviction, purpose selfishly to do their duty to God and man, and, in the presence of temptation, they constantly fail of keeping their resolutions. It is true, that with their selfish hearts, or in the selfish attitude of their wills, they cannot keep their resolutions to abstain from those inward thoughts and emotions, nor from those outward actions that result by a law of necessity from a selfish state or attitude of the will. These legal resolutions the apostle popularly calls willings. "To will is present with me, but how to do good I find not. When I would do good, evil is present with me, so that the good I would I do not, and the evil I would not that I do. If then I do the evil I would not, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I delight in the law of God after the inner man. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," &c. Now, this appears to me to be descriptive of a very familiar experience of every deeply convicted sinner or backslider. The will is committed to the propensities, to the law in the members, or to the gratification of the impulses of the sensibility. Hence, the outward life is selfish. Conviction of sin leads to the formation of resolutions of amendment, while the will does not submit to God. These resolutions constantly fail of securing the result contemplated. The will still abides in a state of committal to self-gratification; and hence resolutions to amend in feeling or the outward life, fail of securing those results.

Nothing was more foreign from the apostle's purpose, it seems to me, than to affirm a proper inability of will to yield to the claims of God. Indeed, he affirms and assumes the freedom of his will. "To will," he says, "is present with me;" that is, to resolve. But resolution is an act of will. It is a purpose, a design. He purposed, designed to amend. To form resolutions was present with him, but how to do good he found not. The reason why he did not execute his purposes was, that they were selfishly made; that is, he resolved upon reformation without giving his heart to God, without submitting his will to God, without actually becoming benevolent. This caused his perpetual failure. This language, construed strictly to the letter, would lead to the conclusion, that the apostle was representing a case where the will is right, but where the established and natural connexion between volition and its sequents is destroyed, so that the outward act did not follow the action of the will. In this case all schools would agree that the act of the will constitutes real obedience. The whole passage, apart from the subject-matter of discourse, and from the manifest design and scope of the writer, might lead us to conclude, that the apostle was speaking of a proper inability, and that he did not therefore regard the failure as his own fault. "It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me. O wretched man that I am," &c. Those who maintain that the apostle meant to assert a proper inability to obey, must also admit that he represented this inability as a bar to obligation, and regarded his state as calamitous, rather than as properly sinful. But the fact is, he was portraying a legal experience, and spoke of finding himself unable to keep selfish resolutions of amendment in the presence of temptation. His will was in a state of committal to the indulgence of the propensities. In the absence of temptation, his convictions, and fears, and feelings were the strongest impulses, and under their influence he would form resolutions to do his duty, to abstain from fleshly indulgences, &c. But as some other appetite or desire came to be more strongly excited, he yielded to that of course, and broke his former resolution. Paul writes as if speaking of himself, but was doubtless speaking as the representative of a class of persons already named. He found the law of selfish habit exceedingly strong, and so strong as to lead him to cry out, "O wretched man," &c. But this is not affirming a proper inability of will to submit to God.

4. All men who seriously undertake their own reformation find themselves in great need of help and support from the

Holy Spirit, in consequence of the physical depravity of which I have formerly spoken, and because of the great strength of their habit of self-indulgence. They are prone, as is natural, to express their sense of dependence on the Divine Spirit in strong language, and to speak of this dependence as if it consisted in a real inability, when, in fact, they do not really consider it as a proper inability. They speak upon this subject just as they do upon any and every other subject, when they are conscious of a strong inclination to a given course. They say in respect to many things, "I cannot," when they mean only "I will not," and never think of being understood as affirming a proper inability. The inspired writers expressed themselves in the common language of men upon such subjects, and are doubtless to be understood in the same way. In common parlance, "cannot" often means "will not," and perhaps is used as often in this sense as it is to express a proper inability. Men do not misinterpret this language, and suppose it to affirm a proper inability, when used in reference to acts of will, except on the subject of obedience to God; and why should they assign a meaning to language when used upon this subject which they do not assign to it anywhere else?

But, as I said in a former lecture, under the light of the gospel, and with the promises in our hands, God does require of us what we should be unable to do and be, but for these promises and this proffered assistance. Here is a real inability to do directly in our own strength all that is required of us, upon consideration of the proffered aid. We can only do it by strength imparted by the Holy Spirit. That is, we cannot know Christ, and avail ourselves of his offices and relations, and appropriate to our own souls his fulness, except as we are taught by the Holy Spirit. The thing immediately and directly required, is to receive the Holy Spirit by faith to be our teacher and guide, to take of Christ's and show it to us. This confidence we are able to exercise. Who ever really and intelligently affirmed that he had not power or ability to trust or confide in the promise and oath of God?

Much that is said of inability in poetry, and in the common language of the saints, respects not the subjection of the will to God, but those experiences, and states of feeling that depend on the illuminations of the Spirit just referred to. The language that is so common in prayer and in the devotional dialect of the church, respects generally our dependence upon the Holy Spirit for such divine discoveries of Christ, as to charm the soul into a steadfast abiding in him. We feel our dependence upon the Holy Spirit so to enlighten us, as to break up for ever the power of sinful habit, and draw us away from our idols entirely and for ever.

In future lectures I shall have occasion to enlarge much upon the subject of our dependence upon Christ and the Holy Spirit. But this dependence does not consist in a proper inability to will as God directs, but, as I have said, partly in the power of sinful habit, and partly in the great darkness of our souls in respect to Christ and his mediatorial work and relations. All these together do not constitute a proper inability, for the plain reason, that through the right action of our will which is always possible to us, these difficulties can all be directly or indirectly overcome. Whatever we can do or be, directly or indirectly, by willing, is possible to us. But there is no degree of spiritual attainment required of us, that may not be reached directly or indirectly by right willing. Therefore these attainments are possible. "If any man," says Christ, "will do his will," that is, has an obedient will, "he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." "If thine eye be single," that is, if the intention or will is right, "thy whole body shall be full of light." "If any man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him." The scriptures abound with assurances of light and instruction, and of all needed grace and help, upon condition of a right will or heart, that is, upon condition of our being really willing to obey the light, when and as fast as we receive it. I have abundantly shown on former occasions, that a right state of the will constitutes, for the time being, all that, strictly speaking, the moral law requires. But I said, that it also, though in a less strict and proper sense, requires all those acts and states of the intellect and sensibility which are connected by a law of necessity with the right action of the will. Of course, it also requires that cleansing of the sensibility, and all those higher forms of Christian experience that result from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That is, the law of God requires that these attainments shall be made when the means are provided and enjoyed, and as soon as, in the nature of the case, these attainments are possible. But it requires no more than this. For the law of God can never require absolute impossibilities. That which requires absolute impossibilities, is not and cannot be moral law. For, as was formerly said, moral law is the law of nature, and what law of nature would that be that should require absolute impossibilities? This would be a mockery of a law of nature. What! a law of nature requiring that which is impossible to nature, both directly and indirectly! Impossible.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/12/21 20:12

