

**THE
BONDAGE & LIBERATION
OF THE WILL**

THE HORROR OF THE FALL AND THE GLORY OF GRACE

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*“For when you were **slaves** in sin, **you were free** in regards to righteousness. What fruit did you have in **those things** [and in that freedom] of which you are now ashamed? For the **end** of those things is **death**.”*

– Romans 6:20-21

CONTENTS

1. Introduction Page 5

2. The Biblical and Logical Bankruptcy of Free-Will Centric Theology Page 11

3. Love: Not Simply a Voluntary Choice but a Product of the New Birth Page 17

4. The Will is governed by the Nature; the Nature is not governed by the Will Page 26

5. The Bound Will is Liberated when we're Effectually Drawn to Christ by the Father Page 37

6. Salvation by Grace Through Faith is Effected by the Liberating of the Bound Will Page 46

7. To Defend Man's Ultimate "Freedom" is to Erect an Idol before God Page 55

8. **Appendix 1:** Being Faithful to the Whole Counsel of God Page 57

9. **Appendix 2:** But What of 'Prevenient Grace'? Page 59

1. INTRODUCTION

Ultimate self-determination: the ability or right to make your own decisions without interference from others

Free: not regulated: not controlled, restricted, or regulated by any external thing

Freedom: release from captivity or slavery: release or rescue from being physically bound, or from being confined, enslaved, captured, or imprisoned¹

For most, the doctrine that “God will not violate our free-will” (of which we may call: “the doctrine of the inviolability of the will”) is as widely accepted as the doctrine of the resurrection. To accept it is to treasure a Gospel that makes much of man’s ‘ultimate self-determination’ and of the God who ‘esteems voluntary love over meticulous control.’ And to accept it is to find a Gospel bereft of it to be inconceivable.

This has been my stance on the subject since my conversion; as it was also the stance of those around me. My heart has since changed. And as it changed, the Lord left indelible brands on my heart concerning the true nature of our will and the richness of His kindness in the emancipation of it. Instead of likening our volitional freedom to that of an ultimate kind, like the freedom that God alone enjoys, I now see it as a freedom that is closer in nature to a prisoner in a concentration camp bound and enslaved incapable of escaping.

¹ Encarta ® World English Dictionary © & (P) 1998-2004 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

This *is* the nature of our freedom. It is a freedom of slavery; a freedom of subjection. It is a freedom that is defined by the apostle as “slavery to sin.” In Paul’s language, apart from the quickening work of God, we are “free *from* righteousness” (Romans 6:20) and incapable of *choosing* it. Like a man emaciating in Auschwitz, we have the ability to make decisions in some sense and to act as we wish to some limited extent, but cannot, in any sense of the word, call ourselves “free”. To ascribe freedom to our wills, in the way that so many today do, is to derange and disfigure the word stripping it of all its meaning. In Paul’s mind, men are either “slaves to sin”² or “slaves to God.”³ This is why Spurgeon preached that “it has already been proved beyond all controversy that free-will is nonsense. Freedom cannot belong to will any more than ponderability can belong to electricity. They are altogether different things. Free agency we may believe in, but free-will is simply ridiculous. The will is well known by all to be directed by the understanding, to be moved by motives, to be guided by other parts of the soul, and to be a secondary thing. Philosophy and religion both discard at once the very thought of free-will; and I will go as far as Martin Luther, in that strong assertion of his, where he says, “If any man doth ascribe aught of salvation, even the very least, to the free-will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace, and he hath not learnt Jesus Christ aright.”⁴

If we were to call ourselves “free,” then the whole idea of “salvation” would evaporate; for salvation requires and includes the liberation of the captive, the freeing of the bound and the emancipation of the enslaved. Rest assured, anything less than this is not Biblical salvation. After all, who saves free men? Who emancipates the liberated? One may say, “To say that the will is free is not to say that the man is free!” I would respond by saying, “I believe it does. For if the will is truly free, can you explain to me what is keeping them from loving and obeying God?” Furthermore, is sin not so destructive that it corrupts the nature of man but not his will? Have we the Biblical warrant to divorce the will of a man from the nature of a man? I think not. (In chapter 3 we will deal with this issue in greater detail) Again I stress, if man’s will is free, then what is keeping him from coming to Christ to believe upon the efficacy of His blood? If the answer is “the man’s will,” then I would ask, “Why?” That is, “What is keeping his will from coming to Christ?” If it is not bondage to sin and rebellion then what is it? – Mere natural ability? If so, then men’s eternal destinies lie simply in individual moral performance. Moreover, it means that one man possesses abilities in and of himself that make coming to Christ in faith easier than another man. Why? – Because a man willing to come to Christ is allegedly contingent upon his natural

² Romans 6:20

³ Romans 6:22

⁴ From the sermon “*Free-Will: A Slave*” preached on December 2, 1855

ability. Does not the history of Israel from Abraham till now show that men are impotent to come to God apart from a regenerating work *within them* wherein they are given a “heart of flesh” in the place of their once unresponsive “heart of stone”?⁵

In light of the obvious problem with the Gospel of ‘ultimate self-determination’ and decisive ‘free-will,’ I want to present a brief argument against it. I have zeal in my heart to expose the myth of man’s “inviolable free-will” urging a generation of young⁶ messengers and laborers to drop the inaccurate and unhelpful rhetoric of man’s supposed freedom that God refuses to violate. We must begin to speak less of our pathetic little freedom and more of God’s effectual work of the Spirit whereby He liberates those who are “fast bound in sin and natures night.”⁷ I’d like to go so far as to prove that the idea of man’s untouchable free-will, ultimate self-determination, unconquerable volition and invincible resolve are all carnal philosophies and horrendous idolatries; for they are hollow theories that the prophets and apostles know nothing of. My hope is that I can adequately and pointedly explain why one would ever employ such language as ‘horrendously idolatrous’ to describe the doctrine of man’s voluntary submission to God and encourage others to do the same. And most importantly, I desire to show how sweet and how efficacious our emancipation is through the decreeing of the Father, the sacrificing of Christ and the appropriating of the Spirit – the emancipation of our nature *and* our will.

Martin Luther wrote a book entitled “*The Bondage of the Will*” on this very subject as the Reformation raged through Europe. I will borrow Luther’s language and write my own treatise on the nature of the human volition as if the term (bondage of the will) were my own. I will argue that the human will *is* in “bondage” and does not know the wonderful sensation of liberty that can be experienced in Christ through the new birth that is altogether contingent “not on the will of blood nor the will of the flesh nor the will of man, *but of God.*”⁸

In my view, the Gospel addresses the salvation of the whole man, of which the will is principally included and chiefly affected. In other words, Biblical salvation entails the quickening of the will *as much as* it does the regeneration of the *nature*. The two are quickened together. And they must be for any man to “come to” Christ (hence why so many

⁵ See Ezekiel 36:26

⁶ I say “young” not to exclude those who are not but because so many my age are wandering so dangerously far from what Scripture teaches on the subject of the will.

⁷ From the hymn, “And Can it Be”

⁸ John 1:13

do not). And so I contend that we are in need of profoundly Biblical Soteriology⁹ in our day that exalts the exquisite work of God in the hell-bound soul of man. Thus I'm becoming more convinced day by day that we are in need of an infusion of the theology of the Reformation if we are to expect any sort of impact in our own generation; especially in a day and age when those who call themselves laborers and messengers are drinking from such poisoned wells as Open Theism¹⁰ and Non-Violent Atonement¹¹ en masse.¹² We are in need of reformers again who will declare the word of the Lord with power and who can articulate the miraculous work of God. The men of the Reformation tapped into such ultimate of realities and such precious realms that we are fools to ignore. So before considering a few propositions on the matter, hear the words of three messengers that beckon us to listen to another Gospel than that which is presently being heralded in much of the western world – one that speaks of men as *enslaved, not as free, and one that speaks of Christ as Savior not merely a contributor.*

Jonathan Edwards argued that if a man possesses the ability to make a first decision to submit to Christ, and if every act of the will prior to that one was driven by its darkened and depraved nature, which was seeking only its own good and selfish benefit, “what makes that first decision any different from the ones before it?” In other words, if men are wicked, but need only to make a decision to follow Christ and to cherish His blood, what is the cause and motive of *that first decision* that sets it apart from all other decisions? If every prior decision was driven by lust, greed, selfishness and corruption, are we not fools to think that the degenerate man possesses enough good in himself to make a decision that is devoid of all those pollutions? I agree with Edwards that: “...principles [do not] derive their goodness from actions, but that actions derive their goodness from the principles whence they proceed; and so the act of choosing that which is good is no further virtuous than it proceeds from a good principle or virtuous disposition of mind; which supposes that a virtuous disposition of mind may be *before* a virtuous act of choice; and that therefore it is not necessary that there should first be thought, reflection, and choice before there can be

⁹ ‘the study of salvation’

¹⁰ Open Theism is a popular doctrine now influencing much of the mission’s movement that states that “the future is open and not settled.” Open Theists reject the foreknowledge of God, the omniscience of God and the Sovereignty of God.

