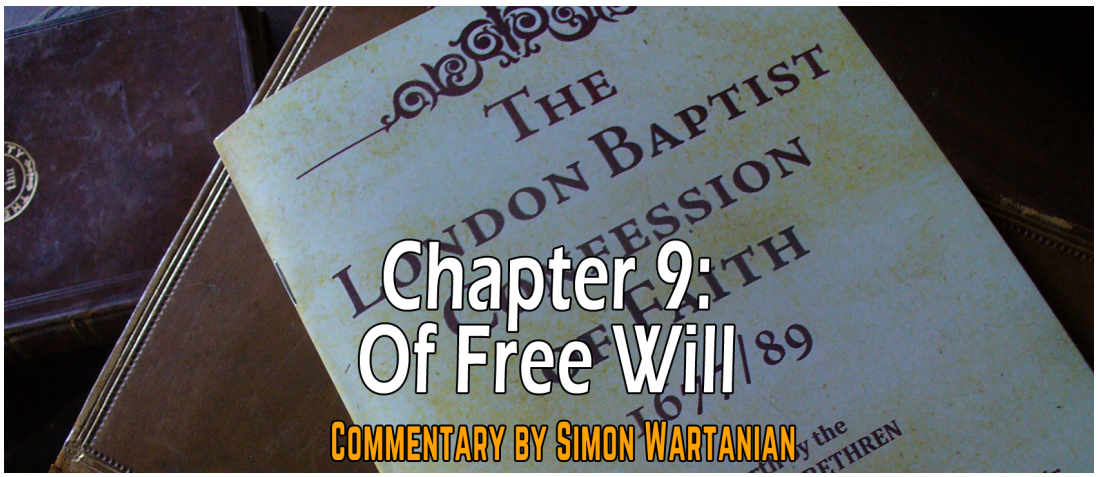
1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 9: Of Free Will - Commentary

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Chapter 9: Of Free Will

I would like to take a look at the freedom of will endued to us by God. Is it a libertarian free will, which most of the non-Reformed find essential for love? Is it another kind of freedom? Does our freedom mean that God is not sovereign? Does God ordain our free actions? These are some questions that we'll have to wrestle with. For this study and my position on it, I am greatly indebted to the following authors:

- Jonathan Edwards – The Freedom of the Will
- R.C. Sproul – Willing to Believe (**see review**)
- Thaddeus J. Williams – Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?
- Scott Christensen - What about Free Will?: Reconciling Our Choices with God's Sovereignty

Calvinists have always been leveled the charge that our understanding of God's absolute micro-managing sovereignty makes men as puppets and robots. One wonders what the reason was for the Westminster, Savoy and 1689 to offer a chapter on free will if they thought that people were merely puppets and robots as many critics like to mock Calvinism.

In section 1, we will have our longest discussion of the will. There, I hope, with Edwards' *Freedom of the Will,* to lay the understanding of the human will as believed by many Calvinists, which I believe happens to be biblical and logical. I have chosen to do this for two purposes: 1) I want to understand Edwards' position better first hand from him. Edwards is difficult to read and understand and sometimes you have to read sentences and paragraphs over and over or look somewhere for an explanation to understand what he's getting at. 2) And I would like you to understand Edwards' position on the will which is the commonly held view by many Calvinists. Edwards is obviously not without critique, especially on his speculations about the Fall. But some Reformed people also disagree with him on free will, claiming that his view is too mechanistic and deterministic. His discussion clarifies many things for me and from the people I benefited from, who are mentioned above, I've not read their criticism on Edwards beside his speculations on the Fall. I mention this so that you know that not every Calvinist agrees with Edwards, though a majority does. Some resources on this subject are found at **Reformed Books Online**.

In the following sections, we will try to lay some things concerning man's will in the four states, from innocence until glory.

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§1 God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and power of

acting upon choice

1. God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty and **power of acting upon choice**, that it is **neither forced**, **nor by any necessity of nature determined** to do good or evil. **1**
    1. Matt. 17:12; James 1:14; Deut. 30:19[1]

The **will of man**, by definition and nature, is **endued…with that natural liberty and power of acting upon choice**. This is also one of those things which set us apart from the lower creation. Paragraph 1 does not speak about Adam's will before the Fall; paragraph 2 will do that. Rather, in paragraph 1, the will of man is spoken of generally without reference to it being enslaved to righteousness or sin. It is by nature free. What does this freedom consist of? That is is **neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil**. Man is not a robot as many non-Calvinists like to caricature Calvinism. No one has done something because they were **forced** by God in their wills to do so. Rather, they acted with **that natural liberty** of will which we are **endued** with. The second thing that the Confession mentions in connection to this **natural liberty** is that the will is not determined by nature. By **nature**, the Confession is referring to the natural world or what we call the laws of nature. There are no physical or natural laws forcing man to do good or evil. But as we will soon discover, another kind of nature is important for the will, that is, the nature of man.

God Ordains Human Actions

It is clear from **chapter 3** that God is sovereign and ordains even human actions. Therefore, the freedom spoken of here is not *autonomous* freedom. Chapter 3:1 says:

> God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, **all things, whatsoever comes to pass;** yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree. (**See commentary**)

His sovereignty, orchestration and ordaining extends to all things whatsoever comes to pass, the good and the bad. **Chapter 5** which speaks of God's providence is even clearer on this:

> The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in his providence, that **his determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall**, and **all other sinful actions** both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also he most wisely and powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth, in a manifold dispensation to his most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

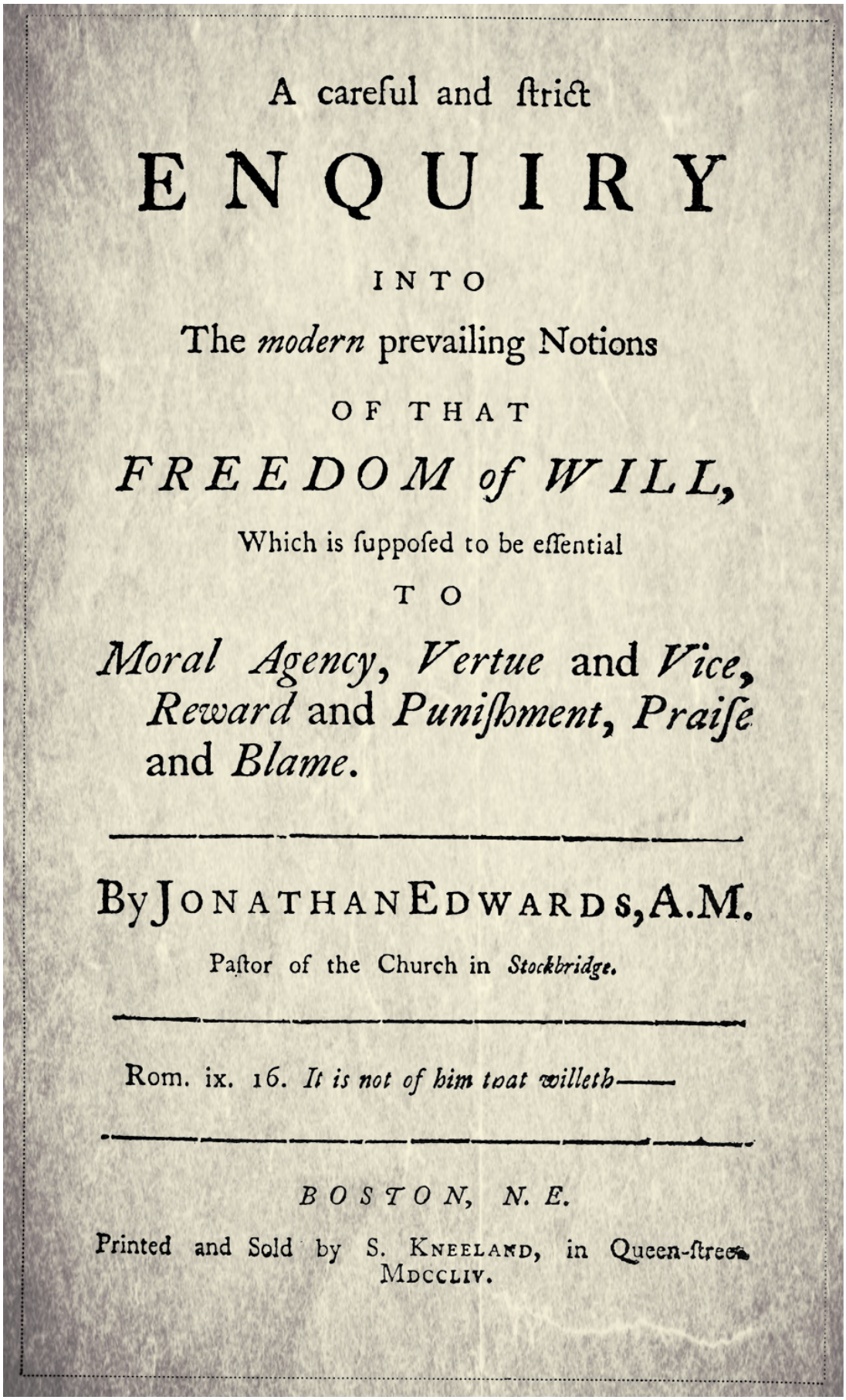
If even the evil actions of men are under His control, how much more the good actions? For the case that God ordains and is sovereign even over the evil actions of men and yet holds them accountable, see **chapter 3** section 1 where I try to argue just that from the biblical texts. Consistent with what the Confession said in chapters 3 and 5, the freedom spoken by the 1689 is not a freedom of will *from* God's sovereignty, but freedom of will *within* God's sovereign decree.