Jesse,

I find it quite immature to just repeat and copy and paste another men's doctrine when we have not experienced or found God ourselves in the same manner. Personally having a "perfect doctrine" in the letter was nothing that was sought after by the Apostles but rather a doctrine that "accords to godliness" all true doctrine teaches and leads towards a life according to holiness (Christ-likeness).

Many men have done damage by being able to know "doctrine" and share it with others without life. I find truth in Edwards and Finney but their life's speak much louder than their doctrine and arguments.

Have we experienced God in the same measure we speak of Him?

The fruits of moral government teachings is bad. If it were the "truth" we would see christian history with it and also many good men and churches with that position.

Re: - posted by davyman, on: 2007/12/21 20:16

Laz,

It's gonna take a while to read this. However, I will muddle through't! I won't have a quick response though i will say that Finney is considered a palagian and quite heretical in my circles.

Re:, on: 2007/12/21 20:30

Quote:

-----I find it quite immature to just repeat and copy and paste another men's doctrine

Greg,

People post articles all the time on Sermon Index. But I'm sure you never say that it is immature. Is it possible that you object to me posting Finney because you don't like Finney's doctrine?

In fact, I didn't "just repeat and copy and past" Finney. My first post was my own critique of Edwards doctrine. It was not Finneys. How is it that I am "immature" when in fact I am the only one in this thread so far that has given their own argument on the topic of freewill??

I only posted Finney's articles after Brother Davyman posted an article. But you seem to fail to tell Davyman that it is "immature" to post articles from John Pipers website.

Why am I "immature" for posting my own critique and then Finney's critique, but Davyman is not "immature" for posting an article from Piper's site??

Quote:

-----The fruits of moral government teachings is bad. If it were the "truth" we would see christian history with it and also many good men and churches with that position.

Actually, revivals and much soul winning have accompanied the doctrines of moral government theology, particularly the doctrines of freewill, repentance, and entire sanctification. But this thread is about freewill, which is a doctrine of moral government theology, Arminian theology, and early Christian theology.

You do see great Christians holding to the doctrines of freewill throughout Christian history. For example, all the Early Church Fathers before Augustine believed in freewill. And they no doubt won many souls and even gave their lives in mart

freedom. Also the Arminians, the Wesleyans, and the Finneyites all believed in freewill and revival accompanied their doctrines.

Quote:
-----It's gonna take a while to read this. However, I will muddle through! I won't have a quick response though i will say that Finney is considered a Pelagian and quite heretical in my circles.

When it came to freewill, Finney was a "Pelagian". But when it came to freewill, all of the Early Church Fathers were "Pelagian". The doctrine of freewill was a Christian doctrine before Pelagius even was born.

Historical Orthodox Christianity taught the same freewill that Finney and Pelagius taught. In fact, the only ones who denied freewill were the Gnostics. So the Early Church said that only heretics deny freewill.

Melito said, "There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man." (c.170, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Irenaeus said, "But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect similar to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself his own cause that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff." (c.180, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Irenaeus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds... And Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?... All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man... For it is in man's power to disobey God and to forfeit what is good." (c.180, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Clement of Alexandria said, "We... have believed and are saved by voluntary choice." (c.195, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Clement of Alexandria said, "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." (c.195, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Clement of Alexandria said, "To obey or not is in our own power, provided we do not have the excuse of ignorance." (c.195, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Theodorite said, "For how can He punish a nature which had no power to do good, but was bound in the hands of wickedness?" (Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan, pg 62, published by Truth in Heart)

Clement said, "Neither praise nor condemnation, neither reward nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary." (Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up, by David Bercot, pg 71, printed by Scroll Publishing)

Jerome said, "God has bestowed us with free will. We are not necessarily drawn either to virtue or vice. For when necessity rules, there is no room left either for damnation or the crown." (Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan, pg 62, published by Truth in Heart)

Archelaus said, "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." (Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up, by David Bercot, pg 71, printed by Scroll Publishing)

Tertullian said, "I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power... For a law would not be imposed upon one who did not have it in his power to render that obedience which is due to law. Nor again, would the penalty of death be threatened against sin, if a contempt of the law were impossible to man in the liberty of

of his will... Man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance." (c.207, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 288, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Justin the Martyr said, "Every created being is so constituted as to be capable of vice and virtue. For he can do nothing praiseworthy, if he had not the power of turning either way." (Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan, pg 61, published by Truth in Heart)

Justin the Martyr said, "unless we suppose man has the power to choose the good and refuse the evil, no one can be accountable for any action whatever." (Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan, pg 61, published by Truth in Heart)

Tertullian said, "No reward can be justly bestowed, no punishment can be justly inflicted, upon him who is good or bad by necessity, and not by his own choice." (Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan, pg 61, published by Truth in Heart)

Origen said, "The soul does not incline to either part out of necessity, for then neither vice nor virtue could be ascribed to it; nor would its choice of virtue deserve reward; nor its declination to vice punishment." (Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan, pg 62, published by Truth in Heart)

Origen said, "How could God require that of man which he had not power to offer Him?" (Doctrine of the Will by Asa Mahan, pg 62, published by Truth in Heart)

Origen said, "It is our responsibility to live righteously. God asks this of us, not as though it were dependent on Him, nor on any other, or upon fate (as some think), but as being dependent on us... We have freedom of the will and that we ourselves are the cause of our own ruin or our salvation." (Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up, by David Bercot, pg 74, printed by Scroll Publishing)

Re:, on: 2007/12/21 20:58

Consider this question:

Do you believe in freewill?