¹¹ Non-Violent Atonement is the interpretation of the Atonement that rejects the involvement of Divine wrath. So instead of the Cross being the place where God satisfied Himself by punishing sin in the body of Jesus (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21) it was the place where Jesus bore the wrath of Satan and of man. This view denies penal substitution and in effect justification by faith.

¹² I mention these two doctrines because they are the two that are gaining the most influence, credibility and popularity in the mission’s movement. They are the two that we ought to be the most concerned about. They are the two that reveal our great need for an authentic reformation more than anything else.

any virtuous disposition. If the choice be first, before the existence of a good disposition of heart, *what signifies that choice?* There can, according to our natural notions, be no virtue in a choice which proceeds from no virtuous principle but from mere self-love, ambition, or some animal appetite." ¹³ Did you catch that? Edwards is saying that principles do not derive their goodness from actions, but that actions derive their goodness from the principles that they originate in. It's like the man that donates money to a worthy cause to be recognized for his excellence. His good deed was rooted in selfish ambition and in perverse desires. Edwards is saying that a corrupt and depraved will cannot produce choices that are pleasing to God. He is saying that they *will not*. He is saying that for a decision, an act of pure volition, and an exertion of the will to be pleasing to God, it must *originate* from within that which is full of virtue – God Himself. ¹⁴ It must be pure and undefiled. And it must be that which is "not from ourselves but a gift of God; that none boast." ¹⁵

George Whitefield, that great preacher and founder of Methodism, once charged men saying, "I hope we shall catch fire from each other, and that there will be a *holy emulation* amongst us, who shall most *debase man* and *exalt the Lord Jesus*. Nothing but the doctrines of the Reformation can do this. All others leave freewill in man and make him, in part at least, *a Saviour to himself*. My soul, come not thou near the secret of those who teach such things . . . I know Christ is all in all. Man is nothing: he hath a free will to go to hell, but none to go to heaven, till God worketh in him to do of His good pleasure." ¹⁶ O for that sort of Gospel preaching! The kind that "debases man and exalts the Lord Jesus"! One of the most powerful evangelists in human history was convinced that the un-aided will could no more bring people to salvation in Christ than it could bring them to the moon. He understood that if God did not work in a man, empowering him "to will and to do," that man was completely impotent to fulfill God's "good pleasure." ¹⁷

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of my greatest heroes, clearly alluding to Whitefield's remark, once said that, "I do not come into this pulpit hoping that perhaps somebody will of his own free will return to Christ. My hope lies in another quarter. I hope that my Master will lay hold of some of them and say, "You are mine, and you shall be mine. I claim you for

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, Complete Works Volume 1 (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 177.

¹⁴ This is why Paul said twice in Galatians 5 and 6 that "nothing counts but the new creation." In other words, it doesn't matter if you do good or bad. What matters is the well-spring of your actions. Either it is polluted water or it is pure water. The quality of the fountain determines the quality of the actions that come out of it.

¹⁵ Ephesians 2:8-10

¹⁶ George Whitefield, Works, pp. 89-90

¹⁷ Philippians 2:12-13

myself." My hope arises from the freeness of grace, and not from the freedom of the will. Free will carried many a soul to hell, but never a soul to heaven." O how this reality shaped Spurgeon's preaching. He spoke as a man confident in God alone to save.

These three men have impacted my life indelibly. I thank God for their ministries. And I recommend them to you wholeheartedly.

Now moving on to the heart of the matter, I want to argue from Scripture that the will of man is by nature bound, enslaved, impotent and therefore incapable of ever 'receiving Christ' ¹⁸ on its own without an efficacious work of God. ¹⁹

To do so, I present to you an Introductory Article:

1. The Biblical and Logical Bankruptcy of Free-Will Centric Theology

Five propositions:

1. Love: Not Simply a Voluntary Choice but a Product of the New Birth
2. The Will is governed by the Nature; the Nature is not governed by the Will
3. The Bound Will is Liberated when we are Effectually Drawn by the Father to Christ
4. Salvation by Grace Through Faith is, in effect, the Liberating of the Bound Will
5. To Defend Man's Ultimate "Freedom" is to Erect an Idol before God

And Two Appendixes

1. Being Faithful to the Whole Counsel of God
2. But What of 'Prevenient Grace'?

¹⁸ John 1:12-13

¹⁹ Which is called "the new birth" (See John 3) or "regeneration." (See 1 Peter 1) It is the quickening of a man dead in sin by giving Him the gift of grace and faith (See Ephesian 2:1-10) and imparting the divine nature to him.

2. THE BIBLICAL AND LOGICAL BANKRUPTCY OF FREE-WILL CENTRIC THEOLOGY

The autonomy of man: truly a touchy issue. From the title of the article it's obvious where I stand. I stand confident and convinced that free-will-centric theology is Biblically and logically bankrupt (though many Biblical, Godly and anointed ministries hold it). With all my heart and mind I am convinced of this.

In regards to this matter, brevity is clarity. So I will begin here by presenting – in a short amount of space – what I believe to be a sound, vibrant and robust alternative to the wanting idea that our wills are “free.” It's clear from Scripture and Holy Spirit-aided logic that our wills are subject to our members; not vice-versa.

The idea of a free-will is logically bankrupt for the reason that the will is not what ‘rules’ the rest of a man's members, his heart is. Thus the Proverb says, “Guard your *heart*, for out of it flow the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). Whereas preachers tell us that from our *will* flow the issues of life. Many men have built ministries and small empires around the idea. That's why at modern evangelistic campaigns “*decision cards*” are passed out those who “made a *decision to ask Jesus* into their hearts;” as if either were Biblical ideas.²⁰

Biblically and philosophically the idea that we can will our way through life and in and out of salvation falls short; tragically short. Why? Because the will is a slave to the heart! The will is

²⁰ Yes we make a decision to follow Christ and nothing is intrinsically evil about filling out a card saying that you ‘went forward to receive Jesus.’ However, altar-call/decision card based Christianity has produced a shallow and confused church who slips in and out of salvation day to day because she was told she gains and loses her salvation by choosing to be saved or not. Moreover, “asking Jesus into your heart” is not a Biblical phrase or a Biblical concept.

subject to the inner most desires of a man! A man may say with his lips that he believes he has a free-will. But within that very hour his actions will contradict that and prove him wrong; and sadly, he may never even come to recognize it. His desires *drive* his will. The desires of the heart are FAR stronger than the will.

If the will and the heart were weapons, the heart would be a chainsaw and the will a butter-knife. Every man who has struggled with sin knows this. He knows that it is not the strength or weakness of his will that determines the victory – it's the inclination of his heart. If I am confronted with the opportunity to engage in sexual sin, I KNOW that it is my heart that keeps me safe or not – not my will. For if that sin is found to be superior to the prospect of purity and faithfulness, that sin will be an *actuality* not just an *opportunity*. The church is steeped in sexual sin because we have been told that our quality of life is determined by the choices we make. While that is completely true, it's also confusing. Why? – Because our choices are made based upon our desires. And if we are *free-will-centric* people we will stumble and flail about in this age not understanding the anatomy of sin or the anatomy of transformation. But if we are people who know that our affections, our desires and the deepest longings of our heart always win out and conquer our will we have a chance of chance of standing steadfast *in love for Jesus* and in *faithfulness against sin*; because we possess a legitimate strategy for victory.

The relationship between the heart and the will is a Biblical matter, and so we will wait to address it more deeply later. For now, let's think logically and philosophically (though not exclusively):

Why does a man choose to eat a cheeseburger? – Because something within his being was attracted to that cheeseburger; his appetite *demand*ed that cheeseburger. And why does he choose the cheeseburger over a filet of fish? – Because the burger won the heart of the man and the filet did not. Why does a man choose to have sex (morally or immorally)? – Because desires and longings with his being tell him that it will be pleasing to him. Why does a man choose purity and faithfulness? – Because he longs for righteousness. Why does a man choose to climb to the top of a mountain with a camera in his hand? – Because something within his being told him that the power of beauty from the top was worth the risk of the climb and worth capturing on film. And why does a man choose pick up the Gospel of John? – Because that man has desire in his heart to seek out the mystery of the Gospel to find whether this Christ is who men say that He is; and he longs to encounter the One that He adores. From the smallest decision – like “small, medium or large” – to the biggest – like “will you marry me” – our decision is based upon when we desire.

The point is this: In every circumstance, in every scenario and in every season of our lives we make every decision based upon what we *find most pleasing in that moment*. I don't eat because I decided to eat! No! I eat because hunger pains within me drive me to pursue food. And never have I made a decision to search the Scriptures without having a desire within me that drove me to make that decision. Though that desire ebbs and flows, my decision is always based on that desire. Even when it is driven by empty religious striving I am still demonstrating that desire trumps volition; for I desire to be a man of piety, knowledge and dedication – even if it's empty, religious and unsatisfying.