Edwards on the Will

R.C. Sproul, in *Willing to Believe*, presents Augustine as having taught the following four conditions of the will:

1. **Posse non peccare** is the possibility not to sin. This is what Adam and Eve had when they were originally created by God.
2. **Posse peccare** is the possibility to sin. This Adam and Eve also had prior to the Fall.
3. **Non posse non peccare** is the impossibility not to sin. These all the descendants of Adam until freed by Christ have.
4. **Non posse peccare** is the impossibility to sin. This is what those in Christ will have in the eternal state.

Points 1 and 2 concern the State of Innocence (**paragraph 2**). Point 3 is for those under the State of Sin (**paragraph 3**). Point 4 is for the State of Glory (**paragraph 5**). Those who are redeemed in Christ are yet not fixed in any one point, but find themselves in points 1-3.



A careful and strict

ENQUIRY

INTO

The *modern* prevailing Notions

OF THAT

FREEDOM of WILL,

Which is supposed to be essential

TO

Moral Agency, Vertue and *Vice, Reward* and *Punishment, Praise* and *Blame.*

By JONATHAN EDWARDS, A.M.

Pastor of the Church in *Stockbridge.*

Rom. ix. 16. *It is not of him that willeth*——

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But what is *freedom* in the Calvinistic sense, then? What do we mean when we speak of freedom of choice? Many agree that none better than Edwards has defended the Freedom of Will as understood by Calvinists:

> And therefore I observe, that the Will (without any metaphysical refining) is, **That by which the mind chooses any thing**. The faculty of the will, is that **power, or principle of mind, by which it is capable of choosing**: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.
>
> If any think it is a more perfect definition of the will, to say, that it is **that by which the soul either chooses or refuses**, I am content with it; though I think it enough to say, it is that by which the soul chooses: for **in every act of will whatsoever, the mind chooses one thing rather than another**; it chooses something rather than the contrary or rather than the want or non-existence of that thing. So in every act of refusal, the mind chooses the absence of the thing refused; the positive and the negative are set before the mind for its choice, and it chooses the negative; and the mind's making its choice in that case is properly the act of the Will: the Will's determining between the two, is **a voluntary determination**; but that is the same thing as making a choice. So that by whatever names we call the act of the Will, choosing, refusing, approving, disapproving, liking, disliking, embracing, rejecting, determining, directing, commanding, forbidding, inclining, or being averse, being pleased or displeased with; all may be reduced to this of choosing. **For the soul to act voluntarily, is evermore to act electively**. Mr. Locke (1) says, "The Will signifies nothing but a power or **ability to prefer or choose**."[2]

The will is the faculty by which the mind makes the choice between options. The will's determination is not forced by outside forces but is **voluntary by nature**. Edwards is not speaking of coercion, but of the soul choosing according to its *pleasure*. By determining or *determination of the will* is meant that the choice is thus and not otherwise. Edwards says:

> By determining the Will, if the phrase be used with any meaning, 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 action, or influence, **its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object**. As when we speak of the determination of motion, we mean causing the motion of the body to be in such a direction, rather than another.[3]

This is the idea that we would have gotten even without the definition of the phrase. But, says Edwards, if we say that the will is determined then we must ask *what* determined the will. The determination of the will is an *effect* which supposes a *cause*. The cause, which makes the will to be determined to one choice rather than another, is the **motive**. There is a cause and effect relationship between the motive and the will. The choice that the soul makes is in accordance with its *desires*. This means that every choice has a reason. Nothing that we choose is without motivation or reason. Edwards says, "**A man never, in any instance, wills any thing contrary to his desires**, or desires any thing contrary to his will."[4] But what then determines the will to one thing rather than another, is it chance, is it fate? No, it is the person itself, or to be more precise—the **motive**:

> that **motive**, which, as it stands in view of the mind, is the **strongest, that determines the will**. But may be necessary that I should a little explain my meaning.
>
> By motive I mean the whole of that which **moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition**, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly. Many particular things may concur, and unite their strength, to induce the mind; and when it is so, all together are as one complex motive. And when I speak of **the strongest motive**, I have respect to the strength of the whole that operates to induce a particular act of volition, whether that be the strength of one thing alone, or of many together.[5]

It is the motive that we have by which we are inclined to the particular choice that determines the will. For instance, God having the most perfect and holy motives only does that which is good and holy in His sight. This motive is an expression of one's own nature. A sinner dead in sins will not have motives to please God and obey Him, but one who is redeemed by God is able, by God's Spirit, to have godly motives by which they make choices pleasing in God's sight. Thus in a sense, our wills are **self-determined**. They are determined by our *nature* and the *motives* that spring from it. But still, we should not forget the fact that God still is sovereign even over our choices. Edwards' discussion does not undermine God's sovereignty over our wills, but he simply is trying to explain how the will works from a human point of view. Edwards then discusses the fact that our motives have *degrees.* By *degrees*, he means that some motives seem to us more pleasant than others. Some motives are stronger at times while weaker at other times. I may want to sleep, but my present motive to write a bit more is stronger than my desire to sleep. This, Edwards calls the **strength of the motive**.

> That motive which has a **less degree of previous advantage**, or tendency to move the Will, or which appears less inviting, as it stands in the view of the mind, is What I call a **weaker motive**. On the contrary, that which **appears most inviting**, and has, by what appears concerning it to the understanding or apprehension, the **greatest degree of previous tendency to excite and induce the choice**, is what I call the **strongest motive**. And in this sense, I suppose the **will is always determined by the strongest motive**.[6]

We always choose according to **our strongest desire at the moment of choice**. When a gunman puts a gun to your head and asks you to give him your money, he has not actually limited you to one choice, you always have a choice. You could (1) give him your money, (2) you could resist him, (3) you could tell him to kill you, or (4) you could ignore him. A choice in all four situations will be made. Either you will choose to give him your money, or resist and be shot, or choose not to act, i.e., ignore him. In each of these situations, you have made a choice. The determination of that choice comes from the *strongest motive and desire at the moment of choice*.

If you would rather die than willingly (i.e., with pleasure) give your money, then you will prefer being shot than giving your money. But if you decide to give your money, you will do so willingly but in another sense. By *willingly,* I here mean by your strongest desire at the moment. Your desire to live is stronger than your desire to not lose your money. You will make that choice. It will not be pleasant (in another sense), but it is the choice determined by your stronger desire to continue living, than the weaker desire to lose your money. You will always choose according to your strongest desire at the moment of choice. You will choose according to that which is agreeable to your mind at the present moment. Edwards uses the word "good" and he explains what he means, which is one of the strengths of his work to define the words and phrases that he uses:

> 1. 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**. Certainly, nothing appears inviting and eligible to the mind, or tending to engage its inclination and choice, considered as evil or disagreeable; nor indeed, as indifferent, and neither agreeable nor disagreeable. But if it tends to draw the inclination, and move the Will, it must be under the notion of that which suits the mind. And therefore that must have the greatest tendency to attract and engage it, which as it stands **in the mind's view, suits it best, and pleases it most**; and in that sense, is **the greatest apparent good:** to say otherwise, is little, if any thing, short of a direct and plain contradiction.[7]

Edwards goes on to say that the **greatest apparent good** is the direct and immediate object of the will—

> When I say, that the **will is as the greatest apparent good**, or, (as I have explained it,) that **volition has always for its object the thing which appears most agreeable**; it must be carefully observed, to avoid confusion and needless objection, that I speak of the **direct** and **immediate object of the act of volition**; and not some object to which the act of will has only an indirect and remote respect. Many acts of volition have **some remote relation to an object**, that is **different from the thing most immediately willed and chosen**.[8]

Edwards goes on to provide an example of what he means.

> Thus, when a drunkard has his liquor before him, and he has to choose whether to drink it, or no; the immediate objects, about which his present volition is conversant, and between which his choice now decides, are his own nets, in **drinking the liquor**, or **letting it alone**; and this will certainly be done according to what, in the **present view of his mind, taken in the whole of it, is most agreeable to him**. If he chooses to drink it, and not to let it alone, then this action, as it stands in the view of his mind, with all that belongs to its appearance there, is more agreeable and pleasing than letting it alone.[8]

Whether he chooses to drink or not, this is the immediate and direct object of his will. He will choose according to the strongest motive/inclination/desire at the moment of choice. But obviously, his choices have consequences, and he may have an indirect and remote object which he is trying to reach through the direct and immediate object of his will. Edwards presents four things "all together concur to constitute the degree in which the object appears at present agreeable; and accordingly will volition be determined".[9]

1. The degree of good supposed by the judgment.
    - "To appear good to the mind, as I use the phrase, is the same as to appear agreeable, or

seem pleasing to the mind. Certainly, nothing appears inviting and eligible to the mind, or tending to engage its inclination and choice, considered as evil or disagreeable; nor indeed, as indifferent, and neither agreeable nor disagreeable."[7]
    - This includes the apparent degree of pleasure or trouble attending the object or the consequence of it. With respect to time, the pleasure of trouble appears either nearer or farther off.
2. The degree of apparent probability or certainty of that good.
    - Surely something which we certainly know we will have is better than that which is without certainty.
3. The degree of the liveliness of the idea the mind has of that good.
    - "With regard to things which are the subject of our thoughts, either past, present, or future, we have much more of an idea or apprehension of some things than others; that is, our idea is much more clear, lively, and strong. Thus the ideas we have of sensible things by immediate sensation, are usually much more lively than those we have by mere imagination, or by contemplation of them when absent. My idea of the sun when I look upon it is more vivid, than when I only think of it. Our idea of the sweet relish of a delicious fruit is usually stronger when we taste it, than when we only imagine it. And sometimes, the idea we have of things by contemplation, are much stronger and clearer, than at other times. Thus, a man at one time has a much stronger idea of the pleasure which is to be enjoyed in eating some sort of food that he loves, than at another. Now the strength of the idea or the sense that men have of future good or evil, is one thing that has great influence on their minds to excite volition."[10]
4. The temper of the mind which views a proposed object of choice.
    - "…the particular temper which the mind has by nature, or that has been introduced and established by education, example, custom, or some other means; or the frame or state that the mind is in on a particular occasion. That object which appears agreeable to one, does not so to another. And the same object does not always appear alike agreeable to the same person, at different times. It is most agreeable to some men, to follow their reason; and to others, to follow their appetites: to some men, it is more agreeable to deny a vicious inclination, than to gratify it; others it suits best to gratify the vilest appetites. It is more disagreeable to some men than others, to counteract a former resolution. In these respects, and many others which might be mentioned, different things will be most agreeable to different persons; and not only so, but to the same persons at different times."[11]

Edwards goes on to conclude based on this that **the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding**. Under *understanding*, he includes the whole faculty of perception or apprehension by which the above four points are known and into which they're included.