If you answer "**yes**", then you agree with Pelagius, Finney, and moral government theology.

If you answer "**no**" then you disagree with all of the Early Church for the first 300 years. But you would be in agreement with the Gnostics.

You would disagree with men like Clement who was even commended in the Bible itself - Php 4:3.

You would disagree with Polycarp who was the disciple of the Apostle John.

You would disagree with Irenaeus who was disciplined by Polycarp.

You would disagree with the personal disciples of the Apostles if you denied that man had a freewill.

In fact, if you answer "**no**" the early Church would consider you a heretic because they said only heretics deny freewill.

Very interesting. These things should be seriously considered.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/12/21 21:02

Jesse,

Perhaps my wording did come across a bit strong but I will provide you with a bit more of my heart and why I said what I worded in that post.

immature |im; ch o;r; -t(y)o;r|
adjective
not fully developed

ORIGIN mid 16th cent. (in the sense referring to death): from Latin immaturus 'untimely, unripe,' from in- 'not' + maturus 'ripe' (see mature).

I find to be "young" in age and experience with God and commit to a whole theology can lead to spiritual "immaturity" which can be a dangerous place. The Lord in His grace is progressing us all in the knowledge of Scriptures and of Christ Himself.

The danger I see you falling into is to shape your thoughts and men's logic around the word of God so that it makes sense. But we cannot do this brother! we must allow the word of God to smite us and break us and teach us. We cannot explain the Scriptures with our reasoning.. God shows forth his word by His Spirit and that leads into "all truth".

My personal conviction is between Arminism and Calvinism proper and I see weaknesses and strengths in both. But to be frank and honest.. in much of the emphasis Calvinism is more biblical! that is what matters what is said in the bible. Not our conjectures, as well, **long**, wordy with various vernacular, and how lofty it reads! It is still our mind and our thoughts trying to "admirably" grasp God's thoughts. This is not to say that logic does not have a place in understanding the bible, or that we are not to use our minds in understanding the bible. But it is clear that God is the revealer of truth and this "revelation" is shown forth in the spiritual realm primarily. Let us be certain and agreed on this.

I can find fellowship with many Christians of different theological thought. But to simply just espouse theology can be a deadening experience.

Quote:
-----Actually, revivals and much soul winning have accompanied the doctrines of moral government theology, particularly the doctrines of freewill, repentance, and entire sanctification. But this thread is about freewill, which is a doctrine of moral government theology, Arminian theology, and early Christian theology.

Thoughts of entire sanctification and holiness existed long before Finney's day. The early church fathers had a mixture of God's sovereignty and freewill (a healthy mix I might add that is biblical).

Quote:
-----For example, all the Early Church Fathers before Augustine believed in freewill.

Brother, you cannot juxtapose Finney with the early church fathers and put them at enmity with Augustine? that is ridiculous. There is as much early church father thought in Augustine's teachings as there is in Finney's, perhaps less.

Quote:
-----Also the Arminians, the Wesleyans, and the Finneyites all believed in freewill and revival accompanied their doctrines.

Brother, once again you cannot compare Finney with Wesley, because we are dealing with different men with different views of thought on this subject. Wesley was in many ways a healthy biblicalist with times of extreme opinion on issues relating to salvation tenets in Calvinism. But overall Wesley had a great high view of God and His sovereignty which he obviously found and shared that thought with the scriptures.

Quote:
-----Melito said, "There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man." (c.170, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Brother, you can take these quotes and make the early church fathers look like prideful men that can do what they want with their lives. It sounds like an American slogan "pride" we are a free country with liberty and have pride in our liberty. May it not be so. The apostles and other men knew themselves very well, and knew how wicked they were. They knew wh

at God did for them and how God changed them through the power of the cross. So that after this transformation they were able to follow God with all their will gratefully.

You have no sense in the bible of a pride in free will. There is humility, contriteness, dependence on God, lowliness, servanthood.

Oh the great things christians do without God in the 20th century! and look where it has left the church. God has left us to our own devices in the 20th century in North America.. We have the "ark" yet the presence of God has lifted. We are powerless and need God again. A great sermon preached on this recently is here:

A Keen Awareness of The Church's Loss by Roger Ellsworth

<https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/mydownloads/singlefile.php?lid=15985&commentView=itemComments>

Re:, on: 2007/12/21 21:10

The more I study the early Church, and the actual teachings of Pelagius, the more I see that it was Pelagius who agreed with the Early Church, and Augustine who disagreed with it.

Augustine brought into the Church so many Gnostic and Manichean doctrines, and Pelagius was severely persecuted for holding to the early Churches doctrine of freewill. Whenever Pelagius was able to defend himself he was declared orthodox. But when he was not allowed to defend himself, and his doctrines were severely misrepresented and slandered, he was called a heretic. Do you know who said that man was justified by "faith alone" long before Luther? Pelagius said justification was by faith alone in his commentaries on the Romans. He did not teach salvation by works or by earning it. Neither did he ever say that we could be holy without God's grace. In fact, Pelagius said the opposite. Pelagius said that we can only be holy through the grace of God.

Anyone who actually studies the writings of the Early Church will see that there is absolutely no Augustinianism or Calvinism in their theology. They did not teach any of the 5 points of Calvinism, which are actually the 5 points of Augustinianism.

We must get our theologies from the bible and not from any men. I do not see any of the five points of Calvinism in the bible at all. Men like Augustine, Luther, and Calvin have truly corrupted the Church. And when great men like Pelagius, Finney, Wesley, and others try to correct their errors, their names are cast out as evil.

The only reason I enjoy reading Pelagius and Finney is because they teach what my bible has been teaching me for years! Particularly that all sin is a choice and is avoidable, man's will is responsible for man's sin, men need to completely repent of all known sin in order to be saved, entire sanctification is possible and required, etc.