No man has ever made a decision without being driven by desire. Never. Every act of nobility and every act of cruelty in history was a product of a first cause; a first cause which we might call '***the supreme desire of the moment.***' Whether it's the sacrifice of a personal possession, a sexual sin, an act of heroism, a theft, a gift, a blessing or a curse, our actions flow from decisions which flow from desires and affections. ***The will is not autonomous. It is subject to our members.*** Is my skin is cold I choose a jacket (my favorite one), if I am hungry I choose food (my favorite) and if I am depressed I choose an remedy (the one that makes me the happiest).

Our HEARTS tells our will what we must have. And our will is at the beck and call of our hearts. And the greatest desire ALWAYS wins. Always. Never has the will conquered the heart. Even when we think we made a decision and overcame our members we deceive ourselves – the fight was just a bit closer that time; but still a victory for your heart by a long shot.

Pop-culture Christianity declares that man is driven by his will. Logic, reason and, as I'll show, Scripture declare that man is driven by the heart; that is, by the desire of a man. This is why the subject of the beauty of the Lord is so integral to our maturity. Without a more fervent affection for God than for all the pleasures of this age, we will be conquered by those pleasures. And without an appetite for it we remain unmoved by the thought of it (thus the need for the indwelling Spirit).²¹

The anatomy of the will/heart relationship is first seen in Genesis 3. Before the fall Adam had a free-will in the sense that sin was not bearing down upon his members deceiving him into thinking that God was less desirable and beautiful than the opportunity before him.

²¹ Colossians 1:29

Adam's will was subject to a pure and clean heart that knew no sin and that craved no substitutes. And God's declaration over this disposition was "It is good." And then in Genesis 3 something dramatic happened. And Adam was no longer considered "good;" and neither was his will – for Adam's will was now driven by a heart that had a stronger appetite for the knowledge of good and evil than the knowledge of God.

In verse 6 we read:

"So when the woman **saw** that the tree was good for food, and that it was a **delight** to the eyes, and that the tree was **to be desired** to make one wise, **she took** of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

Take special note of the progression; the progression that had the greatest impact on humanity second only to the death of Christ. The woman SAW the opportunity. And she found that opportunity to be DELIGHTFUL and to be DESIRED. And then, when her affections were stirred, when her desires were provoked and when her heart was engaged, she TOOK advantage of the opportunity. The Biblical anatomy of sin is bound up in this verse: the will being commanded by the affections of the heart to do whatever the heart desires and to the degree that it desires it.

The reality that the will is in bondage to the heart is abundantly clear in the rest of Scripture through to the book of Revelation.²² Time does not permit us to examine the issue in a proper way. However, the idea is so plain and so clear, as few pointed statements will suffice for now. In Romans 6:20 Paul drops a statement that speaks *volumes* about the nature of fallen man (which so happens to be the verse that first challenged my belief that man possessed a "free-will"). We read:

"For **when** you were **slaves of sin**, you **were free** in regard to righteousness."

Before we were justified and regenerated we were "slaves of sin." We did whatever sin told us to. And Paul says, "Then, when you were slaves, you were *free*." Paul?! What do you mean? How can a man be a slave and free at the same time? "Before you were born again and infused with the Spirit of God, you did not obey righteousness; you obeyed sin. You

²² Martin Luther wrote a book entitled "The Bondage of the Will" in which he surveyed Scripture holistically to prove to a heretic named Erasmus that the will of man is handicapped by sin and incapable of being "free." For an exegetical and thoroughly Biblical treatment of the subject, I refer you to Luther.

were a slave to sin not to righteousness” he would say. The metaphor being used by the apostle is one of slavery in which slaves and slave-owners are involved. Parabolically speaking, there are two slave owners: one whose name is “Sin” and another whose name is “Righteousness.” The natural unregenerate man obeys “Sin” because he is a slave to Him. But the regenerate man obeys “Righteousness.” The one is “free” from “Sin” and the other is “free” from “Righteousness.”

Until men are born again their will remains subject to sin. And once they are born again their wills become subject to righteousness; but not completely. Struggle still remains. But in the midst of the struggle we find that our will is being brought into submission to righteousness by the Lord Himself through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That was Paul’s point in Philippians 2:12-13:

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always **obeyed**, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **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.”

The “will” of someone who has been saved is driven by God who “works in” him. So is his work. When Paul says “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” he doesn’t mean that salvation rests upon what we work out. The word “for” that follows the sentence tells us what he means. We are to fear and tremble as we work out our salvation because God is the One who works in us.

Logically the idea of free-will is bankrupt because all thinking men don’t have to go far to find that they do what they desire not what they decide. And Biblically the idea of free-will is bankrupt because Scripture clearly declares the heart to be supreme over the will. Scripture and reason tell us that our wills are subject to the deepest longings of our hearts; and not that our heart is subject to our wills.

The modern church is ineffective and irrelevant because it is not addressing the issue of pleasure, longing or desire. And as long as she ignores the subject, she will be plagued by sin and unattractive to all who surround her. Only a church that “burns and shines” (John 5:35) attracts the lost, the broken and the hungry; which, again, testifies to the strength of the heart and the weakness of the will. People don’t decide to go to church – they are attracted to the prospect of something superior to the lesser gods and pleasures of this pathetically evil age.

And the modern church is in such compromise and confusion because she has a wrong view of the nature of man's will and the nature of the grace of God. The sovereign grace of God in salvation is seen by most as a "travesty" and as something to protest. But Scripture says something totally different. Scripture presents man as completely incapable of anything but sin and rebellion without grace. And Scripture presents grace as sovereign and saving. Thus we ought to see it as "majesty" and not "travesty" and we out to *praise* God and not *protest* against God as we gaze upon the glory of the kindness of God to deliver us from the severity of sin.

3. LOVE: NOT SIMPLY A VOLUNTARY CHOICE BUT A PRODUCT OF THE NEW BIRTH

I want to address one issue before turning to the propositions that deal specifically with the nature of the will. I want to make mention of the issue of love.

The popular understanding says that love for God simply can be conjured up by the exertion of the will of man whereas another (the one I am presenting) says it's only be possible when we are first quickened by God to perceive the love of God for us. Only then can we reciprocate it. In other words, no natural man can simply choose by an act of his own free-will to love God. There has never been one man in all of human history who has loved God apart from God enabling him and empowering him to do so. Why? – Because as we'll see in proposition number 2, the natural man's will is held captive by his corrupt nature. Let's first establish an understanding of what the popular view says before moving on. Bear in mind that I am intending on presenting the view as it is without drawing a caricature of it like some slanted political cartoon. Don't let the blunt language lead you to believe that this is simply about being "right." For if we go wrong here, that is, concerning the nature of love, then surely we will go wrong just about everywhere. I am deeply concerned for us, that we become able to understand the anatomy of the first Commandment. So in my understanding, this subject of the nature of the will has *massive* implications on how we 'live, move and have our being in' God.

Gregory Boyd, a man who has done incalculable damage to the Body of Christ in the last decade and a half,²³ says that "...God's creations were to be personal beings who [have] the

²³ A brief summary of Boyd's disastrous Satan-centric theodicy that has permeated so much of the church over the last decade (which influences his conviction that evolution is a form of cosmic spiritual warfare that began 4.6 million years ago) would include some of these statements that are littered throughout his almost 300 page book, 'God at War', where he is openly: building a case for the incredible power of God's "competitor" (page 36); explaining that we live in a "quasi-democratic" cosmos (page 118); contending for the idea that in the unfolding of history there is a definite amount of "surprise on Yahweh's part, and an uncontrolled dimension of the satan's activity" (147); showing how demonic spirits can sometimes "victimize against God's will" (Page 200); definitively stating that "significant powers exist with some measure of autonomy over against God, with whom.....God must genuinely fight" (page 284); and preaching authoritatively that God's will is often thwarted by cosmic forces (page 291-292). His theological assertion is that we are entrenched in a cosmic conflict that can best be understood as

ability to make authentic choices, including the choice *whether to enter into a loving relationship* with Him.”²⁴ Clark Pinnock, another advocate of “ultimate freedom” writes, “It seems that God, in deciding to create humankind, placed *higher value on freedom leading to love* than on guaranteed conformity to His will.”²⁵ Another statement that encapsulates much of the understanding of God’s relationship to man is: “Freedom must exist for love to exist because love is voluntary.” And so the logic goes, “If we are not free to choose to love God, then we are merely machines.” And “God refuses to violate our free-will because He desires voluntary love.”