To summarize what we have learned from looking at Edwards at this point:

- The will is by nature free.
- The will is the faculty by which the soul chooses.
    - The will is always as the greatest apparent good.
- The will is determined by the motive/inclination/desires of the person.
- The will always follows the strongest motive at the moment of choice.
- The will follows the last dictate of the understanding.
    - i.e., the apparent nature and circumstances of the objects; the manner of the view and the state of the mind (the four points above).

<sarcasm> It is amazing and mind-blowing that Edwards, being a most staunch Calvinist, doesn't think people are robots and they are forced to do things by God that they don't want. But he actually believes that people are free to do that which pleases them, i.e., the greatest apparent good to them, according to their inclinations and nature. They are voluntarily determined by their motives and desires. </sarcasm>

Defining and Refining Necessity (Part I, section III)

The charge raised by the opponents of "Edwards' will" is that *necessity* and *inability* are incompatible with freedom. So Edwards first introduces these concepts and then tries to answer the objections.

Edwards begins section 3 by taking a lot of time to point out the pitfalls that can come from using words like *necessary* and *impossible*, which are relative terms and suppose a certain opposition. When I say that it's impossible for me to fly, I mean that the earth's gravity keeps pulling me down and I don't have wings, etc. When I use the word *impossible,* I am thereby pointing to, for example, the opposition of gravity which pulls me down. There is something that is fighting against me, making me unable to fly. That is *not* the sense that Edwards uses the word or how it is used philosophically. The word *necessary,* as we use it and in the proper sense, means that which "is, or will be, notwithstanding all supposable opposition."[12] It is the same as we should say that it is impossible that *something* not be. The words *impossible, unable* and *irresistible* are also relative and they suppose that certain power is exerted, yet it is insufficient to bring the desired effect. Edwards observes the common way we understand and use certain words and concludes that the "common notion of Necessity and Impossibility Implies something that frustrates endeavor or desire."[12] From there he goes on to observe three things:

1. The general idea we get from things that are necessary is that they will be or are in spite of any supposable opposition.
2. "These terms necessary, impossible, irresistible, &c. more especially belong to controversies about liberty and moral agency, as used in the latter of the two senses now mentioned, viz. as necessary or impossible to us, and with relation to any supposable opposition or endeavor of ours."[13]
3. As the word *necessary* is relative to some supposable insufficient opposition; so likewise "when we speak of anything as necessary to us, it is with relation to some supposable opposition of our Wills, or some voluntary exertion or effort of ours to the contrary...Things are said to be what must be, or necessarily are, as to us, when they are, or will be, though we desire or endeavor the contrary..."[14]

This is how these words are "vulgarly" (i.e., commonly) used and understood. But is this how it is used philosophically and how theologians have used it? Rather,

> ...if any one should affirm after this manner, That it is **necessary** for a man, or what must be, that **he should choose virtue** rather than vice, during the time that **he prefers virtue** to vice; and that it is a thing **impossible and irresistible**, that it should be otherwise than that he should have this choice, so long as this choice continues; such a one would use the terms must, irresistible, &c. with either insignificance, or in some new sense, diverse from their common use; which is with reference, as has been observed, to supposable opposition, unwillingness, and resistance; whereas, here, the very supposition excludes and denies any such thing: for the case supposed is that of being willing, and choosing.[15]

The keywords are used in a different sense than usual. Usually, they are used with reference to some opposition, but in the example given, there is no opposition from the will. Therefore, the words are used in a different sense by philosophers and metaphysicians, which *excludes the idea of opposition*. It is used to speak of God's existence being necessary and which could not be otherwise; it is used to speak of God's nature, his loving righteousness and hating sin. God is not forced to do that. There is no opposition that He has to struggle against, rather those things are merely expressions of what His perfect nature is. Thus the way in which we will speak of *necessity* is not to be understood in common sense, rather **by philosophical necessity the very idea of all opposition of the will is excluded!** Basically, necessity, as used by philosophers and Edwards, is nothing other than *certainty*. Edwards writes:

> Philosophical Necessity is really nothing else than the full and fixed connection between the things signified by the **subject** and **predicate** of a **proposition**, **which affirms something to be true**. When there is such a connection, then the **thing affirmed in the proposition is necessary**, in a philosophical sense; whether any opposition or contrary effort be supposed, or no. When the subject and predicate of the proposition, which **affirms the existence** of any thing, either substance, quality, act, or circumstance, have a full and certain connection, then the existence or being of that thing is said to be necessary in a metaphysical sense. And in this sense I use the word necessity, in the following discourse, when I endeavor to prove that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty.[16]

In the sentence "all men are mortal," the word *men* is the subject and *mortal* is the predicate (tells something about the subject). There is a certain and full grammatical connection between the subject and predicate of any proposition that affirms anything true. It is such a connection and necessity which Edwards speaks of. Edwards goes on to point out in which ways the subject and predicate of a proposition have a certain and full connection with each other:

1. "They may have a full and perfect connection in and of themselves; because it may imply a contradiction, or gross absurdity, to suppose them not connected. Thus many things are necessary in their own nature."[16]
    - For example, 2+2 must be 4 and cannot be otherwise. It is necessary that it should be four by nature.
    - It is necessary that a square have four equal sides, otherwise, it is not a square.
2. "The connection of the subject and predicate of a proposition, which affirms the existence of something, may be fixed and made certain because the existence of that thing is already come to pass; and either now is, or has been; and so has, as it were, made sure of existence...Thus the existence of whatever is already come to pass, is now become necessary; it is become impossible it should be otherwise than true, that such a thing has been."[17]
    - Thus we can know the connection through the history of what has already happened.
3. "The subject and predicate of a proposition which affirms something to be, may have a real and certain connection consequently; and so the existence of the thing may be consequently necessary; as it may be surely and firmly connected with something else, that is necessary in one of the former respects."[18]
    - Edwards here speaks of the necessity of consequence. If X at the present lies in the future, it cannot be necessary except by a necessity of consequence. It is necessary because of a certain cause and effect connection. It is necessary not in and of itself, but because of this connection. But if it was necessary in and of itself then it must have always existed, like God.
    - X does not become necessary once it has come to pass. It is necessary merely because of consequence. Edwards further observes that this is the only way which we could speak of all things past (except those from eternity) as being necessary. "...therefore the only way in which any effect or event, or any thing whatsoever that ever has had or will have a beginning, has come into being necessarily, or will hereafter necessarily exist. And therefore this is the Necessity which especially belongs to controversies about the acts of the will."[18]

Moral and Natural Necessity/Inability (Part I, Section IV)

Necessity, as we have said, is simply the "infallible connection of the things signified by the subject and predicate of a proposition..."[19] But now we move on and we discover that necessity is distinguished under two heads: *moral* and *natural*. Edwards defines **moral necessity** in this way:

> ...by moral Necessity is meant that Necessity of **connection** and **consequence**, which arises from such moral causes, as the **strength of inclination**, or **motives**, and the connection which there is in many cases between these and such certain volitions and actions.[20]

Moral necessity is not something that forces us to do things we do not desire, rather by moral necessity is actually meant that there is a **connection between a person's desires and choices**. God, the thrice-holy, cannot but do good. God is under (if such language is proper only for illustration) moral necessity because there is nothing in His nature that would cause Him to do that which is sinful and vile in His sight. God is able to do only that which is holy and good in His sight, not because He is being forced by outside forces, but because that is what His nature is and therefore there is a connection between His nature from which spring His motives and actions. So likewise our creaturely will. Moral necessity has to do with the *desires of our hearts*. On the other hand, **natural necessity** is such a

> Necessity as men are under through the **force of natural causes**...[21]

Edwards gives a few examples of natural necessity: we by nature feel pain when our bodies are wounded; we see things when there is light and our eyes are opened; if we jump from above we necessarily will go downward. This has nothing to do with the desires of our hearts or our inclinations. It is crucial to understand the difference between moral and natural necessity. **Moral necessity** supports and does not undermine human freedom because it provides the soul with the expression of its own nature. By that, I mean that *our actions and choices truly reflect and come from our hearts*. People would have no difficulty with this concept only if humans were not sinful. But this concept is attacked when we couple moral necessity with Total Depravity (**see chapter 6**). As the natural man is dead in sin and is following Satan's will, so it is impossible for him, not because of anything that has to do with his body but because of his desires, to do that which is pleasing in God's sight (e.g., Rom. 8:7-8; Heb. 11:6; Rom. 14:23). Moral necessity is simply the **certainty of the connection between *cause*** (the motive, which determines the will) **and *effect*** (the choice). Again, we remind ourselves, when we use the word *necessity* we exclude any idea of contrary will or opposition.