Honestly, it deeply grieves me and hurts my spirit that the teachings of Augustine and Calvin are considered by so many today as "orthodox" when they are not found in any of the Early Churches teaching. Men like Washer and Piper are helping to spread these theological errors, and while their hearts might be right with God, their errors are truly damaging Christianity.

Men cannot blame their nature for their sin. God will not hold your nature responsible on the Day of Judgment. God is going to hold you accountable. God won't send Adam to hell for your sin. God will send you to hell for your sin, unless you make the freewill decision to forsake all sin and follow Jesus Christ.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/12/21 21:12

Please address the points in my reply post.

Re:, on: 2007/12/21 21:57

Greg,

Do you believe in freewill?

Are sinners criminals, who have the ability to obey but refuse to do it?

Or are sinners cripples, who were born that way and cannot help it?

Are sinners victims of Adam and victims of nature, or are sinners rebellious criminals who are sinners because they choose to be??

The Early Church taught that sinners are criminals because sinners have a freewill. But the Gnostics said men were cripples who did not have a freewill and said men are sinners because of their involuntary inherited natures. The Gnostics also said that Salvation was entirely the Sovereign work of God, the Gnostics said that God's grace was irresistible, and the Gnostics taught that once you are saved you are always saved.

Calvinism vs Arminianism is really Augustinianism vs Pelagianism. And Augustinianism vs Pelagianism is really Gnosticism vs the Early Church.

The ancestors of the Calvinists are the Augustinians. And the ancestors of the Augustinians are the Gnostics.

The ancestors of the Arminians are the Pelagians. And the ancestors of the Pelagians is the Early Church Fathers who were discipled by the Apostles, who were trained by Jesus.

Quote:

-----Consider this question:

Do you believe in freewill?

If you answer "yes", then you agree with Pelagius, Finney, and moral government theology.

If you answer "no" then you disagree with all of the Early Church for the first 300 years. But you would be in agreement with the Gnostics.

You would disagree with men like Clement who was even commended in the Bible itself - Php 4:3.

You would disagree with Polycarp who was the disciple of the Apostle John.

You would disagree with Irenaeus who was discipled by Polycarp.

You would disagree with the personal disciples of the Apostles if you denied that man had a freewill.

In fact, if you answer "no" the early Church would consider you a heretic because they said only heretics deny freewill.

Very interesting. These things should be seriously considered.

Quote:

-----immature |ˌiməˈ ch oŏr; -ˈt(y)oŏr|

adjective
not fully developed

ORIGIN mid 16th cent. (in the sense referring to death): from Latin immaturus 'untimely, unripe,' from in- 'not' + maturus 'ripe' (see mature).

I find to be "young" in age and experience with God and commit to a whole theology can lead to spiritual "immaturity" which can be a dangerous place. The Lord in His grace is progressing us all in the knowledge of Scriptures and of Christ Himself.

If it is immature to be committed to a whole theology, is it not immature to be against a whole theology? Because you have taken a stand against the whole system of moral government theology. So are you then immature?

And are Calvinists like Piper and Washer immature because they hold to the 5 points of Calvinism?

Could it be that the immature do not have doctrine, but the mature in Christ will be very familiar with sound doctrine? In which case, those who don't have a systematic theology would be the ones immature.

Quote:
-----The danger I see you falling into is to shape your thoughts and men's logic around the word of God so that it makes sense. But we cannot do this brother! we must allow the word of God to smite us and break us and teach us. We cannot explain the Scriptures with our reasoning.. God shows forth his word by His Spirit and that leads into "all truth".

This is a straw man. I am not trying to fit the bible around my thoughts, I am trying to fit my thoughts around the bible. Let the bible determine my theology. And that is why I've been preaching the same doctrines for years, long before I ever started to read Finney or even heard of Pelagius.

In fact, I remember debating with you in your car brother Greg on whether or not we had a freewill and if we could keep God's commandments. That was about 3 years ago, before I ever read Finney at all. And I remember reading about Pelagius shortly after that, in your car, and I said "Wow. This guy is said what I was just saying" and you said "Pelagius was a heretic". I didn't even know who he was, but I knew that he taught what I had been teaching for years.

Quote:
-----My personal conviction is between Arminism and Calvinism proper and I see weaknesses and strengths in both.

Which part of the TULIP do you agree with? All of TULIP stands or falls together. One doctrine necessitates the other doctrines. Total Inability necessitates unconditional election, which necessitates limited atonement or universalism, to irresistible grace, to perseverance of the saints. If total inability is affirmed, these doctrines necessarily follow.

But I don't believe the bible teaches any of the 5 points:

TOTAL DEPRAVITY: By this Augustine and Calvin meant total inability. I agree with Finney that men are totally morally depraved. Sinners are not righteous at all, by it is by choice and not by birth or by nature. Men are totally sinful, but not totally unable. The only reason they are sinful is because they are able but not willing.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION: Nothing could be further from the gospel then this. Salvation is conditional upon repentance and faith. Until a person forsakes all their sin and trusts solely in Christ, they are not truly or soundly saved. Salvation is grounded in the grace of God, but it is conditional upon blood shed, repentance and faith.

LIMITED ATONEMENT: Again, nothing could be further from the gospel. The glorious truth of the bible is that God so loved the whole world, and that Jesus tasted death for every man. That doesn't mean anyone is automatically saved. The atonement makes conditional salvation possible for everyone.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE: God's grace is the most resisted thing in the entire universe. God is offering grace to everyone through Jesus Christ, and the majority of the world chooses darkness when God genuinely offers the light. The majority of the world chooses the broad road when it is possible for them to walk on the narrow road.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS: Jesus said only those who persevere unto the end will be saved, because many who are saved will not persevere unto the end during persecution. The Early Church universally believed that final salvation was conditional upon perseverance, but that nobody will automatically persevere. Salvation could be lost.

Quote:
-----But to be frank and honest.. in much of the emphasis Calvinism is more biblical! that is what matters what is said in the bible.

I disagree. Again, I don't believe the bible teaches any of the doctrines of Calvinism. I know many today listen to Piper and Washer and think that Calvinism is biblical, but Calvinism is in fact the exact opposite of the truth.