And so, as you can see, the core tenet that under girds most of the church’s Soteriology today is that man possesses free will because God esteems *love over control*. If we were to boil these statements down, this is what we have in front of us: a forced decision between love and control. I want to suggest that this is a Biblically unwarranted coercion. While the statements have an appearance of nobility, they are inaccurate. And while on the surface they seem true and wonderful, they are not. The reason they are so palatable to us is because men have so disfigured the doctrines of (1) man’s depravity and (2) the work of God in the new birth. So let’s look at this alleged decision we must make.

First a question: Are love *for* God and the sovereignty *of* God truly antithetical matters? I think not.

God *does* desire love. And He desires *voluntary* love. We mustn’t object to that idea. It’s clear that love for Him is the chief desire of His heart.²⁶ But what we must be sure to object to is the idea that voluntary love is *possible* apart from the supernatural enabling of love through the quickening work of the Spirit when a man “dead in transgression” is “raised” up and given “newness of life” that was completely foreign to him until that moment of His regeneration. The degree that Lazarus could love and enjoy a hot meal as his body rotted in that tomb in Bethany²⁷ is the degree that unregenerate men can love and enjoy God as they rot in their tomb of depravity. In other words, we mustn’t be so foolish to think that because God desires voluntary love the natural unregenerate man is *capable of it*. See, I am not saying that God does not esteem voluntary love – I’m just questioning the Biblical

Dual of epic proportions. He states that: “one cannot deny that the warfare motif of the New Testament presupposes a dualistic worldview of sorts.”

²⁴ Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible*; pg. 97

²⁵ Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*; pg. 41

²⁶ See Matthew 22:39; Jesus’ final plea to the Father in John 17:26; the letter to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2; and Paul’s discourse on the supremacy of love in 1 Corinthians 13

²⁷ See John 11

validity of believing in its existence apart from the effectual giving of grace and faith to “dead” and incapable men; who are described by the apostle as being “helpless,” “far off” and “enemies”.²⁸

How could you love that which is by nature detestable to you? Charles Hodge wrote – in a fantastic essay on the beauty of Jesus – that “all gracious or spiritual affections presuppose and arise from *spiritual views of divine truth*. These views the *natural man neither has, nor can have, while he remains such*. Hence arises the necessity of such a change of being wrought in the state of the soul that it can perceive the beauty and excellence of divine things. This change consists in imparting to the soul what he calls 'a new sense' or a new taste, or relish, or principle, adapted to the perception and love of spiritual excellence.”²⁹ In other words, how does a natural man, who hasn't the slightest appetite for the beauty and excellence of Jesus, desire Jesus and then exert his will in favor of Him? How can he love what he knows he hates? And so it seems, in light of the impossibility of the natural man possessing voluntary love for God, that we shouldn't be asserting a truism that pits love and sovereignty against each other as the former is dependant upon the latter; especially if the liberating of the bound will is an act of God's love for us! (as opposed to some criminal offender who “violated” some law that He must keep).

Furthermore, to say that “God places *higher value on freedom leading to love* than on guaranteed conformity to His will,” is a completely wrong way of thinking; especially in view of the first three chapters of Ephesians where ‘the eternal purpose of God’ and ‘His purposed will’ is spoken of so frequently.

Shallow philosophical reasoning will force carnal men into that corner where they are compelled to choose whether God esteems love or sovereignty more. But we mustn't go there. If we have gone there, it's a good indicator that we are confused. This is why Paul puts the two subjects together and explains them as inseparable when he says “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. *In love He predestined us* to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”³⁰ *In love He predestined.*³¹ We are not at liberty to make a

²⁸ See Ephesians 2:1-11 and Romans 5

²⁹ Charles Hodge, an essay entitled, *Regeneration Necessary to Perceive the Beauty of Christ*

³⁰ Ephesians 1:4-7

³¹ I am aware that many see “predestined” to mean something other than “predestined.” In this context, I have quoted, as Paul did, to mean, “predestined.” That is, to destine before (pre).

distinction between the God of love and the God of sovereignty. See, the question is not, “Does God value love or control more?” The question is, “If God does not effectually act upon fallen and depraved human beings, by a gracious act of quickening and resurrection, will He ever receive their voluntary love?” To pit love against sovereignty is juvenile and unbiblical.

Love is not simply a voluntary choice to love. Love is a response to that which subdues the lover. It is the encounter of worth that produces it. And the natural man has no ability to see it. He needs the Spirit to show him what “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, and what mind has not conceived.”³² In other words, to call a man who does not know God to love God is to be a foolish evangelist of futility. *No one* loves generically. *No one* loves something or someone of whom they know nothing about. *No one* loves blindly. And *no one* loves without first being subdued. Love is a response to that which cannot be ignored, to that which is unavoidably enthralling, to that which is inescapably beautiful and to that which is infinitely superior to everything else when compared to it. So while love *is* a response, it *is not* a mere voluntary act of the will that can be conjured by any one of Adam’s fallen children. It is the product of the new birth wherein we are given the wondrous ability to see Him by “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.”³³ To define love as “a choice” and an “act of volition” that fallen and degenerate man can stir up and exert is to undermine the Scriptures and to pollute the glorious doctrines of the grace of God. Thus John says in his first epistle that “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.”³⁴ It is the new birth that produces in us the faith necessary to love God. It is not our love for God that grants us the faith to be born again. To say that faith is an exertion of the will that quickens the new birth is totally inaccurate.

Let me make the distinction between the two views clear for you by explaining how I see ‘love as an inevitable and certain response to God’s effectual work in the soul of a man’ and not as ‘a possible choice.’ The two are radically different. One is hypothetical and, at best, a mere possibility, whereas the other is sure and certain. Love for God is *not* merely a choice. It is a *product*. It is the product of God’s miraculous work in the fallen and unresponsive heart of a man. In the same way that the spark of fire gives off heat, so too does the quickening of man by the Spirit produce love for God.

³² See 1 Corinthians 2:9-11

³³ Ephesians 1:17

³⁴ 1 John 5:1

If love is a choice, a voluntary act of the will, then love is a mere option. If love is a response to God's resurrecting power, then love is not simply an option but a surety. One view makes love hypothetical whereas the other makes it sure, inevitable and certain. And I see this latter sort of love as that which arises in the heart of a man who *has been regenerated by the Spirit of God*. And *that* is the heart of the matter and the line of demarcation. Do we love with our own love? Or do we love with the love of God for God in dwelling in us? Is this not what Jesus' last request was for in John 17:26? – "that the love with which the Father ha for the Son may be in" us? I think that that love Jesus is referring to is not simply the same quality of love but the same essence, sum and substance. That is, it is the love of God *for God from God* emanating out of us back *to God* as we voluntarily give ourselves to God in the power of the Spirit of God.

Those who advocate a free-will Gospel must say that men are capable of loving God apart from regeneration, apart from new birth, apart from quickening, apart from indwelling, apart from resurrection. And that is something that the Scriptures do not permit. This is why Jesus used the adamant and insistent "must" in John 3; for we *must* be born again. What I am trying to say in this first point is that love is an impossible task for the natural heart who knows only Adam's fallen ways and who views God through Adam's infected eyes. Love cannot come naturally and it surely cannot come by virtue of some act of the will – no matter how authentic one may appear. The church is filled today with excellent fakes. Love arises in the heart of a man unbidden by his will only because God has raised Him from the dead and has given him the Spirit.³⁵ One cannot conjure up love. One may fake it before men, but it doesn't "count" or "avail" before God. Only the "new creation" counts before Him.³⁶

If we understand the nature of man as described by God, then it's absolutely absurd to argue that God is waiting upon us to *make a decision to love Him*. God sees that as a complete impossibility and one that will never be witnessed apart from His precious saving work. So I want to argue, in the following propositions, that natural men hate God and will always hate God *unless* God intervenes with an irresistible work of regeneration wherein all hostility is removed, and the will is liberated to adore the One who purchased it. See, until the nature of a man is liberated, the will remains bound by sin, "free from righteousness" (Romans 6:20), and incapable of perceiving the worth of God in all of His beautiful attributes. And a man that cannot perceive the beauty of God, but can only abhor the

³⁵ See Romans 8:5-17

³⁶ See Galatians 6:15

mention of His name, cannot be considered “free” to make a decision to adore Him. He is bound and controlled by the corrupt nature that has swallowed up his members.

Until a man is free to see beauty, he is not free to love. To *treasure* beauty – which is to love – rests upon ones ability to first *see* beauty. And as Paul said, minds of unbelievers have been “blinded by Satan” so that “the glory of the Gospel of Christ,” that is, “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ,” cannot be perceived or celebrated. For we must understand that there is a fundamental connection between *beholding* the worth of a thing and *loving* that thing. No one has ever seen something without worth, value or beauty to feel unbidden love for that thing welling up within him. We love that which we see as superior, that which is worthy, that which is beautiful, that which is valuable. And so, I want to suggest to you at the outset of these propositions that I affirm God’s esteem of voluntary love but reject the idea that He feels that we are capable of it without the effectual work of the spirit in the “new birth” wherein we are at last capable of “seeing the Kingdom.” This is why Jesus connected being “born again” to “seeing.”³⁷ There is a fundamental impotency of natural man to *see* the beauty of God which therefore makes him incapable of *loving* Him. A man must be regenerated out of degenerate nature in order for his will to be liberated and for his heart to pulse with love for God.