Edwards defines **natural inability** in this way:

> 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 [external, outside] to the Will... [22]

I can will and desire to fly, but I don't have the *natural* ability to fly. I don't have wings, for example. Thus, I am unable naturally to fly. But on the other hand,

> Moral Inability consists not in any of these things [of natural inability]; but either in the want **[lack] of inclination**; or the **strength of a contrary inclination**; or the want **[lack] of sufficient motives** in view, to induce and excite the act of the Will, or the **strength of apparent motives to the contrary**. [22]

Moral inability, like moral necessity, has to do with the *heart*. It is a **defect from within** and not without as it might be with natural necessity. Moral inability may be illustrated not in the case of a gunman threatening a man unable to walk; but asking a favor from a person who hates you. There is no defect in their ear or brain to understand your request, rather the defect is in the lack of love or graciousness and the contrary inclination of hatred toward you. Thus, he is unable to do this favor for you but may do it for someone else. This is a very simple example. When we come to the things of God, the situation is similar. We have already discussed **Total Depravity** in **chapter 6** of the 1689, especially in paragraph 4. The only difficulty at this point is that the subject has to do with eternal things. It has to do with Heaven and Hell and that's why people have difficulty with moral inability and moral necessity coupled with Total Depravity. Man does not lack the heart, the understanding or the brains to love and submit to God, but what he lacks is the *desire,* which in Adam we all had, but we also fell in him and lost it.

Edwards observes that the **will which is determined by the strongest motive always has an inability**. Even God is morally unable to do certain things. The Bible says, for example, that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). That is a moral inability and yet we praise Him for that. Likewise, the same Bible which records that God cannot lie, also says that anything done outside of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). The former inability is a perfection of God, but the latter is a defect of what is good and holy, though it expresses perfectly the heart and nature of fallen man. God's inability concerns not doing that which is evil and that which is sin; fallen man's inability concerns the impossibility of not sinning and of doing righteousness.

Understanding liberty to be the *expression of one's nature*—of doing that which one pleases—moral necessity and inability do not hinder the exercise of that freedom, rather ascertain it. The only problem is that fallen man is depraved and dead in sin.

Liberty and Moral Agency (Part I, section V)

What do we mean when we say that man is free? Strictly speaking, the will is not free, but the *person* who makes the choice is free. Edwards defines liberty and freedom as:

> 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**. — And the **contrary** to Liberty, whatever name we call that by, is a person's being **hindered or unable to conduct as he will**, or being necessitated to do otherwise.[23]

This is a simple yet the right understanding of human liberty. We are free to do anything we desire. Isn't that the essence of

freedom? We are able to do that which we desire and will, not things for which we do not have any desire. To hold us and hinder us to do as we please is slavery and contrary to liberty. It is proper to use the term "**free will**" if we speak of *such* liberty and freedom, but sometimes the phrase is used to mean freedom in another sense. Sometimes it is used to mean freedom *from* sin and corruption which natural man does not have because of his sinful nature. The latter type of freedom is the freedom which is pleasing to God and which we will have in the eternal state. The will is not free because freedom is ascribed to persons and not faculties, strictly speaking:

> ...neither Liberty, nor its contrary, can properly be ascribed to any being or thing, but that which has such a faculty, power or property, as is called will. For **that which is possessed of no will, cannot have any power or opportunity of doing according to its will**, nor be necessitated to act contrary to its will, nor be restrained from acting agreeably to it. And therefore **to talk of Liberty, or the contrary, as belonging to the very Will itself, is not to speak good sense**; if we judge of sense, and nonsense, by the original and proper signification of words.— For **the Will itself is not an Agen**t that has a will: the power of choosing, itself, has not a power of choosing. **That which has the power of volition is the man, or the soul**, and not the power of volition itself. And **he that has the Liberty of doing according to his will, is the Agent who is possessed of the Will**; and not the Will which he is possessed of.[24]

To speak of the will being free in "strict propriety of speech" is to say that the will is an agent and not a faculty because freedom and liberty are only properly assigned to agents. What is contrary to freedom and liberty defined thus is not *moral necessity*, which is the fixed connection between cause and effect; nor *moral inability*, which is the lack of contrary inclination than that according to our desire and nature, but *constraint* and *compulsion*. When a person is forced to do something contrary to his will and desire, there we *cannot* properly speak of a free moral agent. When a person is hindered to do that which he pleases and desires, there we *cannot* properly speak of a free moral agent. Edwards defines a **moral agent** as:

> A moral agent is a being that is capable of those **actions that have a moral quality**, and which can properly be denominated **good** or **evil** in a moral sense, virtuous or vicious, commendable or faulty. To moral Agency belongs a **moral faculty, or sense of moral good and evil,** or of such a thing as desert or worthiness, of praise or blame, reward or punishments; and a **capacity which an Agent has of being influenced in his actions by moral inducements or motives**, exhibited to the view of understanding and reason, to engage to a conduct agreeable to the moral faculty.[25]

A moral agent is a person whose actions can properly be said to be good or evil. We cannot properly and strictly apply "good and evil" to natural disasters as there is no will involved or anything that "nature" is to be blamed for. Neither can we, strictly speaking, ascribe good or evil to animals as they are simply *animals*. Edwards writes:

> The brute creatures are not moral Agents: the actions of some of them are very profitable and pleasant; others are very hurtful: yet seeing they have **no moral faculty, or sense of desert, and do not act from choice guided by understanding**, or with a capacity of reasoning and reflecting, but **only from instinct**, and are **not capable of being influenced by moral inducements**, their actions are not properly sinful or virtuous, nor are they properly the subjects of any such moral treatment for what they do, as moral Agents are for their faults or good deeds.[25]

The difference is between the thinking and the meditating upon the actions. The desire, the understanding of good and evil, etc. They do not have an understanding as us humans, created in the *Imago Dei*, do and act upon that. They do things simply by their nature and instinct, not by premeditated understanding and desires as humans. Edwards notes a difference between us and the Supreme Being. The difference lies in the moral inducements which arise from the difference of circumstance. He differentiates between the moral agency of a ruler and a subject. God is not capable of being influenced by the moral law, its sanctions and threatenings as we the subjects are, though both moral agents and the Supreme Being are influenced by a knowledge of the law. The law of God is simply a reflection of His own nature. It is not something outside of Him, constraining Him or hindering Him from some actions or choices.

> And therefore the moral Agency of the Supreme Being, **who acts only in the capacity of a ruler** towards his creatures, and never as a subject, differs in that respect from the moral Agency of created intelligent beings. **God's actions**, and particularly those which he exerts as a moral governor, **have moral qualifications, and are morally good in the highest degree.** They are most perfectly holy and righteous; and **we must conceive of Him as influenced, in the highest degree, by that which, above all others, is properly a moral inducement; viz. the moral good which He sees in such and such things**: and therefore He is, in the most proper sense, a moral

Agent, the source of all moral ability and Agency, the **fountain and rule of all virtue and moral good**; though by reason of his being **supreme over all, it is not possible He should be under the influence of law or command**, promises or threatenings, rewards or punishments, counsels or warnings. **The essential qualities of a moral Agent are in God, in the greatest possible perfection**; such as understanding to perceive the difference between moral good and evil; a capacity of discerning that moral worthiness and demerit, by which some things are praiseworthy, others deserving of blame and punishment; and also a capacity of choice, and choice guided by understanding, and a power of acting according to his choice or pleasure, and being capable of doing those things which are in the highest sense praiseworthy. And herein does very much consist that image of God wherein he made man, (which we read of, Gen 1:26-27, and Gen 9:6) by which God distinguished man from the beasts, viz. in those faculties and principles of nature, whereby He is capable of moral Agency. Herein very much consists the natural image of God; whereas the spiritual and moral image, wherein man was made at first, consisted in that moral excellency with which he was endowed.[26]

God is not under the moral law as men are under the law, as He is the Supreme Being and the Lawgiver, which is a reflection of His nature. God is not able to do that which is contrary to His nature and we praise Him for that. The Psalmist sings, "You are good and do good; teach me your statutes" (Ps. 119:68). God's good actions spring from the fact that He is good (Matt. 19:17).

Glossary of Edwards

Moral Agency

- A moral agent is a being that is capable of those actions that have a moral quality, and which can properly be denominated good or evil in a moral sense, virtuous or vicious, commendable or faulty. They have a sense of moral good and evil as it is worthy of praise or blame. They have the capacity of being influenced by moral inducements or motives to engage in conduct which is agreeable to the moral faculty and their desires.

The Will

- The Will is that by which the soul either chooses or refuses. The Will's determining between the two is a voluntary determination;
- In every act of will, there is an act of choice; in every volition, there is a preference or prevailing inclination of the soul which at that moment takes the soul out of a state of perfect indifference with respect to the immediate object of the volition.[27]

Freedom and Liberty

- Freedom or liberty is the power, opportunity, or advantage that we have to do as we please.
- Liberty is us being free from hindrance or impediment in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect as we will and desire.

The Motive

- By motive I mean the whole of that which moves, excites, or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly or many things conjunctly.
- The greatest degree of previous tendency to excite and induce the choice is what I call the strongest motive.

The Determination of the Will

- Determining the will means causing it to be the case that the act of the will, or the choice, should be thus and not otherwise.
- The will is always determined by the strongest motive.

Necessity

- All opposition of the Will is excluded in the very supposition of the case.