The reason I cannot accept Calvinism is because it is so unbiblical. They have their scriptures that they twist and pervert, but that doesn't make it biblical!

Quote:
-----I can find fellowship with many christians of different theological thought. But to simply just espouse theology can be a deadening experience.

It can be. It is no wonder that many hate thinking about or talking about theology, because so many theologies are absolutely dead!

Any theology that does not make us fall more in love with God cannot be biblical. And that is why I love moral government and open theism, because it is entirely biblical and because it makes me love God even more.

Quote:

JESSE SAID: Actually, revivals and much soul winning have accompanied the doctrines of moral government theology, particularly the doctrines of freewill, repentance, and entire sanctification. But this thread is about freewill, which is a doctrine of moral government theology, Arminian theology, and early Christian theology.

GREG SAID: Thoughts of entire sanctification and holiness existed long before finneys day.

That is exactly the point. Christian history is full of moral government theology. Long before Finney came around Christians believed in freewill, repentance, and holiness.

Quote:
-----The early church fathers had a mixture of God's sovereignty and freewill (a healthy mix I might add that is biblical).

Finney had a great mixture of Sovereignty and freewill too. Just like the Early Church, Finney believed that God was Sovereign, but just like the Early Church, he also believed that salvation required a freewill choice to repent and believe. God does not cause sin neither does God force anyone to repent.

Quote:

JESSE SAID: For example, all the Early Church Fathers before Augustine believed in freewill.

GREG SAID: Brother, you cannot juxtapose finney with the early church fathers and but them at enmity with augustine? that is ridiculous. There is as much early church father thought in augustines teachings as there is in finneys, perhaps less.

You can't be serious. Augustines entire system of doctrine was novel and foreign to the Early Church. Augustine denied freewill and affirmed original sin. The Early Church affirmed freewill and denied original sin.

If you actually study extensively the teachings of the Early Church, the teachings of Augustine, and the teachings of Finney, you will clearly see that the early Church and Finney agreed on most things, while Augustine and the early Church disagreed on almost everything.

Quote:

JESSE SAID: Also the Arminians, the Wesleyans, and the Finneyites all believed in freewill and revival accompanied their doctrines.

GREG SAID: Brother, once again you cannot compare finney with wesley, because we are dealing with different men with different views of thought on this subject. Wesley was in many ways a healthy biblicist with times of extreme opinion on issues relating to salvation tenets in Calvinism. But overall Wesley had a great high view of God and His sovereignty which he obviously found and shared that thought with the scriptures.

Yes and Finney too had a very high view of God and His Sovereignty which he obviously found and shared the thought with the scripture.

But just like Finney is accused of being a Pelagian, Wesley and Fletcher were also accused of being Pelagians, because they taught freewill and perfection just like Pelagius did.

Quote:

Melito said, "There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man." (c.170, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Brother, you can take these quotes and make the early church fathers look like prideful men that can do what they want with their lives. It sounds like an American slogan "pride" we are a free country with liberty and have pride in our liberty. May it not be so. The apostles and other men knew themselves very well, and knew how wicked they were. They knew what God did for them and how God changed them through the power of the cross. So that after this transformation they were able to follow God with all their will gratefully.

The Early Church Fathers knew that they were sinful because they had a freewill, because God gave them a freewill and they used it for sin! So because of their doctrine of freewill, they viewed themselves as criminals not as cripples. But those who deny freewill cannot truly believe that they are sinful, they view themselves as cripples who cannot help it. But those who believe in freewill believe that they could have done better but sinfully choose not to.

And the Early Church repeatedly said that all men have the ability to obey God. Ability to obey does not come after being born again. But a person is born again when they decide to forsake all and follow Christ. To the Early Church, the difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate was not that one had freewill and the other didn't, but that one man used his freewill for God and the other used their freewill for sin.

Quote:

You have no sense in the bible of a pride in free will. There is humility, contriteness, dependence on God, lowliness, servanthood.

That humility is exactly what the doctrine of freewill should give us. Because when we recognize that we have always had a freewill, but sinfully choose to rebel against God, that should humble us and make us utterly and totally dependent upon God for leading and guiding. That humility and dependence is exactly what the doctrine of freewill should give us.

Quote:

Oh the great things Christians do without God in the 20th century!

I agree. We absolutely need God. Like Pelagius taught, we don't have any strength of our own. The only strength we have is the strength that God gives us. And now that God has given all men the power of choice when God gave all men a freewill, now we are especially dependent upon God to teach us how to use our freewill rightly. We need the Holy Spirit to convict us, lead us, guide us, teach us, comfort us, etc.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/12/21 22:52

Quote:

-----Are sinners criminals, who have the ability to obey but refuse to do it?

Or are sinners cripples, who were born that way and cannot help it?

Are sinners victims of Adam and victims of nature, or are sinners rebellious criminals who are sinners because they choose to be??

Both brother, because scripture qualifies this and also early church history. We are victims of adams fall, and if there was any free will left in us that was not tainted by that fall, we choose evil anyways with it. And for some who did not they were self-righteous about their "good" choices and more evil then the rest.

Quote:

-----If it is immature to be committed to a whole theology, is it not immature to be against a whole theology? Because you have taken a stand against the whole system of moral government theology. So are you then immature?

Brother, I am still growing in God and learning wisdom. I am learning from Christ who is my teacher, and seeking God according to the pattern of those before me. I am seeking to be apostolic and not believing on the outset that certain theologies prevalent must be a expression of it.

It can be immature to act as a teacher when others should be teaching you. The Spirit of Christ in a man is according to his humility, teachable and also gentleness when teaching others. I personally am not a self-proclaimed teacher and hope as I progress in Christ that I can learn and speak forth what I live.

Quote:

-----And are Calvinists like Piper and Washer immature because they hold to the 5 points of Calvinism?

Could it be that the immature do not have doctrine, but the mature in Christ will be very familiar with sound doctrine? In which case, those who don't have a systematic theology would be the ones immature.

Brother, I was stating that you are immature (un-ripe) in that you believe you have the truth and a full theology but you don't and to stay in that state is of no use. Does God's vineyard full of ripe fruit meet for the masters use. We are in the school of God and God! Himself brings us to a place of useability and usefulness for Him in His Kingdom.

