

On Free Agency And The Will

Free Agency: is the ability to freely choose the thing appearing best to the mind. The confession rightly includes a statement regarding the human will, which considers man in a fourfold manner. This is required because there are four conditions existing within human experience. One is irretrievably lost, while the other three co-exist in human history.

1. God, at creation, endowed man with free agency positively inclined towards good, but in a state of probation and not necessitated. This was lost for the entire race in the calamity of the Fall.
2. By man's fall into sin, he lost all power to will any spiritual good. Thus in his natural condition he lacks any power to will the good, but freely and willingly only wills that which displeases God.
3. Regenerated man, by the inculcation of a new principle of holiness, now can will that which pleases God, though not perfectly in this life. Because corruption remains he wills good and evil, though the bondage to corruption has been broken.
4. In glory, man is able to will that which is good immutably and is forever free from any necessity to commit evil.

Two schools of thought in total reject any concept of human free agency. (1) One school of thought supposes the existence of an all knowing, all-powerful God who has planned all things occurring within time down to its minutest detail. Thus, any perception of free agency is, in its final analysis, simply that- a perception. Men can suppose they are free, but in actuality they make no choices at all and are the unwitting slaves of God's predetermined arrangement. (2) The other school sees little necessity to posit a divine being (it may or may not), concluding man's volitional component to simply be the physical effect necessitated by desires. These desires are the mere effect of impressions from without. This makes man the slave of the circumstances buffeting the passive soul; stimulated desires simply emerge uncontrolled from the susceptibility of the soul

To the first, two things can be said. (1) The voice of conscience screams against any notion of iron clad fatalism. Consciousness is not so easily dealt with. Every man feels himself to be truly free, to truly choose. The moral accountability felt by every person cannot be explained by such a view. (2) The Scripture portrays an altogether different arrangement. It unambiguously sets forth both the predetermined counsel of God and the free agency of men with equal clarity. Thus God fulfills His purpose upon His people by the king of Babylon, while the king of Babylon is shown to act from his own evil motives (**Isa. 14**). While to the second it can be admitted that desires are the effects of occurrences from without, it must be denied that the determiner of the desire lies in the object. Rather the

power and actor is in the mind itself, it determines the perception and generates the volition in accordance with its nature.

The chief difference between **Arminians** and **Calvinist**, on this point, lies in how each understands *where free agency resides*. The Arminian supposes it to lie in the self-determining power of the will itself. Calvinist supposes it to lie in the self-determining power of the soul. The first would mean that the will determines itself, being in a neutral state after the deliberation of the mind. On the surface it appears absurd to suppose the will to have the power to determine itself without being persuaded by the emotions and intellect. Moreover, it is difficult to see how an uninfluenced will could exist, since all wills are acted upon from its actual existence. Calvinist holds that the will is a power or function of the mind (soul) itself. It is the mechanism by which the mind acts. Thus the will acts freely choosing the thing that appears best to it.

1. With such understanding it is possible to conceive of free agency coexisting with moral necessity. What is meant by moral necessity is simply that there is a certain connection between the deliberation of the mind and the exercise of the will. The will, of necessity, does that which the mind (soul) prefers. It should be noted that in reality the process can be complex and one can be largely unaware of the process of arriving at what is preferred. E.g., One can actually think that a choice has been made against the preference of the mind because of ignorance of some components included in the process. A soul thinking that poverty is undesirable can choose poverty over an entrepreneurial endeavor, because fear of failure is greater than fear of poverty. One can prefer to be slim but prefer chocolate to a greater extent. Etc.
2. Ironically, in spite of the frequent and heated false accusations of Calvinist denial of free agency and human responsibility, it is the Arminian who actually denies it. If the will enjoys the power to act contrary to the dictates of the mind one could have deliberated only to be denied the result by the will. Thus one could truly deny responsibility for the act. Thus human responsibility is obliterated. It is actually the Calvinist who preserves and protects these truths.
3. Moreover, if will is subservient to a mind that is corrupt it then becomes possible for a free agent to remain free while absolutely enslaved to corruption, because this is what the mind is preferring and freely exerting the will in the direction of. The will itself is not the capacity to think, but the mechanism which the mind uses to access what it prefers after its thinking. Consider the implications for the will in light of Scriptural statements such as, “...**the**

wickedness of man was great on the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Gen. 6:5. In fact this relationship is clearly being asserted, “...**the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.” Ro. 8:7.** Thus there is free agency coexisting with moral inability. Man, while free in his will, is not able to undertake good in the sight of God. It also stands to reason that the ability to alter this condition cannot reside within the creature itself. The will cannot lift a finger to act upon a pre-determined mind. Once the tables are turned towards unrighteousness, they are turned. This is what is meant in the two terms **total depravity** and **total inability**. The depraved mind is *unable* to reverse itself, because the will does not determine it it determines the will. Thus it is powerless to move towards God.

Proofs:

1. Again the testimony of conscious should not be undervalued here. Every man is conscious of freely making choices, and of doing so based upon motives prevailing within the mind.
2. Outside of this understanding it must be admitted that actions are not an index to character. Can one conceive of a good character apart from the habitual actions it evidences? Does not reason mark as ridiculous any claim to character where actions deny the testimony? But, the other scheme makes this possible. Multitude of men could say they think only pure thoughts but the will, choosing contrary to the mind, does evil. Experience cries that this is not so. Men do evil because they first deliberate, not the reverse.
3. The Calvinist view permits man to be a rational being. How could this be so if the powers of the mental faculties are denied the ability to determine action? Is not this the very seat of rationality?
4. The Calvinist view alone agrees with the obvious fact that glorified saints, as well as angels, and God will good because of the holiness of their beings. Demons are determined towards evil because of the corruption of their beings.