- Necessity is simply the full and fixed connection between the things signified by the subject and predicate of a proposition.
    - General necessity is when all things considered there is a certainty for the existence of something or quality (or whatever) through the infallible connection between the subject and predicate of the proposition.
    - Particular necessity is when nothing that can be taken into consideration, in or about a person, thing, or time, alters the case at all in determining the infallibility of the connection of the subject and predicate in the proposition which affirms the existence of the things. It is often something that is not connected with our will.
- **Moral Necessity** is that necessity of connection and consequence, which arises from such moral causes, as the strength of inclination, or motives, and the connection which there is in many cases between these and such certain volitions and actions.
- **Natural Necessity** is that necessity as men are under through the force of natural causes.

Inability

- **Natural Inability** consists in being *naturally* unable to do a thing when we cannot do it if we will because what is most commonly called nature does not allow for it.
- **Moral Inability** consists in either in the lack of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the lack of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the act of the Will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary. Moral Inability consists in the opposition or lack of inclination.
- General and Habitual Moral Inability is the inability in the heart to all exercises or acts of will of that kind, through a fixed and habitual inclination, or a habitual and stated defect, or lack of a certain kind of inclination.
- Particular and Occasional Inability is the inability in the heart to a particular act, through the strength or defect of present motives, or of inducements presented to the view of the understanding, on this occasion.

The Confession

What the Confession says here is consistent with what Edwards said. It is God Who has given us this ability above the animals, which is contained in the fact that we are in the image of God. We are naturally free creatures. There is no necessity by nature (natural world) that we should be inclined to one way or another. By *nature* here is meant the natural world, physics, etc.; not one's own desires and *human* nature. One's will is not forced, but it merely is the **expression of one's own desires and inclination**.

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§2 In the State Of Innocence

2. Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to **will and to do that which was good** and well-pleasing to God, **1** but **yet was unstable,** so that he might fall from it. **2**
    1. Eccl. 7:29
    2. Gen. 3:6

Adam, **in his state of innocency**, could really and truly **will and…do that which was good and well-pleasing to God** (Eccl. 7:29). He was not forced to do that which is good, but it simply flowed from his heart as yet unstained by sin. Yet his will **was unstable**. It was not fixed to righteousness but left unstable **so that he might fall from it**. The will of Adam and Eve is very unique and the only biblical data which could be used is in Genesis 1-3 and it does not say much on their will prior to the Fall. Therefore, the Confession is careful in saying what it asserts about Adam's will. We know that Adam and Eve were created "upright" (Eccl. 7:29) and "very good" (Gen. 1:31), yet we also know that this "upright" and "very good" creature fell into sin. This means that he was not fixed in his state of innocence or righteousness but could have stayed in it or fallen from it, which he did.

The only data we have to deal with about the State of Innocence are the first three chapters of Genesis. So, there is here much speculation of what Adam's will might have been. But, two things can be said: 1) Adam could have remained sinless in his probation and 2) Adam could have sinned, as demonstrated by his fall.

That Adam could have remained sinless can be seen in the fact that he was sinless for quite some time, whether it be days, months or years. Reading Genesis we might get the idea that the Creation was created and after a few days, man rebelled. I don't think that was the case. We must allow quite some time perhaps months or years for the fall of Satan, for example, who enticed Adam and Eve to rebel. Thus, theoretically, Adam could have remained sinless and earned righteousness and sinlessness for his whole posterity. Thus Adam had the *posse non peccare*—the ability not to sin. But Adam was **unstable** in his will. He and Eve did certainly choose to stand on Satan's rather on God's side. Thus he had the *posse peccare*—the possibility and ability to sin. He was not fixed either in righteousness or in sinfulness, though his default state was righteousness.

Was Adam's will neutral? I don't know and I don't think so. There are some difficulties with a neutral or a libertarian will, which will be discussed **below**. One of the difficulties is the fact that if a person has two opposite choices with equal desire and strength of inclination, then what could incline him to the one rather than the other? If I desire *X* in the same way and exactly just as much as *Y* (which is the opposite of *X*), how can it be said that I acted according to my desire and freely in choosing *X* rather than *Y* if my desire for both was exactly the same in strength? I don't desire to write more about what I don't know. What I know is that Adam had the ability to remain sinless and the ability to sin. Adam's will is unique and there is very little material to say something about it without speculation.

§3 In the State of Sin

3. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, **hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good** accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether **averse from that good**, and **dead in sin**, is **not able by his own strength to convert himself,** or to prepare himself thereunto. **1**
    1. Rom. 3:10-12; 5:6; 6:16, 20; 7:18; 8:7; 9:16-18; John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5; 5:40, 6:37, 39, 40, 44, 45, 65; 8:31-34; Eph. 2:1, 5, 8-9; Titus 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 3:14; 4:3-4; Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33-37; Luke 6:43-45; Jer. 13:23; Acts 11:18; 7:51; James 1:18; Phil. 1:29

Man has not lost his free will by the fall, but **hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good** (e.g., Rom. 3:10-12; 14:23). Man no longer desires God for he has been severed from God by sin and has become His enemy. The **natural man** is **averse from that good** which comes from God because he hates God (Rom. 1:30; 3:11; 8:7-8). He is **dead in sin** (Eph. 2:1) and he loves it because he is a slave of sin and does not love or practice the righteousness which comes from God. He is neither able **to convert himself** nor **prepare himself thereunto**. He is completely helpless. All these things are the work and blessings of the Holy Spirit upon the elect thanks to Christ's redemption.

When Adam fell from the state of innocence, we, being represented by him before God, fell with him from innocence into sin (**chapter 6**). What is true of Adam's fallen will is likewise true of his sons and daughters whom he represented before God.

The Biblical Testimony about Fallen Man's Will

The Confession claims that man has the moral inability to that which is spiritually good and pleasing in the sight of God. Moreover, man is dead in sin and cannot convert himself. Is what the Confession says consistent with the Bible? Let us see. Many are the biblical references concerning Total Depravity and man's will. I simply want to give you a sample of them.

Inability to will anything spiritual good

What is good in the highest sense? It must be that which conforms to God's will and done to the glory of God (**chapter 16**). If sin is the separation from God (Isa. 59:2), Who is goodness Himself (Ps. 119:68; Matt. 19:17), how can fallen man will that which he is separated from? He is unable to do that which is good and pleasing in God's sight. We may judge the actions of people, whether believers or unbelievers, to be good, but it doesn't mean that God thinks the same. Outwardly and

according to God's common grace, men are able to do that which is outwardly good though not to the glory and honor of God and therefore not good in the highest sense. Paul says that "none does good" (Rom. 3:10). Furthermore, to do that which is pleasing to God, it must be done in faith. Paul says anything done not in and from faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Therefore, Isaiah says "all our righteousnesses [are] as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6 KJV).

Dead in sin

The phrase is used by Paul a few times (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13) to note the utter depravity of man in sin. It denotes that fallen man, just like any man, cannot raise himself up from the dead. It is as if sin is all that he can see and desire. He cannot escape it because he does it *want* to escape it. Such is the sad state of fallen man. He is not merely sleeping or sick in his sins and trespasses seeking to be healed. All his actions, which proceed from his "dead in sins" state, are sinful. That's why the Bible often speaks of regeneration and salvation as being a resurrection (e.g., John 5:24-25; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:13). We have to be made alive and set free from our sin. We are fixed by our fallen nature in sin and we do not desire to escape it. Paul said—

> Rom. 6:20 For when you were **slaves of sin**, you were **free in regard to righteousness**.

Slaves are not free, but fallen man is free in regards to righteousness, meaning—he is free from anything that has to do with righteousness. They have no desire or "allegiance" (HCSB) to righteousness. Righteousness was far away from them who were slaves of sin. They had nothing to do with righteousness. Their will was to do sin and their allegiance was to Satan (John 8:44; Eph. 2:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:26). They are under a hard and cruel master and they follow his will.

The Bible also tells us about fallen man's inclinations. Before and after the Flood, it is said that "Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5 NET; 8:21). Even from childhood man's intentions and inclinations are evil and thus opposed to God. But if our inclinations and intentions are what determine our will, how can it be properly said that man is able to come to God or do anything pleasing to Him if His inclinations are against Him? It is impossible without a heart change—the miracle of regeneration.

Inability to come to God

Fallen man cannot convert himself, nor can he even prepare himself for conversion. What we said above about fallen man's actions all being sinful in God's sight (Rom. 14:23; 2 Tim. 2:26) obviously does not exclude the fact that he cannot come to God or convert himself. Rather, the data above implicitly says that fallen man *cannot* and *will* not come to God because of his sinfulness and God's utter holiness and righteousness.

It is common to hear people saying that they are searching for God, but are they? What does the Bible say? Is not what we have already said enough to conclude that no such thing can spring from man's will? How can a man dead in sins, following the will of Satan—the enemy of God—come of his own to God and seek Him? That's an impossibility. Paul, when he looks at the whole of humanity, expressly says that "no one seeks after God" (Rom. 3:11). But you may say, "people do seek for God!" That might be true and it is true in two senses. Either they are seeking the pleasures and peace that come from God and not the person of God Himself, or it is God Who is seeking them. In the former, men are seeking after idols; in the latter, men are seeking after God because He is seeking after them. The Lord Jesus' mission was "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10), He was not sent so that the lost might seek Him, rather, He is the Seeker! But we have a more express testimony to this effect from the lips of our Lord:

> John 6:44 No one **can come** to me **unless the Father** who sent me **draws him**. And I will raise him up on the last day.
>
> For a discussion of this passage and **John 6 see chapter 3** on Unconditional Election.