May we not be found doing His work with our strength claiming to be apostolic when we are non of the sort. I find beyond the theology a emphasis on "life" and experience with God in the life's of piper and washer. You cannot but get that from their sermons and writings. But brother all I am hearing from your threads and posts is dry theological assumptions and ideas from your mind "about" God. This is not the number one importance, this is not what matters, this is not it. What is important is experience and life with and from God.

A theology won't turn a world upside down but a man filled with God will.

Quote:

-----In fact, I remember debating with you in your car brother Greg on whether or not we had a freewill and if we could keep God's commandments. That was about 3 years ago, before I ever read Finney at all. And I remember reading about Pelagius shortly after that, in your car, and I said "Wow. This guy is said what I was just saying" and you said "Pelagius was a heretic". I didn't even know who he was, but I knew that he taught what I had been teaching for years.

I know you realize this is a public forum but I assume you are comfortable with these things being addressed and spoken about before many. I do trust it will challenge and speak to many hearts of what truth there is in our words.

It is not reasonable to assume that pelagius was of the apostolic sort. A careful and quick reading of history will show that he was not at all of that "sound doctrine" that leads to godliness.

Brother I want you to simply understand and think of what is of chief importance. Is it our ability to do things God says, or firstly is it to recognize God as the giver of commandments and of His power that enables us to even keep them. The second here does not nullify the first. A basic reading of any of the epistles shows a God exalted, Authoritative, In-control, sovereign, a enabler, a giver, .. and what is our response but "thanks be to God" all that we have do and are.. are from His hand. This is biblical Christianity, Apostolic Christianity and Early Church Father Christianity and is the Christianity I have been overtaken by.

Quote:

-----Which part of the TULIP do you agree with?

Personally this is beside the point right now. The question needs to be How "big" is your God?

Quote:

-----the doctrines of Calvinism.

Perhaps we need to define this word "calvanism" you are thinking the 5 points of tulip when I use this word. I am thinking in most cases of a "Higher" view of God, which the scriptures are very clear on. Is Christ Lord? or is Jesse Morell, the person who repented by his own strength to receive God's free gift, which you received and opened, and now you can by yourself fulfill your ministry which you have called yourself to, to make people believe and repent and be saved by their own strength. I am not trying to be funny or condemning with these words but illustrative to the point of showing how low a "gospel" this is.. and how unbiblical any part of those thoughts are. The Scriptures clearly state that God creates, God loves, God saves, God gifts, God calls, God grants, God enables, God ... EVERYTHING! :-)

Praise be to God the Lord of All, to whom, and from whom are all things! and all things were made by Him and for Him. (paraphrase)

Quote:

-----And that is why I love moral government and open theism, because it is entirely biblical and because it makes me love God even more.

To love God more, what does that entail?

Quote:

-----That is exactly the point. Christian history is full of moral government theology. Long before Finney came around Christians believed in freewill, repentance, and holiness.

Brother, you cannot say that repentance, freewill and holiness ARE moral government theology. All of these things are in the bible and thought by the early christians but not in the way you make them out to be.

Repentance - is given by God, it is a gift. There is a part of man to receive and exercise this gift. But no one can just choose to be sorrowful over the fact that their sins are against a infinitely holy God and that their sins stab God and killed God. And the wrath of God hangs over their head. This is God given to realize the "divine insult" and the "divine remedy". How needful are both revelations.

Freewill - We are bound to choose or even be accepted by God. We cannot do right, but we can do something. As God allows and grants we are able to seek Him. One thing every man HAS FREE WILL to do is to HUMBLE OURSELVES. Humble, contriteness, lowliness, this is our position before God. Only God can enable our wills after conversion to walk in righteousness and heavenly wisdom which is "given" (freely) from above.

Holiness - Is Christ-likeness or its heresy. It is not abstaining from ALL sin but rather being "set apart" to the Spirit of Christ and allowing Himself to conform our lowly spirits to His. Meekness, Gentleness, Self-control,... this is HOLINESS not just to be able to say to people I don't fornicate or commit adultery.

Scriptures and Doctrine :: A Critique of Edwards on the Will

Quote:
-----You can't be serious. Augustines entire system of doctrine was novel and foreign to the Early Church. Augustine denied freewill and affirmed original sin. The Early Church affirmed freewill and denied original sin.

If you had a moral government teacher try and teach a open theism gospel to people in the early church days you would be looked upon as very strange. The bible does not use this type of language or "argumentation" the apostles did not. We once again are trying to use our minds and ideas to sculpt God. The Israelites of Old were very humble, not ignorant but WISE, in their dealing with God. They gave Him the rule, the kingship, of their nation, lifes, and did not try to explain God, they worshiped Him! May we do the same.

Quote:
-----Yes and Finney too had a very high view of God and His Sovereignty which he obviously found and shared the thought with the scripture.

I know that finney had a high view of God, but obviously in His later years not high enough, he lost many things and was repulsed by a presbyterian church around him that was chiefly cold, formalistic and apostate. Does this mean that his open theism and moral government beliefs that mostly were formed near the ending of his life constitute apostolic lineage and truth? Finney is admirable in many ways, and I love to quote him and read him, but I do not fully commit to all his views and the sections of his writings I get edified and blessed from are those that are not argumentative on doctrine but speak of experience and life in God.

Quote:
-----The Early Church Fathers knew that they were sinful because they had a freewill, because God gave them a freewill and they used it for sin!

If you willfully sin that is a very bad thing brother, scripture is clear on that. The early church fathers had a high view of God and a low view of man seeing how persuasive sin is! May we see how beguiling and evil sin is..

Quote:
-----That humility is exactly what the doctrine of freewill should give us. Because when we recognize that we have always had a freewill, but sinfully choose to rebel against God, that should humble us and make us utterly and totally dependent upon God for leading and guiding. That humility and dependence is exactly what the doctrine of freewill should give us.

:-(

Quote:
-----The only strength we have is the strength that God gives us. And now that God has given all men the power of choice when God gave all men a freewill, now we are especially dependent upon God to teach us how to use our freewill rightly.