Even if men could, by an act of their voluntary will come to Christ, they are in need of regeneration before there can be any union with Christ! And that is something that proponents of a “free-will” are not prepared to expound upon. It is much more fitting to see regeneration and the romancing of the human heart as one event. It is much more fitting to see men giving themselves unreservedly in love to God after they have been given such an unfathomably wonderful gift as eternal life and the indwelling Spirit. And it is much more fitting to see regeneration as that which makes voluntary love possible; for where there is love for Christ, there must also be union with Christ, for how can someone who truly possesses love for Him ever be turned away from Him? We must therefore view regeneration, union and volition as being bound up together; again, like a spark produces flames and heat.

Stephen Charnock, in his work on “*Regeneration*” writes, “There can be no point of contact between God and His Christ with a sinful man until he is regenerated. There can be no lawful union between two parties who have nothing vital in common. A superior and an inferior nature may be united together, but never contrary natures. Can fire and water be

³⁷ See John chapter 3 for all these verses

united, a beast and a man, a good angel and a vile devil? Can heaven and hell ever meet on friendly terms? In all friendship there must be a similarity of disposition; before there can be communion there must be some agreement or oneness. Beasts and men agree not in a life of reason, and therefore cannot converse together. God and men agree not in a life of holiness, and therefore can have no communion together.”³⁸ If we are “children of wrath”³⁹ as Paul explained, how do we choose to enjoy blissful and voluntary communion with a new Father who we for our whole lives hated? Isn’t it foolish to think that children of wrath have the ability to come out from under wrath to treasure the One whose wrath “abides”⁴⁰ on them?

So, let us understand that I am not pitting myself against the glory of voluntary love for God. I am challenging the idea that we are capable of voluntary love for God apart from the regeneration by the Spirit of God wherein we are given the “Spirit of God” to “dwell” within us to cry out “Abba Father!” I suggest that we side with Paul and not with the popular thought that the “Abba Father” cry can emerge from a natural, unrepentant and unregenerate heart. Love is supreme. But until we are made free *to* righteousness instead of being “free *from* righteousness” (Romans 6:20), we remain subject to our fallen God-hating nature that sees God as someone to be murdered and trampled upon (or even crucified!) not someone to be adored. **I am simply saying that man’s free-will is not something that God refuses to *violate* but something that God must *liberate* for love to exist.** And furthermore, if He were content not to liberate any wills in bondage, none would ever come to Him calling Him “Abba.” (See Romans 3:8-10) Only *adoption* makes this possible.

It is the quality of God’s love imparted to our hearts that makes love for Him inevitable and not just a mere possibility. For men who cannot perceive the excellence of God’s love for them or in them cannot love Him in return. So what I’m suggesting is that a man’s voluntary decision to love God is first and foremost contingent upon his ability to perceive God’s love for him. And *that*, I do not believe is possible until the new birth when the darkness that covers us is illuminated with the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. (We will deal with this matter in chapter 5)

For many, especially those involved in ministry and in missions, the Gospel is primarily a call to obedience that, if need be, is devoid of love (though they would never say that with their

³⁸ Charnock

³⁹ Ephesians 2:3

⁴⁰ See John 3:16-21

own lips). They preach, "Obey God!" when the hearers are all the while asking the question of them, "Why?" If a man is converted on the basis of obedience and not of love then you can be sure that that man has not been converted. I am not diminishing obedience but want to emphasize the supremacy of love in the conversion of a sinner. Both are necessary. After all, Paul was give grace to "bring about the obedience of the faith."⁴¹ The distinction that I want to make is between the Gospel that says "First and foremost obey God by exercising your will and choosing Him!" and the Gospel that invariably causes love to arise in the heart of a hate-filled sinner which constrains him to obey God joyfully and gratefully when God quickens him by the Spirit. Lorraine Boettner, explaining how "love and gratitude to God for what He has done for us is the strongest possible and only permanent basis for morality," writes:

Our love to God would at best be only lukewarm if we believed that His love and favor toward us depended only on our good behavior [or the exertion of our wills]. His love toward us is as an immense sun, which shone without beginning and which will shine without end, while ours toward Him is, at its best, as only a little flame... Love which is founded on self-interest is commonly recognized as not being moral in the highest sense; ...faith [which is a gift from God]...presents a purely unselfish motive, namely the consciousness that it is alone the free grace and unmerited love of God, to the exclusion of all human merit, that saves men. When the Christian remembers that he was saved only through the suffering and death of Christ his substitute, love and gratitude overflow his heart; and, like Paul, he feels that the least he can offer Christ in return is his whole life in loving service. *Seeing himself saved by grace alone, he learns to love God for His own sake and finds it the joy of his life to serve Him with the whole heart. Obedience becomes not only the obligatory but the preferable good.*

The motive which actuates the saints on earth is the same in principle, though not so intense, as that which actuates the saints in glory, whose constant delight is to perform the noblest actions and service, namely, that of praising God, and punctually performing His will without interruptions or defeats. "As they have always a ravishing sense of His goodness to them, so they exercise their perfectly pure minds in ascriptions of praise and glory to him for delivering them from deserved ruin, and placing them in the blissful mansions where they find themselves possessed of ease, delight, complacency, and glory wholly unmerited."⁴²

⁴¹ Romans 1:7

⁴² Walmsley, S. G. U. pamphlet No. 173, p. 67.

Pure love and gratitude to God, and not selfish fear, is the very fuel of acceptable obedience, and these are the elements from which alone anything like high and pure morality will ever proceed.”⁴³

In summary of this first point, let it be said and understood that love is not simply the exertion of the will. Though it surely does include it, our ability to love God is caused by supernatural “love” being “poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us”⁴⁴ when we were “born”⁴⁵ again. In fact, it was this gift of the Holy Spirit that caused our being born again. See the difference? One view says that love for God can be conjured up by the will of a man whereas the other says it can only possible when we are first quickened by God to perceive the love of God for us.

Furthermore, saying that God refuses to violate our free-will does not emphasize His love or magnify our dignity (as many argue). If we wish to emphasize the love of God in our preaching, we need not do so by declaring God has created us with a neutral will that He promises not violate. We rightly emphasize His love by stressing the glory of God in “giving [us] beauty for ashes, the oil of gladness for mourning and a garment of praise for a spirit of fainting.”⁴⁶ Instead of celebrating our glorious freedom that we supposedly have apart from Christ, we ought to celebrate the fact that “instead of [our] shame [we] will have a double portion, and instead of humiliation [we] will shout for joy over [our] portion. [For] everlasting joy will be [ours].”⁴⁷ “For as the earth *brings forth* its sprouts, and as a garden *causes* the things sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will *cause* righteousness and praise to *spring up* before all the nations.”⁴⁸ Our freedom to love God is found in God’s miraculous work not in any sort of Christ-less freedom that we possess because of our alleged “moral neutrality.”

⁴³ Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*

⁴⁴ Romans 5:5

⁴⁵ 1 John 5:1

⁴⁶ Isaiah 61:3

⁴⁷ Isaiah 61:7

⁴⁸ Isaiah 61:11

4. THE WILL IS GOVERNED BY THE NATURE; THE NATURE IS NOT GOVERNED BY THE WILL

Before examining this statement, - that the will is governed by the nature – let’s get a working definition of “freedom.” If we are going to speak of the human will as being “free,” we need to know what we mean by that. The Encarta World Dictionary defines “free” as that which is:

1. **not regulated:** not controlled, restricted, or regulated by any external thing
2. **not a prisoner:** not, or no longer, physically bound or restrained, for example, as a prisoner or in slavery
3. **not restricted in rights:**
4. **self-ruling:** not ruled by a foreign country or power
5. **disregarding traditional limitations:**
6. **not affected by something stated:** not subject to or affected by something specified, especially something undesirable (often used in combination)
7. **not physically restricted:** not restricted by something such as tight clothing, stiffness, or lack of space ⁴⁹

So to say that the will of a man is “free” is to say that the will of a man is *not subject to anything outside of itself*. That is, it is not regulated, governed, subject, or restricted by anything. The free will is the will that cannot be violated or regulated. It cannot be limited or restricted. It is bound by nothing, enslaved by nothing, influenced by nothing and captive to nothing. Free means *free*. It is, as the word means in any other context, *free*. And if that is what is meant by “free-will,” then the doctrine of “free-will” is completely absurd and one that the Scriptures know nothing about. Why? – Because we cannot ascribe that sort of ultimate freedom to the will. (It’s quite a misleading term isn’t it?) To ascribe that sort of freedom to the will is to ascribe to man which can be ascribed to God alone. This may be

⁴⁹ Encarta ® World English Dictionary © & (P) 1998-2004 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

why John Owen referred to the doctrine of free-will as **“THE OLD PELAGIAN⁵⁰ IDOL FREE-WILL, WITH THE NEW GODDESS CONTINGENCY, ADVANCING [ITSELF] INTO THE THRONE OF THE GOD OF HEAVEN, TO THE PREJUDICE OF HIS GRACE, PROVIDENCE, AND SUPREME DOMINION OVER THE CHILDREN OF MEN.”**⁵¹ Owen described the doctrine of free-will in such harsh terms because of how dangerously and idolatrously high it exalts human freedom; and how grotesquely similar it is to the freedom that God experiences.