The Lord Jesus is not excluding people by saying no one can come, rather He is expressing the inability of natural man to come to Him. He does not say no one *may* come, but He says no one *can*. "Can" has to do with power and ability, "will" has to do with desire. He who "cannot" likewise "wills" not. The two are interconnected. The Greek word here is *dunamai* from which we get the word "dynamo" from. Thayer's Greek Definitions (G1410) says the following:

> - Original: δύναμαι
> - Transliteration: Dunamai
> - Phonetic: doo'-nam-ahee
> - Definition:

1. to be able, have power whether by virtue of one's own ability and resources, or of a state of mind, or through favourable circumstances, or by permission of law or custom
2. to be able to do something
3. to be capable, strong and powerful

- Origin: of uncertain affinity
- TDNT entry: 06:44,2
- Part(s) of speech: Verb[28]

Now couple this definition with the negative: man is *not able*, man does *not have the power*. No man has the power and ability to come to Jesus. Why would this be if fallen man was not dead in his sins and married to unrighteousness and enmity to God? He *cannot*, not because God has forced him so, but he cannot because he *will not*, because he *desires not*. It is a lack of inclination through which an inability is formed. This inability is unstoppable by man because *he will not will something contrary to his desires*, but it is not unstoppable for God Who is able to draw and make men willing (Ps. 110:3 KJV) so that they will definitely come to the Lord Jesus and be raised up. Man lacks the ability and desire to come to God, but God can change the heart so that the desires, which are pleasing to Him, can be found within *redeemed* man.

Inability to believe

John 3:6 That which is **born of the flesh is flesh,** and that which is **born of the Spirit is spirit**.

John 6:63 It is the **Spirit who gives life**; the **flesh is no help at all**. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

Fallen man is unable to come to God, which is actually the same as believing in Him, so likewise he is unable to believe. As he is flesh, the only thing that he will bring forth is flesh. In conversion, the flesh is no help at all. It is all the work of God's Spirit Who makes us new. The Spirit places in us a heart of flesh that is actually able to love and obey God and removes the heart of stone through which we were unable and unwilling to love God and His Law (Ezek. 36:25-27). The flesh, the sinful nature, cannot bring us to life. Someone outside of us must make us alive and bring us to faith. Here is seen the necessity of being born again. It means that we receive a new nature and a new heart to be able and willing to love and obey God. In our fallen state, we will never desire to do that, but when God gives us a new nature and makes us new creatures we become able to do that which is pleasing in God's sight. Let us look at a different passage found in John's Gospel:

John 10:24-28 So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." 25 Jesus answered them, "I told you, and **you do not believe.** The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, 26 but **you do not believe because you are not among my sheep**. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

To be able and willing to believe they must be of His sheep, meaning they must have a different nature. A new and freed nature from sin must be given to them so that they may be able to believe. The reason that they do not believe is found in the fact that they are not part of His sheep, not the other way around. They do not believe *because* they are left in their sin by God as a judgment (Rom. 1:18ff). See also John 8:43-47; 12:37-41; Romans 8:5-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Conclusion

If we consider the above, we cannot, without doing harm to the biblical testimony, accept the idea that fallen man always is able to make the choice between good and evil, God and Satan, while he is dead in sins. Libertarian free will is inconsistent with the biblical testimony, to which we now turn.

The Inconsistency of Libertarian Free Will

Libertarian free will is basically the concept that, metaphysically and morally, man is an autonomous being, one who **operates independently, not controlled by others** or by outside forces. According to the Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion (InterVarsity Press, 2002), libertarian free will is defined as "in ethics and metaphysics, the view that human beings sometimes can will more than one possibility. According to this view, a person who freely made a particular choice could have chosen differently, even if nothing about the past prior to the moment of choice had been different." In the libertarian free will paradigm, the **power of contrary choice reigns supreme**. Without this ability to choose otherwise, libertarian free will proponents will claim that man cannot be held

morally responsible for his actions.[29]

That which is contrary with libertarian free will to the biblical testimony is especially the idea that our actions cannot be ordained by God, but also the idea that we can choose and will contrary to our inclinations. There is no need to recite the biblical evidence that fallen man is unable to will that which is contrary to his nature as we did cite them above. That alone is enough to refute the idea of libertarian free will and declare it as an unbiblical concept. But that is not the only problem which the opponents of Calvinism often suppose to be the essence of liberty; the fact is that such a will is *self-inconsistent*. That, Edwards endeavors to show in part II of his work. Edwards says that Arminians place the liberty of the will in three things:[30]

1. Self-determining power in the Will or a certain sovereignty that the Will has over itself;
2. Indifference: The mind previous to the act of volition is in an equilibrium;
3. Contingence in the sense as opposed to all kinds of necessity or any fixed and certain connection with some previous ground or reason.

Self-determining power and sovereignty over itself

One problem that the Arminian or non-Calvinist libertarian free will has with the self-determining power of the will is that the very notion of that leads to absurdity. It is wrong to speak of the will determining itself as it is the *soul* that determines things because actions are ascribed to agents, not to properties or faculties. But even if we say that the agent determines every prior will of theirs, how is that determination done but by a prior will and so ad infinitum? But if we go back to the link and find that the first act of choice in the chain was not caused by a prior free act of choice, then the notion of such liberty is destroyed. If the first choice in the chain is not free in the sense that it is self-determined, then the rest of the choices within the chain are not free in this sense of liberty and thus it is self-refuting.

By the power of choice, I keep using my fingers to write this sentence. By the power of choice, I keep looking at the screen to see what I'm writing. By the power of choice, I prefer sitting on a chair rather than standing. All such things and many others, I choose. If that is the case, then it must also be the case that if my will must be self-determined, how else could it determine itself but by a prior act of choice? Which leads to the absurdity mentioned above. Using our will and acting on that power is the same thing. Therefore, to say that the will can determine itself by anything other than a prior act of will is wrong. But to say that the will determines itself by a prior act of will does not lead to the Arminian notion of free will. Edwards spends the first five sections of part II discussing all kinds of questions and objections concerning a self-determining power in the will as the Arminians understand the will to be.

Indifference

By this, the Arminian notion of the will is said to be in perfect equilibrium between two (contrary) choices. Meaning, that the person is able to choose with the same easiness between two (contrary) choices. For example, I have 20 degrees of desire for *X* and I also happen to have 20 degrees of desire for *Y*. At the moment of choice, I choose *Y*. But how can it be properly said that my choice was an expression of my desire if both things were in perfect equilibrium in the strength of my inclination? I desired both with the same strength of inclination. But how then was my choice determined if my motive and inclination were with the same strength toward both objects? Such a thing is an impossibility and even if it were theoretically true, it would mean that if I choose *X* rather than *Y* it would be without reason and random, as I earnestly desired both with the same strength of inclination. The inclination and agreeableness of the object chosen in this scheme would come after the choice has been made and not during the choice. Therefore, our wills, in fact—no *will* can be in perfect equilibrium at the time of choice. Indifference cannot and does not reign supreme.

Sections VI to IX are dedicated to this subject in part II of the *Freedom of the Will*. His discussion is great and beneficial. I believe he demonstrates the absurdity of indifference being essential to the will or even being possible. Even in "random" things he argues that we are not in indifference but act upon our desires. Everything has a cause and likewise our choices. We do not simply act without motive and cause.

> One might choose, because an Arminian friend wants to demonstrate his point to pick one of the 64 squares of a chessboard at random. Indeed, at the moment one decides to please his friend by carrying out this experiment, which square he will pick is still a matter of indifference. But when the time comes for the immediate object of the will to be to pick out just one square, the mind, in its constantly varying states (38.4), coupled with a desire to complete this experiment quickly (38.2), will prefer one square to all the rest, and thus direct the arm and finger to indicate the square that is chosen. "So," JE concludes, "the accident [of selecting one of 64 squares], as I have called it . . . is not anything which comes to pass without cause" (38.7).[31]

Contingence

The word *contingency* means uncertainty and possibility. But the word as used in the controversy of free will and as was used in the time of Edwards meant "as opposite, not only to constraint, but to all Necessity."[32] Basically, this is the rejection of *moral necessity*, which is the full and fixed connection between cause and effect. Which does not at all stop liberty, but enhances it, actually. Edwards repeats an axiom that "nothing can ever come to pass without a cause, or a reason, why it exists in this manner rather than another"[32]. But if this is true how can it be said that the actions of the will are contingent, i.e., uncertain or they may possibly come or not? If everything that starts has a cause, then surely the acts of our will do also, therefore they cannot be contingent. Every event has a cause and it is connected with its cause. We cannot consistently say that an event has a cause yet it is not connected with its cause. For contingence to be true it must be proven that some events are not connected and dependent on their causes. Edwards concludes section VIII:

> On the whole, it is clearly manifest, that every effect has a necessary connection with its cause, or with that which is the true ground and reason of its existence. And therefore, if there be no event without a cause, as was proved before, then no event whatsoever is contingent, in the manner that Arminians suppose the free acts of the Will to be contingent.[33]

Not to mention the fact that God's certain foreknowledge, which is admitted by Arminians, removes the idea of anything that is uncertain and contingent. If God's foreknowledge is perfect, then there cannot be anything that is contingent. Both the good (1 Kgs. 13:1-6, 32; Isa. 44:39; 45:13; 2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; Dan. 8; 11; Matt. 26:21-25) and evil (Ex. 3:19; 7:4; 9:30; 11:9; 1 Kgs. 21:22-20; 2 Kgs. 8:12) actions of men are foretold and known by God, therefore, they cannot be uncertain and contingent, unless God's foreknowledge is uncertain and imperfect. Edwards produces a plethora of passages to the effect that God has a certain foreknowledge of the moral actions of creatures in section XI of part II. In section XII, he shows how contingence is inconsistent with God's perfect foreknowledge. Obviously, there is more to Edwards' argumentation as to why these points are wrong and unnecessary for liberty, but that will be left for the interested reader to find out.