This makes me want to weep. How very sad that we have such a low view of God and what He has and does in men through Christ.

If God left us!

(Thomas Watson, "Four Sad Evils" 1663)

The sins of the ungodly are looking-glasses in which we may see our own hearts. Do we see a heinous, impious wretch? Behold a picture of our own hearts! Such would we be--if God left us! What is in wicked men's practice --is in our nature. Sin in the wicked--is like fire which flames and blazes forth. Sin in the godly--is like fire hid in the embers. Christian, though you do not break forth into a flame of scandalous sin--yet you have no cause to boast, for there is as much sin in the embers of your nature! You have the root of all sin in you, and would bear as hellish fruit as any ungodly wretch--if God did not either curb you by His power, or change you by His grace!

Why might not God have left you--to the same excess of wickedness? Think with yourself, O Christian--why should God be more merciful to you, than to another? Why should He snatch you, as brand plucked out of the fire--and not him? How should this make you to adore free grace! What the Pharisee said boastingly, we may say thankfully--"God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers, etc."

If we are not as wicked as others--we should adore the riches of free-grace! Every time we see men hastening on in sin--we are to thank God that we are not such! If we see a crazy person--we thank God that it is not so with us. When we see another infected with the plague--how thankful are we, that God has preserved us from it! Much more when we see others under the power of Satan--how thankful we should be, that this is no longer our condition!

"For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, captives of various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful" Titus 3:3

Re: - posted by Christinyou (), on: 2007/12/22 0:34

There is only one true government of God. That is Jesus Christ.

Why do we always argue Calvin, and Arminius, circumcision, uncircumcision, Piper and Washer?

There is no Government in any of them.

The only true government is a Person and that Person is Jesus Christ, and His Government is upon His shoulders, and that Person is in the believer. That is our only hope of Glory, that is the Christ that is in us. A Person making us new persons in Christ Jesus. Let us seek Him and His Father and allow the Holy Spirit to teach us this Person, and all things will be added unto us.

We have Christ in us, we died to sin with Him on the Cross, let us take up His Cross which is now ours by the birth of His Son in each of us. Being Born again of Incorruptable Seed of God, the Word Himself.

Colossians 1:25-28 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

Only One Way to be Perfect: "IN CHRIST"

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Dead to sin a new birthed creature: "IN CHRIST"

1 Peter 1:19-25 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was forordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

The Word: CHRIST JESUS.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

IN CHRIST: Phillip

Re: - posted by whyme, on: 2007/12/22 7:19

Lazarus 1979,

I notice that you use the words "free will" repeatedly and appear to hold it in the highest regard. My reading of the Bible finds the term used once by Paul in Philemon in a very innocuous way. It would seem that on the basis of omission alone, it is a very limited concept in the minds of the Apostles and most importantly by God Himself.

Perhaps Brother Greg's gentle instruction to you concerning doctrinal blinders is merited. God doesn't seem nearly as concerned with the words and implicitly, the concept, as you are. Further, you spend a great deal of time exalting man's abilities while the God in the Bible spends His laying man low. God devotes His revelation to His own Holiness, you devote a great deal to your own. I'm not trying to argue theology, just priority.

Re: - posted by PaulWest (), on: 2007/12/22 8:21

Brother Jesse, I know you love Charles Wesley, and hold his hymns and theology, like I do, in very high regard. I want to show you something from a hymn I know you cherish. Notice this stanza:

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee."

Notice that like Peter, Wesley regards himself to have been "fast bound" in chains, and *bound* in "nature's night." Freewill I here would express a natural desire to be loosed from the chain, though such a desire would be futile to effectuate this in reality, as much as a prisoner approaching the gallows could freewill make a choice for his own release and expect it to happen on that basis. The reality is that he is imprisoned - most likely *against* his will - and being led to execution. Intercession was put forth for Peter. A miracle had to occur in that dank prison, God had to come down into the dungeon, and flame it with light, and quake the walls and loose the chains, and open the prison door.

You might say at this point, "Yes, of course. Only God can open the prison and set man free. But God does all this *after*

a man repents and *after* he employs his faculties of *freewill to forsake all known sin.*"

The Bible plainly states that even the act of repentance must be "*given by God to the acknowledging of the truth*" (2 Tim. 2:25). Man, by the powers of freewill, can reform a superficial aspect of his life in increments, and suppress certain deeds and thoughts and words to a degree, but this does not extirpate Sin's Root; it only conceals the branching fruit.

Charles Wesley also acknowledged this unseen, alien dynamic, known as the "Root of Sin" which is beyond the capability of man to eradicate through his own willpower. The difference between sin and the "Root of Sin" is the difference between the individual taskmaster Moses killed in secret and the entire Egyptian army of Pharaoh which God destroyed in one moment. The Egyptian taskmaster was only a single branch of Pharaoh's vast government and might. One tiny grape compared to a 100,000-acre vineyard of clusters and clusters of grapes, all stemming from a massive vine with roots that go down deep beneath the surface of the earth. Observe:

"I come to testify the grace
My Lord obtained for all our race,
Enough ten thousand worlds to save;
Salvation is in Jesus's Name,
Which every soul of man may claim,
And all that seek the grace, shall have.
Salvation from the power of sin,
Salvation from the root within,
Salvation into perfect love,
(Thy grace to all hath brought it near,)
An uttermost salvation here,
Salvation up to heaven above."

Notice Wesley says that all who "**seek the grace**" shall have salvation from the power of sin - *salvation from the root within*. I agree with Wesley. Such healing comes by grace, and the blessed doctrine that true, godly repentance is of itself initiated by the grace of God, I also agree with the Apostle Paul. Brother, we must instruct sinners to look to Jesus Christ crucified and only to the crucified Christ. Anything else is tantamount to placing a bandage over a lesion and believing that it cures one of AIDS.

Unregenerate men have the snakebitten venom of "Sin" running through their spiritual veins and need the only effectual antidote in the universe to get rid of it, which is *one true gaze at the Serpent on the tree*. Salvation is, as Wesley says, "from the root within." I contend that no man is able to reason or freewill this viral poison out of his system; he is able, and only inasmuch as his impressionable conscience allows, to ameliorate the symptoms. Brother, this is why you must be quickened, healed, born-again of the Holy Spirit to enter heaven. No "Sin-Root" positive victims will be allowed in.