Human freedom – that is, freedom to choose God or not to choose God – is so highly exalted that it is, in the hearts and minds of many, more precious *than God*. At *this* many would object saying that “human freedom magnifies the glory of God in that He chooses to let voluntary love have preeminence over His meticulous control of history.” But, as I have briefly (though not comprehensively) explained, the issue is not whether God values *love* over *control* but over the issue of human ability and the bondage of the will.

If men *aren't* actually capable of making a first choice to love God and to cherish the shed blood of His Son, then Owen is right in calling the doctrine of God's unwillingness to violate our free will “idolatrous” because it is, in effect, the passing of a Law that God is told He must not break or violate. For what if, contrary to popular belief, the will of man was free only in its ability to hate God but not in its ability to love God? What if the nature of a man invariably dictates the will of a man? What if we are free to sin on our own but not free to be righteous on our own? What if we are free to reject Christ on our own but not free to choose Him on our own? Having said these things, let us be clear – natural man's inability to accept Christ, be righteous or love God is not because God will not allow it but because we have chosen, in Adam,⁵² to treasure the knowledge of good and evil over and above the knowledge of God. In other words, when I condemn the doctrine of man's inviolable free will, I am not saying that God *forces* anyone to reject Him but that He must *cause* them to accept Him for if He did not, then none would come.

And so, I repeat – to say that the will is “free” is, in essence, to say that the will is subject to nothing. That is, it is governed by nothing but itself. Though God may influence our hearts, so they say, the ultimate decision rests in our hands. The will of a man that is free is a will that is sovereign. And if there be any who wish to defend this doctrine, there are a few other points that they must also defend.

⁵⁰ Pelagius was a philosopher that introduced the doctrine of the freedom of the will to the church. Augustine battled the budding heresy that became the seedbed for a multiplicity of variations of the heresy Pelagius presented.

⁵¹ This sentence is actually the subtitle of Owen's book “A Display of Arminianism.”

⁵² See Romans 5 on how Paul views man's corruption in view of Adam's decision.

And so, I want to argue now that the principle error of this theory, of this doctrine, is the omission of the reality that that the *will of a man is governed by the nature of a man*. His nature controls his will. His will is subject to his nature. His will is bound by his nature. I wish to show that the will is in need of liberation before it can in fact choose God voluntarily. The will must be *recreated*.

For instance, will the Lion have a will to eat straw this side of the “new heavens and the new earth,” that is, before God recreates and overhauls the entire created order as described in Isaiah 65? Will that Lion that Isaiah spoke of have an appetite for straw at any moment prior to his own regeneration? Will any natural Lion crave the taste of straw in its current nature? Will his will be inclined towards plants instead of meat? Will his nature allow it? – Of course not. So it is with man’s appetite, man’s will and man’s ability. In the same way that no natural Lion has the will to eat straw, no natural man has a will to eat of the flesh and drink of the blood of Jesus apart from the impartation of “the new creation.”

⁵³ I will not believe a person that says that the natural man has the appetite for God until that person stands before a Lion un-caged and watches the Lion choose straw over him. Until that day comes, I will remain convinced that we like the Lion have need of a dramatic regeneration before we can hunger after that which we by nature despise.

Why? – Because our wills are held captive by our nature. "Does the will stand apart from the other great faculties or powers of the soul, a *man within a man*, who can reverse the man and fly against the man and split him into segments, as a glass snake breaks *in pieces*? Or, is the will connected with the other faculties, as the tail of the serpent is with his body, and that again with his head, so that where the head goes, the whole creature goes, and, as a man *thinketh* in his *heart*, so is he? First thought, then heart (desire or aversion), and then act. Is it this way, the dog wags the tail? Or, is it the will, the tail, wags the dog? Is the will the first and chief thing in man, or is it the last thing-to be kept subordinate, and in its place beneath the other faculties? and, is the true philosophy of moral action and its process that of Genesis 3:6: 'And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food' (sense-perception, intelligence), 'and a tree to be desired' (affections), 'she took and ate thereof' (the will)." ⁵⁴

To ascribe freedom to the will is to say in a most definitive way, that the will governs the members of a person and that nothing outside of it can bring it under its own sway or make it subject. I suggest to you dear reader that this is not a reasonable position to hold. I want

⁵³ See Isaiah 65 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

⁵⁴ George S. Bishop

to contend with this silly idea by saying that the will is very much at the mercy of many things outside itself. For “that which determines the will is that which causes it to choose. If the will is determined then there must be a determiner. *What is it* that determines the will? We reply, The strongest motive power which is brought to bear upon it. What this motive power is varies in different cases. With one it may be the logic of reason, with another the voice of conscience, with another the impulse of the emotions, with another the whisper of the Tempter, with another the power of the Holy Spirit; whichever of these presents the *strongest* motive power and exerts the *greatest influence upon the individual himself* is that which impels the will to act. In other words, the action of the will is determined by that condition of mind (which in turn is influenced by the world, the flesh, and the Devil, as well as by God) which has the greatest degree of tendency to excite volition.... Hence we say that, if the will is *controlled*, it is neither Sovereign nor free, but is the servant of the mind [emotions, conscience, discernment, etc].”⁵⁵

What shall we say governs a man? The popular teaching says that it is the will. Is it? Pink writes that “When we affirm that it is the *heart* and not the will which governs the man, we are not merely striving about words, but insisting on a distinction that is of vital importance. Here is an individual before whom two alternatives are placed; which will he choose? We answer, the one which is most agreeable to himself, i.e., his "heart"-the innermost core of his being? Before the sinner is set a life of virtue and piety, and a life of sinful indulgence; which will he follow? The latter. Why? Because that is his choice. But does that prove the will is Sovereign? Not at all. Go back from effect to cause. *Why* does the sinner choose a life of sinful indulgence? Because he *prefers* it-and he does *prefer* it, all arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, though of course he does not enjoy the *effects* of such a course. And why does he prefer it? Because his *heart* is sinful. The same alternatives, in like manner, confront the Christian, and he chooses and strives after a life of piety and virtue. Why? Because God has given him a *new heart* or nature. Hence we say it is not *the will* which makes the sinner impervious to all appeals to "forsake his way," but his corrupt and evil *heart*. He will not come to Christ *because* he does not want to, and he does not want to because his *heart* hates Him and loves sin: see Jeremiah 17:9!”⁵⁶

Lorraine Boettner writes: “Strictly speaking we may say man has free will only in the sense that he is not under any outside compulsion which interferes with his freedom of choice or his just accountability. In his fallen state he only has what we may call "the freedom of slavery." He is in bondage to sin and spontaneously follows Satan. He does not have the

⁵⁵ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*; from the chapter titled “God’s Sovereignty and the Human Will”

⁵⁶ *The Sovereignty of God*

ability or incentive to follow God. Now, we ask, is this a thing worthy the name "free"? and the answer is, No. Not freewill but self-will would more appropriately describe man's condition since the fall. It is to be remembered that man was not created a captive to sin but that he has come into that condition by his own fault; and a loss which he has brought upon himself does not free him from responsibility. After man's redemption is complete he will spontaneously follow God, as do the holy angels; but never will he become entirely his own master.

That this was Luther's doctrine cannot be denied. In his book, "The Bondage of the Will," the main purpose of which was to prove that the will of man is by nature enslaved to evil only, and that because it is fond of that slavery it is said to be free, he declared.... "When it is granted and established, that Free-will, having once lost its liberty, is compulsively bound to the service of sin, and cannot will anything good; I from these words, can understand nothing else than that Free-will is an empty term, whose *reality is lost*. And *a lost liberty*, according to my grammar, is *no liberty at all*."⁵⁷ He refers to Free-will as "a mere lie"⁵⁸.⁵⁹

If free-will is, as Luther says, a "mere lie," how are we to understand the nature of the will? Again I refer to Pink in his brilliant description of the freedom of the will. He states, "Now in contradistinction from the will of the Lord Jesus which was biased toward good, and Adam's will which, before his fall, was in a condition of moral equipoise-capable of turning toward either good or evil-the *sinner's* will is *biased toward evil*, and therefore is free in one direction only, namely, in the direction of evil. The sinner's will is *enslaved* because it is *in* bondage to and is the servant of a depraved heart.