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§4 In the State of Grace

4. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, **he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin,** and **by his grace alone enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; 1** yet so as that by reason of his **remaining corruptions**, he doth not perfectly, nor only will, that which is good, but doth **also will that which is evil. 2**
    1. Col. 1:13; John 8:36; Phil. 2:13
    2. Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17

When **God converts a sinner**, they are no longer in the state of sin but are transferred **into the state of grace** (Col. 1:13), where he is free **from his natural bondage under sin** (Rom. 6:12-14). Redeemed man is no longer dominated by sin and ruled by it as a natural man is. And now **by His grace alone**, we are enabled to **freely…will and to do that which is spiritually good** (Ezek. 36:25-27; Phil. 2:12-13; Heb. 13:20-21). We are now able to do that which we were unable and unwilling to do in the state of sin. But this is not by our power, but **by His grace alone**. Even though we are now enabled to do that which is spiritually good and pleasing in God's sight, yet we still have **remaining corruptions** (Rom. 7:14-25; Gal. 5:17) in us and therefore are not perfect and still do that **which is evil** and sin.

Now that the sinner is converted by God's doing, not because of his own "free will," he is made able to will and desire that which pleases God by the Holy Spirit indwelling him.

No Longer Slaves of Sin

The Bible speaks of man as a slave. We are always slaves, either slaves of sin as in the State of Sin (**paragraph 3**) or slaves of righteousness as in the State of Grace. The fact that those who have been crucified with Christ and risen with Him are no longer slaves of sin is most clearly spoken of in Romans 6. So we need to take a look at it.

After explaining that all are under sin and justified solely by God's grace, now Paul turns to consider that if we have been

justified by God's grace, then it doesn't matter if we sin, does it? The answer to that question is an emphatic negative:

> Rom. 6:1-2 What shall we say then? Are we to **continue in sin** that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who **died to sin** still **live in it**?

The hypothetical objection that Paul raises is not "Can Christians sin?" or "Do Christians still sin," rather it is much more specific. He speaks of someone who *continues* and *lives* in sin. There is a huge difference between sinning and living in sin. We all sin. If we deny this reality then the Bible says that "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). If we deny that we, as Christians still sin, then we actually are not Christians, because the truth is not in us. But to "continue in sin" means to live as you did before you became a Christian; to live a *lifestyle characterized by continual sin*. If we *continue* and *live* in sin then we manifest that in truth, we have not died with Christ. Do you see the difference between the two? One is occasional sinning and struggles against and hatred of sin; while the other is a lifestyle, love and celebration of sin. Thus the hypothetical objection of Paul in verse 1 is against a life and continuance in sin, which is a sign that we are not in Christ, or to put it in the words of v. 2: we have not died to sin.

How have Christians died to sin? Christians died to sin together with Christ Who was our representative. Baptism illustrates the reality of being united with Christ in His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4; **see also chapter 29**). Just as Christ died and was raised to life, so likewise the person who has been regenerated is put to death and raised to new life: a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Our new birth is often described in terms of resurrection (John 5:25-26; Eph. 2:5-6; Col. 2:12). What does being dead *to* sin mean? It means that we no longer are slaves to sin. We no longer are under its bondage so that we are not able to do righteousness (Rom. 6:20). Sin no longer reigns and rules over us. We are no longer the obedient slaves of sin as we were before the new birth. We now struggle and war against sin.

The reason that we were united with Christ in His death, as Romans 6:3-4 says, is so that we also would die to sin and no longer be slaves of sin (Rom. 6:6). Since the one who has died is freed from sin, that's why it was necessary that we would be united with our Savior on the cross (Rom. 6:7). Just as we died with Him on the cross, so likewise we live with Him now in newness of life thanks to His resurrection (Rom. 6:4, 8, 11). In the past, when we did not know Christ, sin did reign over us and made us obedient to its passions (Rom. 6:12-13), but now the apostle commands us not to allow sin to reign in us as it did before we knew Christ. Indeed, sin will no longer have dominion over us because we have been freed from the curse and demands of the law as a covenant of works (Rom. 6:14; **see here**). When we were under the law, either the one written on stone or the one written on the heart (see **the Law of Creation**). The law condemned us whenever we sinned and brought us under condemnation. But that power of the law has been destroyed for the believers through Christ. Now the law points us to Christ through Whom we receive forgiveness for every sin (Acts 13:38-39). We are now under grace. We are under the Covenant of Grace whose promises are "confess your sins and you will be clean" (cf. 1 John 1:8-9). There is no condemnation for us who are in Christ as He was the One who paid by His precious blood for every sin we would commit (Rom. 8:1). How different than the covenant of works! The one condemns and administers death and condemnation; the other administers righteousness and eternal glory (2 Cor. 3:7-11). Thus those who are under sin and "continue in sin" are under the bondage and condemnation of the law, that will only bring death (Rom. 6:16, 23), impurity, lawlessness (Rom. 6:19), and shame (Rom. 6:21). But Paul bursts into thanks to God for His amazing grace:

> Rom. 6:16-18 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, **you are slaves of the one whom you obey**, either of **sin, which leads to death**, or of **obedience, which leads to righteousness?** 17 But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have **become obedient from the heart** to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and, having been **set free from sin**, have **become slaves of righteousness.**

Glory be to the Sovereign Who has freed us from our slavery to sin. We would have never come to Christ through our free will because our will was only free to do what accords with our desires, which at that time was only sin (Rom. 14:23; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; Eph. 2:1-3). But it is God who has bought us from the slave market of sin and made us slaves of Himself. We no longer are under the harsh dominion of sin, but are under the dominion of the gracious God Who saved us. It is an axiom that whoever or whatever we obey and love the most, to that we are slaves. So, when we were in the State of Sin, we were obedient to sin and thus were slaves of sin. But now thanks be to God, we have become and are becoming more obedient to God. We have been set free from sin and now we have a new goal: we now, thanks to the new nature, want to be slaves of righteousness and no longer slaves of sin. We want God to rule in our lives. We want to produce fruit in keeping with our repentance and demonstrate our love for God by being obedient slaves to Him and not defy Him through sin. We no longer want to be ashamed of the things that we did before we came to Christ, but we want to be obedient slaves of God and produce fruit which is consistent with our new nature, which does not lead to death, but instead to life eternal with God! (Rom. 6:21-22)

Rom. 6:14 For **sin will have no dominion over you**, since you are not under law but under grace.

Thanks be to God!

Remaining Corruptions

The fact that we have been freed from the dominion of sin does not mean that we no longer sin. If we claim that we no longer sin, we disqualify ourselves from being Christians (1 John 1:7). We do sadly sin, but this is because of the remaining corruption in us and the sinful world around us. Paul says that there is still an aspect to our redemption (Rom. 8:22-23). Thus in a sense, our redemption is not yet complete. It does not mean that the Lord Christ did not provide a perfect atonement for the elect, forbid the thought! But it means that the *application* of all the benefits of that atonement are not applied at once. For example, when we come to newness of life at the point the Spirit of grace regenerates us and gives us a new heart, which now has different desires. It wants to obey God and please Him, unlike our previous sinful desires. But we do not directly obey God in everything. There are still things that we struggle with. Then comes the lifelong process of sanctification. That is the process through which the Spirit works on us to transform us into Christ's image and destroy sin in us slowly. Sanctification is a lifelong process of ups and downs. It is not a constant line going upward, but upward and downward. When we die then our sanctification is complete and we are freed from the presence of sin, but still await the redemption of our bodies.

Now we are engaged in a war. As Paul says in Romans 6:13, we should present ourselves no longer as instruments of sin and unrighteousness, but instruments fit to be used by God. We should present our members as instruments for righteousness. To do that which God is pleased with. But sadly that is not as easy as it sounds and Paul knows this, that's why he writes of the struggle that there is within him in Romans 7. So now we turn our attention to Romans 7. In vv. 1-6, Paul uses an analogy, which seeks to demonstrate how we have been freed from the law by dying just as a wife is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives, but if he dies she is free from that particular law. But for our purposes, we need to look at vv. 7 and beyond.

From his previous discussion about the effect of the law when we are under sin, some people might get the idea that Paul says that the law is of sin and is actually sinful, which is not even remotely in Paul's mind. His point was that the law for a person under sin can only increase sin, as it has no power to forgive, but it condemns all who do not obey it (Gal. 3:10). Rather, he says that the law actually brings the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). The law is not the problem; sin is the problem (Rom. 7:8), which uses the "holy and righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12) commandments to produce sin in us. Where there is no law, there is no sin (Rom. 5:13) because sin is **law**lessness (1 John 3:4). But all are indeed under the law either the one written on stone or on the conscience (Rom. 2:12-15; **see chapter 19**). Sin has no power without the law (Rom. 7:8), but since we were under the law as a covenant of works (i.e., in the State of Sin), sin reigned over us and used even the good and holy to produce more sin and impurity. Thus Paul says that in a sense he was alive or unaware of his sin apart from the law, but when he understood the requirements of the law, he died (Rom. 7:9-11).