Imagine an unregenerate Charles Wesley visits one of those college university campuses you preach at. And he comes under conviction, and cries out:

"O that my load of sin were gone!
O that I could at last submit
At Jesus's feet to lay it down,
To lay my soul at Jesus's feet!"

And what will OpenAirOutreach tell him to do? Will your group point him to the only anti-viral drug available: Jesus the Bronze Serpent hanging on the tree, or will you instead point him to his own mortal faculties of flawed reason, logic, and manipulative willpower: "Just use your freewill to make a decision! Just stop sinning! Make a freewill choice to trust Jesus today!"

Oh, this is fatal.

Wesley replies in tears:

"I would, but Thou (God) must give the power;
My heart from every sin release;
Bring near, bring near the joyful hour,

And fill me with Thy perfect peace."

These stanzas are taken from his hymn, "O That My load of Sin Were Gone."

Brother Paul

Re: - posted by davyman, on: 2007/12/22 9:48

Lazarus:

I am not bound by the doctrines of Calvin or Piper or Warfield or Kuyper, etc. But I am bound by the doctrines of the Bible. I learn from the Bible that "Even when dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. . ." (Eph. 2:5; see 2:1, Col. 2:13, 1Pet. 2:24). I walked away from Christ at every turn. "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," (John 5:40) said Jesus to my heart. I was a spiritual corpse.

So what happened? My heart was stone. Stone is lifeless, unable to move even a millimeter without an external force working on it. God, rich in His mercy "the stony heart out of their flesh, and them a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 11:19). God removed the rock in my chest and replaced it with a living heart of flesh.

You may say "it certainly true that God did this in response to repentance." This may be true, but the apostles recognized that repentance itself is given by God: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). I absolutely repented, I absolutely trusted in Christ, but why?

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Salvation is the total gift of God, not only in the saving, but in the believing. Paul tells us that saving faith itself is "not of yourselves." In verse two he acknowledges that we are "the children of disobedience." We were obedient to our father, the devil (John 8:44). Hallelujah, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (Eph. 2:4,5).

We are all in the same boat, all of humanity. In the ninth chapter of Romans we see the absolute sovereignty of God in redemption. "Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory?" (21-23). We are all from the same lump of clay, it is God's good pleasure to form us into vessels of mercy. A vessel of dishonor is incapable of choosing to be a vessel of honor.

From AW Tozer's "The Sovereignty of God:"

We readily acknowledge that it is very humbling to the proud heart of the creature to behold all mankind in the hand of God as the clay in the potter's hand, yet this is precisely how the Scriptures of Truth represent the case. In this day of human boasting, intellectual pride, and deification of man, it needs to be insisted upon that the potter forms his vessels for himself. Let man strive with his Maker as he will, the fact remains that he is nothing more than clay in the Heavenly Potter's hands, and while we know that God will deal justly with His creatures, that the Judge of all the earth will do right, nevertheless, He shapes His vessels for His own purpose and according to His own pleasure. God claims the indisputable right to do as He wills with His own.

Re: - posted by EvanSchaible (), on: 2007/12/22 15:03

Saints,

Coming from a man that was once enslaved to the theology of the Moral Government, and nigh fatally wounded spiritually by the doctrines perpetrated thereby, I can confidently attest that the theology is quite dangerous, but even moreso was the fruit it produced in my life. I became carnally minded, speaking very rarely of the grace and mercy of God, and much about sin and being sinless. I spoke very rarely, if ever, of the all sufficiency of Christ in the glorious work of redemption, and very much of the all sufficiency of man to set himself free of the bondages that he naturally and voluntarily finds himself in.

Everything turned into dry logical reasoning and if it was otherwise I wanted nothing to do with it. Consequently I was de

void of any spiritual conception of reality, God, and the Christian experience and life. This was perhaps the most villainous of it all as this left me dangling over the brimstone of the torments of hell because to be carnally minded is death. Not a single soul on earth could have convinced me otherwise because I, to be consistent with my theology (which was then staunchly Moral Government) could not ever admit pride, because I would then be unsaved according to my own system. This bred deep rooted self deception and pride as I just progressed further and further along in the filthy downward spiral I found myself in.

If it wasn't for the sovereignty of God in providence providing me with my beautiful wife and teaching me what love is then I would likely not be saved today. I had no idea what true love was, I had this conception of God standing over me, a believer, with an iron club just waiting for my foot to slide so He could beat me into submission or just toss me away to those torments that I hung over, desperately clinging to my self righteousness and pride, and yet the flames began to lick even those weak and beggarly cords.

Liz has literally been a saviour to me, and God has used her to teach me many things about Christianity, theology, life and love. We can all too easily forget what it is to be human, and yet also what it is to be a human that contains God. But God has uncanny ways of showing us these very things, and laying bare our hearts before us.

When I met Liz my entire life changed. God used her in a plethora of ways to rebuke my pride and self righteousness. In this way He brought me out of that theology. What mercy does God have as I would be brainwashing my precious wife (soon to be wife I should say) with the vile doctrines that drug me to the pits of condemnation and spiritual duplicity and hopelessness.

Let this be a lesson to us all, deception can and does, and always will lead to the path tread most often by devils and pharisees, I once tread that way, and all that follow the same errors will tread that way also. Oh pray for the blinded eyes to be opened, the hardened hearts to be softened and replaced with a fleshly heart of love. Pray that our dear brother receives a love of the truth, otherwise he will be swept away by the winds of last days deception into the rocky shores of apocalyptic apostasy.

Pray brethren...pray. What more can be said. God will lead all who are truthful and humble into the glorious light of the truth of His word, but He resists the proud, and pride resists correction and hardens its neck. So dear brothers, seek the Lord that He may break up the fallow ground and drive in the precious seed of His truth, so that the Lamb that was slain will receive the full reward of His suffering.

- Evan Schaible
<http://GetWisdom.net>