In what does the sinner's freedom consist? This question is naturally suggested by what we have just said above. The sinner is "free" in the sense of being unforced *from without*. God never *forces* the sinner to sin. But the sinner is not free to do *either* good or evil because an evil heart within is ever inclining him toward sin. Let us illustrate what we have in mind. I hold in my hand a book. I release it; what happens? It falls. In which direction? Downwards; always downwards. Why? Because, answering the law of gravity, its own weight sinks it. Suppose I desire that book to occupy a position three feet higher; then what? I must lift it; a power outside of that book must raise it. Such is the relationship which fallen man sustains toward God. Whilst Divine power up-holds him he is preserved from plunging still deeper into sin; let that power be withdrawn and he falls-his own weight (of sin) drags him down.

⁵⁷ Bondage of the Will; pg. 125.

⁵⁸ Ibid; pg. 5.

⁵⁹ Lorraine Boettner; The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination

God does not push him down anymore than I did that book. Let all Divine restraint be removed and every man is capable of becoming, would become, a Cain, a Pharaoh, a Judas. How then is the sinner to move heavenward? By an act of his own will? Not so. A power outside of himself must grasp hold of him and lift him every inch of the way. The sinner *is* free, but free in one direction only-free to fall, free to sin. As the Word expresses it: "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were *free from* righteousness" (Rom. 6:20). The sinner is free to do as he pleases, always as he pleases (except as he is restrained by God), but his pleasure is to sin."⁶⁰

Hopefully the alternative to the doctrine of the inviolability of the will can now be seen clearly; at least to some degree. What I am arguing is that the alternative to ultimate self *determination* is ultimate self *regulation*. That is, the will is regulated by *the nature of the man who possesses it and bound to obey it until it is regenerated by the Spirit of God in the new birth*.

Jesus, in John chapter 8, explains this principle of the bondage of the will in great clarity. He explains that salvation, or more appropriately, regeneration – without using that term – is (1) the renewal of the corrupt human nature and (2) the emancipation of the bound and captive will. He explains that the reason people do not hear His words and do not come to Him is because their nature inhibits them from doing so. In the next section we'll address the nature of this emancipation; that is, what it accomplishes. But before we do, we will focus on Jesus' description of the natural man.

In this chapter we observe that all unregenerate men are subject to their nature and that their will is completely and unavoidably governed by it. Jesus asks three questions and answers two of them directly. The answers to these questions shed much light on the issue at hand. I will add comments to the text so that as you read it you can see where Jesus asks a question and where He answers it. It's critical that we see the question and answer structure of this portion of Scripture. Addressing obstinate and unwilling men, Jesus asks:

[Question #1:] ***“Why do you not understand what I am saying?”*** [Answer to Question #1] ***It is because you cannot*** [and are unable to] ***hear my Word.*** [And the reason why is because] ***You are of your father the devil, and you want*** [will and long] ***to do the desires*** [and lusts] ***of your father. He was murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because*** [and for this reason] ***there is no truth in him. Whenever he***

⁶⁰ The Sovereignty of God

speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me. [Question #2] Which one of you convicts Me of sin? [Question #3] If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? [Answer to Question #3] He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God." (John 8:43-47)

This is one of the most important passages in Scripture explaining the magnitude and severity of the crisis that humanity is facing. Jesus is explaining why He was rejected by those in His presence. But let us remember that Jesus wasn't simply addressing this specific people in their unwillingness to come to Him but all people in their unwillingness to come to Him. See, He was explaining why *anyone* rejects Him at any point in time. And that is an important issue for us to pay attention to.

Jesus tells the rebellious throughout the ages why it is that they do not come to Him to receive salvation. He puts it plainly: *they cannot*. And by virtue of the fact that Jesus called human beings "children of Satan," let us remember that what is true of Satan is true of man to some degree. Jesus grouped the two together in *nature*: They are both incapable of receiving or responding to truth. By *nature* they *cannot* hear His Word. By *nature* they *will not* hear His Word. By *nature* they *cannot* stand in the truth. By *nature* they *will not* stand in the truth. And I repeat: *What is true of Satan, is true of the unregenerate human.*

So, let's now examine the text to understand Jesus' assessment of the unresponsive will.

The two reasons that Jesus gives for a man being in unbelief and rebellion is (1) the depraved nature of that man and (2) the bound and impotent will of that man. He says that the nature of the man is corrupt and that the will of the man is impotent. We have reason to believe that the former is the direct cause of the latter. And *that* is what I am arguing for. Adam was free in every respect. He was liberated to choose God and to choose the knowledge of good and evil. He flaunted that freedom by embracing the latter and shunning the superior. So let's be clear – Adam was free to love God indeed. But once corruption entered the created order, the will and volition of man was also corrupted. When corporate humanity took the plunge into sin to drink the full cup of the knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge of God was distorted and marred so that we all became subject to the corruption of our souls. So corrupt were we, and are we, that God sentenced every human being from Adam on to condemnation and eternal punishment. The only way of escape from that condemnation is through the vicarious and substitutionary condemnation of God the Son by God the Father for those who were declared "Guilty!" And

from that moment until now, the human race has been subject to futility because they lack the power to will that which they ought. And in their inability, God holds them all, - us all – completely responsible for all the deeds done in the body.

Now let's look at Jesus' questions and answers:

The first question was: ***“Why do you not understand what I am saying?”*** He follows the question immediately with a pointed answer. He says that it is ***“because you cannot hear my Word.”*** Be sure to note that the Lord has just deemed them incapable of doing the thing that they must do *to be saved*. He assures them of their impotence. This then begs the question, *“Why can't they hear His Word?”* It makes sense that they cannot and do not *understand*, but why can't they *hear* His Word?

His answer? – ***“You are of your father the devil.”*** The natural man is incapable of hearing because he is by nature a son of Satan. The Lord bluntly says that they are *by nature corrupt sons of Satan*. What a difficult thing to say! How could this be? Note the words *“you are of”*. This is to say that, *by nature* these people are of the carnal and demonic order and not of the heavenly and divine order. Those that are by nature *“of the devil”* obviously cannot and do not *“hear His Word.”* We must see the mutuality of inability within Satan and his sons. If we do not we've missed a great reality that Jesus spoke very clearly about and one that gives much insight into the nature of man and his response to the Gospel.

The natural man is incapable of hearing because he by nature is controlled by the lusts of Satan. They cannot and do not hear His Word because they want to follow the *desires of Satan*. This issue of desire is the issue of will. It is the issue of volition and of determinism. Jesus is addressing the disposition of the natural man's heart towards God. First Jesus declares unregenerate humans incapable of hearing and understanding His Words because of their corrupt nature. Next He addresses their corrupt will. When he says that they *“want to do the desires and lusts of their father”* He means to convey the reality that the natural human will is subject to Satanic influence and authority.⁶¹ So if one wishes to advocate this doctrine of freedom of the will, then he must do some fancy theological footwork to explain how *“sons of Satan”* who desire to *“follow after the lusts of Satan”* and who *“cannot hear*

⁶¹ While this is a rarely considered issue within most preaching, it was a central reality in the minds of the Lord Jesus and the apostles. That's why they often rejoiced that in Christ we are no longer *“under the sway”* of *“the evil one.”* There are many passages that speak of the sway of the demonic realm within created order. While the power and sway is real, it is restrained and subject to the sovereignty of God. The task is to be faithful to the Scriptures in acknowledging the threat of the powers and principalities while not exalting them above the Lord's sovereignty or over His leadership.

[His] word” can freely choose to follow Christ. In light of what Jesus is saying here about the nature of the will, how are we to ascribe ultimate freedom to that will in the realm of righteousness? Shall we not describe the will of these sons of Satan as bound and not as free?

Next, the Lord addresses the nature of Satan, and of the Father of all who do not believe upon Him for salvation. He says: “**...he....does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him....**” Jesus defines those who *do not* hear His Word as those who *cannot hear His Word*. He then explains that it’s due to the fact that they are *of Satan*. That is, they are of Satan in nature and will. They are like Him and they desire the things that he desires. *But what is the nature of Satan?* Satan cannot and does not hear the Words of Jesus for one primary reason: *there is no truth in him*.

The issue here with Satan’s inability to hear the words of Jesus is an issue of nature. There is nothing truthful in Satan. He does not stand in the truth – *Jesus’ Word* – because he has no ability to. When the great rebellion took place, Satan became incapable and unwilling to hear or stand in truth. Not having truth in you does not mean that you are incapable of seeing truth, hearing truth, saying truth or possessing truth. It means that you are not in essence and in person *of* the truth. This is to say that men are capable of much good on many different levels but are still devoid of *truth*. Both Satan and his children (the unregenerate) say truths, possess truths and dispense truths but are in themselves empty of essential truth: the life of God. *Jesus is truth*. It’s no wonder that Satan and all of natural humanity cannot and will not receive the Words of Jesus with joy. They are incapable of standing in truth because there is no truth in their nature. Their nature has never abided in truth any more than a man has abided on the moon. His nature is such that He cannot. By nature and character they are unable to stand in truth, to hear truth and to respond to truth.