The problem of why the law is ineffective to bring life and sanctification to a person under the State of Sin is because the law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14). It is not designed to produce life and sanctification in the lives of those under sin, but only condemnation and fear. For the law to produce righteousness and sanctification, its subject must be those who are spiritual (Col. 2:13-15). Spiritual does not mean non-physical, but rather a person who is led by the Holy Spirit. This is indeed the promise of the New Covenant in which God promises that He will cause us to obey and delight in the law (Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:31-34). But the problem is that corruption still remains in us and we still sin (Rom. 7:14). Now we come to the controversial aspect of this chapter. The commentators are divided whether v. 14 and following refers to Paul in the present or in the past. I believe that it refers to Paul in the present, i.e., when he is regenerated and under grace and not law. I believe that this is the case because of the following reasons:

- Paul speaks in the present tense and does not speak in the past tense. That is a bit strange if he was describing a time before his conversion, while he does speak in the past tense about his conversion (Rom. 7:5, 7, 9).
- When he sins he calls that "the very thing that I hate" (Rom. 7:15). How is it possible for an unregenerate person to hate his sin? Everything that an unregenerate person does is sin (Rom. 6:20; 14:23).
- There is a struggle between his desires (Rom. 7:16), which would not be there if he was under the dominion of sin and condemnation of the law (Gal. 5:18-21).
- He has desires for what is right but does not have the ability to carry it out (Rom. 7:17-20). He wishes he would do the good, but sin seduces him. Can this be said of the unregenerate?
- He delights in the law of God in his inner being, in his spirit (Rom. 7:22). Is this a description

consistent with an unregenerate man?

Those are the reasons I believe that Paul is speaking of his present experience as a Christian. That would not be a problem if we do not expect the apostles to be perfect. The whole human race is sinful, Christian or not Christian. But the one is freed from the *dominion* of sin; the other still walk in it. Paul describes a struggle of desires in himself. He does not understand some things that he does. He sometimes does the sin which he hates and then does not understand why he did that. Many of us can concur. When we sin it seems to us at that present time to be nothing, but once we realize what we have done we look with disgust and amazement at ourselves that we did such a thing. But thanks be to the Lord Who forgives us when we confess our sins (1 John 1:8-9).

Paul does that which he does not want according to his new nature and whenever he does that, he agrees with the condemnation of the law of those sins. According to his new nature, he desires to obey and love the law, but he sees that there is a war within him between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Sometimes we are able by the Spirit to overcome those sinful desires, but other times they overcome us. The difference from the State of Sin is that such a war between the flesh and the Spirit does not exist because then we were under the complete dominion of sin.

> Rom. 7:22-25 For **I delight in the law of God, in my inner being**, 23 but I see in my members another law **waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin** that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this **body of death**? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, **I myself serve the law of God with my mind**, but **with my flesh I serve the law of sin**.

There is a constant war between the Spirit, which Paul here calls his inner being and the law of his mind, and the flesh, which is the law of sin. He delights in the law in his mind and knows that it is good, but does not have the desire and ability to always carry it out. Sin is still trying to seek him out and gain dominion over him again, but Paul has to resist. His wretched condition is connected to the weakness of his body of death and the sinful world around him. There is nothing good in his flesh, which is the remaining corruption and sin in him and his body (Rom. 7:18), but he knows that deliverance will come through Jesus Christ. I believe that Paul here is looking forward to the complete and finished redemption of our bodies as in Romans 8:22-23. The term *flesh* in Romans 7:14 is not the usual word σάρξ (*sarks*, G4561), which he mostly uses to speak of the sinful nature (Rom. 8:3, 8, 9, 12), but it is σάρκινος (*sarkinos*, G4560), which simply means "pertaining to the body (as earthly and perishable material)"[28]. σάρκινος (*sarkinos)* is also used in 1 Corinthians 3:1; 2 Corinthians 3:3; Hebrews 7:16. The word σάρξ (*sarks*) is used to speak of the corruption still within him in Romans 7:18 and from which he will be freed by God in Romans 7:25.

We should not think that Paul is here using the words "desire" and "ability" as Edwards uses them in a philosophical sense. Paul is not speaking of philosophy, but he is simply describing the war between the Spirit and the flesh as he perceives it.

Will the Good

Now that we have received a new nature, we are made able by God's Spirit to do that which is pleasing and good in the sight of God. He has given us His Spirit so that we would walk in His "statutes and be careful to obey [His] rules" (Ezek. 36:27). But before the Lord did that He changed something essential in us. He took away the old heart of stone, which was dead in sin, and gave us a heart of flesh, which is now able to obey God and walk in His rules (Ezek. 36:25). To the same effect is Jeremiah 31:31-34. We are a new creation with a new nature, thus what was agreeable to us before Christ will be hateful to us now that we see sin to be exceedingly sinful.

Philippians 2:13 tells us that under and behind our willing is God's willing. We are to work out (not work *for*) our salvation. Why? Because it is God Who is working in us. This destroys the idea or objection which people have who say "why do anything if God is sovereign?" Well, in this verse both are combined and such an objection is far away from Paul's mind. Human willing and divine willing go hand in hand, but only one is the basis for the other. We are to work out our salvation *because* God is at work in us. He produces in us, in accord with the promise of Ezekiel, that which pleases Him. Therefore, all the glory is due only to Him. **Hebrews 13:20-21** tells us that it is God Who equips us and supplies us with all that is necessary to do His will. It is He who works in us that which is pleasing in His sight. This is similar to Philippians 2:13. God works us in us to produce that which He desires. **Ephesians 2:8-9**, after speaking of our salvation by grace alone, then says that God prepared works for us before the foundation of the world in order to walk in them (Eph. 2:10). God prepared tasks and things for us before we even existed. It is to Him that all the glory for the good that we do belongs!

§5 In the State of Glory

5. This will of man is made **perfectly and immutably free to good alone in the state of glory only.** **1**
    1. Eph. 4:13; Heb. 12:23

Only in the **state of glory** will the **will of man** be **perfectly and immutably free to good alone**. Our wills will truly be free in heaven when we only desire to do that which pleases God because all sin and its effects will be gone. Our wills will not be like that of Adam's, but even better. For Adam was unstable in his will, but our wills will be stable and fixed to righteousness alone.

From the description of the state of glory especially in Revelation 21-22, there seems to be no possibility to sin. That is really no problem or hindrance to our freedom, as some imagine, but that is, in fact, perfection and complete glorification. Why would we desire to sin and do that which is contrary to God when all evil and sin have been removed far from us? In the State of Glory, we will be made perfect. The State of Glory which is spoken of is both the Intermediate State, where the believers now go to when they die and also the New Heavens and the New Earth in which righteousness dwells (1Pet. 3:13). It is there when our glorification and sanctification will be complete and we would perfectly reflect the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29-30). It is there when we will finally be freed from our remaining corruptions and be sinless like our Lord. We will no longer have the ability to sin because our desires will be wholly holy and righteous, just like that of our Lord. In heaven, we will have the *non posse peccare*—we will no longer have the possibility to sin and our wills will be fixed to the good, just like the Lord Jesus' and God's. For those who think this means that we are made robots, they need to consider the Lord Jesus Who never sinned (whether there was actually an ability to sin or not is beside the point) and God Who cannot sin (has an inability to sin) and explain how They are "free." Freedom consists in doing that which is according to one's nature. As God's nature is good and holy, He only desires to do that. As our nature and our redemption will be complete and we will be made "perfect" (Heb. 12:23), so likewise we will only desire that which accords with our nature, the good and holy.

Glory be to God who will give us victory over sin and Satan and answer the prayer of Paul in Romans 7:24-25. Thank You, **Lord Jesus**, for redeeming us by Your precious blood from the dominion of sin. Thank You, **Father**, for choosing us and sending Your beloved Son to die in our place so that we will be Your slaves and not the slaves of sin. Thank You, **Holy Spirit**, for applying the perfect work of Christ to us, regenerating us, causing us to desire that which is pleasing to God, working in us God's pleasure and making us more like Christ every day. Glory be to the **Triune God** alone for His perfect work! We long to the day when our wills will be made "perfectly and immutably free to good alone."

…work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

(Philippians 2:12-13)

Footnotes

1. ^ *Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith which was apparently supplied by the Westminster Confession of Faith 1646.*

2. ^ *Jonathan Edwards. Freedom Of The Will. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications. Originally, 1754. 2012). pp. 1-2. A digital version can be found at CCEL.*
3. ^ *Ibid., p. 4.*
4. ^ *Ibid., p. 3.*
5. ^ *Ibid., p. 5.*
6. ^ *Ibid., pp. 5-6.*
7. a, b *Ibid., p. 6.*
8. a, b *Ibid., p. 7.*
9. ^ *Ibid., pp. 9-10. Edwards classifies the first on under "the apparent nature and circumstance of the object" (p. 8). The other two he classifies under two one point with two sub-points which he calls "the manner of view" (pp. 8-9). Point 2 (here) is called the degree of assent, and point 3 the degree of the idea or apprehension of the future pleasure.*
10. ^ *Ibid., p. 9.*
11. ^ *Ibid., p. 10.*
12. a, b *Ibid., p. 12.*
13. ^ *Ibid., pp. 12-13.*
14. ^ *Ibid., p. 13.*
15. ^ *Ibid., p. 14.*
16. a, b *Ibid., p. 15.*
17. ^ *Ibid. pp., 15-16.*
18. a, b *Ibid., p. 16.*
19. ^ *Ibid., p. 18.*
20. ^ *Ibid., pp. 18-19.*
21. ^ *Ibid., p. 19.*
22. a, b *Ibid., p. 21.*
23. ^ *Ibid., p. 24.*
24. ^ *Ibid., pp. 24-25.*
25. a, b *Ibid., p. 26.*
26. ^ *Ibid., pp. 26-27.*
27. ^ *Jonathan Edwards. The Freedom of the Will. (Early Modern Texts, 2007). PDF p. 5.*
28. a, b *Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. See reference for the Strong's number.*
29. ^ *GotQuestions.org. What is libertarian free will?*
30. ^ *Edwards, Freedom of the Will. p. 25.*
31. ^ *Daniel P. Fuller. A Digest of Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of the Will, 1991. p. 8.*
32. a, b *Edwards, Freedom of the Will. p. 64.*
33. ^ *Ibid., p. 66.*