Jesus continues to address the issue of *nature* and its relationship with receiving truth. He says that: “**....Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature....**” This is an important point to take into consideration. He wills and acts *because of his nature*. His nature demands that he act and will a certain way. To not do so would be contrary to all that he is. To ask Satan to obey Jesus’ Word is like asking a Lion to eat straw or a Sheep to eat a Lion. The nature makes the task impossible. The alternative view would be to say that Satan’s corrupt will governs and dictates his nature. We know however that this is not the case. Sure a first act of the will plunged Satan and Adam’s offspring into filthy rebellion, but

it is not their will that determines their nature *now*. Now the will is determined by the *nature*.

Next Jesus says that Satan is: “... ***the father of lies.***” If Satan is the father of lies and if natural men call him “father,” then we should understand that the natural man is himself a lie. (So too is the notion that his will is capable of choosing God and that God is content to leave him dominated by his enslaved will) While this is not what Jesus was saying primarily, it’s implied. Satan cannot receive truth because there is no truth in his nature. Natural man cannot receive truth because there is no truth in his nature. Man can attribute his depravity largely to the leadership and ‘parenting’ of Satan. So man – in all his arrogance, self-righteousness and sin – is in himself a lie incarnate. The nature of Satan and the nature of man are delusional in that both believe it foolishness to obey God. Both hear the Words of Jesus and reject it as if their opinions were truer than Jesus’ Words. Both possess wills that are subject to lies.

Next Jesus asks two questions: “***But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin?***” and “***If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?***” Jesus asks these two questions not for His sake but to provoke in those in His proximity awareness; an awareness of their hopeless and depraved nature that is incapable of even *identifying* truth; let alone glorying in it. Note how He says “***because I speak truth, you do not believe***” before asking the question. Isn’t that an interesting way to phrase it? It’s as if He’s saying, “My declaration of truth causes your depravity to react which makes you reject it.” In the same way that the rising of the sun casts shadows behind obstacles, so too do the truth of Jesus’ Words cause darkness to be cast with the natural human heart. *Because* Jesus speaks truth to the natural man, the natural man rejects Him. We would think that men simply need to hear truth! But it isn’t the case: Men need a new nature to be willing and capable of hearing and responding to truth. In order for men to embrace the Words of Jesus they mustn’t simply hear them, they must be quickened to cherish them.

And so Jesus asks the question “***If I speak truth and if I am sinless, WHY do you not believe Me?***” to confront and identify the root of the problem. The root of the problem is that man is like Satan in that he is completely incapable of receiving the Words of Jesus apart from regeneration even though Jesus is truthful and sinless. The root issue here is not over information being communicated to people but the corrupt nature of the people that hear that information. Jesus is asking why anyone would reject that which is clearly true and clearly without sin or error. The answer is not because a lack of intelligence; it’s a lack of purity.

Next He answers the third question saying: ***“He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.”*** *This is the most important phrase in the whole passage.* And it’s the one we must focus on. Jesus says that the difference between a person that receives His Words and a person that rejects them is because they are not *of* God; that is, their nature is incompatible with hearing His words. Pay attention to the word “of” in this portion of Scripture. Note what is implied by it. He says that if they are *of* their father the devil, then they reject it; and if they are *of* God, then they *“hear the words of God.”* Can we understand this passage any other way? Is Jesus not saying that *because* “they are not of God” they “do not hear [His Words]”? The point to make note of is that Jesus says that only those who are of God, who have been born of God, and who call God their Father and not Satan, can hear and respond to His Words.

So the question that we must now ask ourselves is: What does it mean to be of God? We already know what it means to be of Satan; it means that you are incapable of hearing Jesus’ words but are bound to follow after the lusts of Satan. What does it mean to be of God?

I want to suggest that Jesus speaks of a man being “of God” to mean those who have, by virtue of the new birth, had their demonically enslaved wills liberated to receive the words of Jesus and to love God freely and voluntarily. Regeneration, if we understand this passage aright, is the renewal of the nature of man and the emancipation of the will of man by the eternal life of God being imparted to that man. Without regeneration, without being born “again,” the natural man is bound up in his corrupt nature endemic to all Adam’s children and is thus ruled and governed by that corrupt and enslaved will. He can’t escape it! And so, *all men are either sons of God or sons of Satan.* The key word in this passage is surely “of.” It denotes nature and character. And so we conclude that if the natural man is “of Satan” and not “of God,” then any talk of him possessing a free will to love God is absurd and Biblically unwarranted.

Next we move to a brief consideration of what the liberation of the once bound will looks like in the following two propositions.

5. THE BOUND WILL IS LIBERATED WHEN WE ARE EFFECTUALLY DRAWN TO CHRIST BY
THE FATHER

In this third proposition I want to argue that the bound will is liberated when we are effectually drawn by the Father to Christ. The Gospel of John gives profound insight into this issue. We'll look at three passages specifically:

1. Verse 37: **"All that the Father gives me will come to me."**
2. Verse 44: **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."**
3. Verse 65: **"No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."**

In John chapter 6, the national rejection of the Messiah begins to come to a head. While there was considerable opposition to His ministry from the beginning, it isn't until chapter 6 that the magnitude and seriousness of the nation's obstinacy and hardness comes into full view. In this chapter, following the feeding of the masses (which was upward of 20,000 people), Jesus begins to speak about the reasons why the people eat the bread and celebrated of the signs but rejected the Person who caused them. Jesus says three times, without equivocation that *no one can come to him unless the Father draws him*. We will expound on these three statements in light of our premise question of whether the will is truly free of if it is in fact bound up in sin and depravity.

As we look at each statement, continue to ask yourself, "Why would Jesus say this if my will is truly free?"

1. Verse 37: **"All that the Father gives me will come to me."**

Many attempt to explain this statement in a universalistic sense suggesting that God, to some degree, draws all men and grants all men to come to Jesus. They say that God commands all men to come and that this implies that all men are capable of coming voluntarily. The problem with this theory is that Jesus was not speaking universally. Of

course “God desires all men to be saved”.⁶² That isn’t up for debate. The question is, do all men desire to be saved? The answer is clearly and emphatically “No!” To affirm the bondage of the will is not to stab at God’s goodness towards all men (an issue we’ll soon deal with in greater detail). To affirm the bondage of the will is to challenge the sufficiency of a universal invitation that is devoid of an effectual and irresistible calling; the sort Paul spoke of in the first chapter of 1 Corinthians 1 and in the eighth chapter of Romans.

See, the point of this passage is not to explain the universality of the Gospel but to explain the nature of God’s effectual calling of an individual because of the universal opposition to God’s desire. (This will become clear when we look at the following two verses in the chapter) Jesus says plainly that if the Father gives someone to Jesus, that someone *will surely come*. Think: He’s looking unbelieving, unresponsive and unrepentant Jews in the eyes telling them that they can come to Him only if they are called. And then Jesus defends the nature of this calling by acknowledging its efficacy. That is, *it is efficient to bring about the intended end*. All that are given to the Son *will come*. They will be willing to come. And those around Him in that scenario that were not coming were living proof of Jesus’ words in the midst of apparent failure when all were leaving Him.

We must keep in mind the context of John 6. The national apostasy is ripening and the greatest enigma in human history is going to take place: The Jewish people are about to have their Divine Messiah nailed to a Roman Cross beam. What is the explanation of this?! How could this happen?! Who’s to blame here?! Jesus builds a strong case in the Gospel of John that this hardening, this apostasy, this extravagant iniquity, was necessary, and it was prophesied. That’s why Paul spoke with such clarity and matter-of-fact-ness about God’s sovereignty in Israel’s apostasy in Romans 9-11. What’s important about this is that Jesus is looking forward explaining it as Paul was looking backwards and explaining it. Jesus explains that *all men are destined to futility, depravity and penalty unless He effectually calls them*. That’s what this passage is about.

The effectual nature of God’s leadership in salvation is so crucial to understand because of what it produces in us when we grasp it. Both gratitude and reverence well up within us because the weight of our rescue is so evident. When we are called “orphans” in the New Testament, we so often fail to realize that orphans have no ability to find parents. And

⁶² A quote from the two passages that declare that “...God...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4) and “...longsuffering toward us, [He is] not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

when an orphan becomes adopted, how glorious is the rescue and how wonderful is the drawing! *That* is what Jesus is communicating here: that men are completely helpless when left to themselves.

What is meant here by “they *will* come”? Jesus is speaking of an efficacious call that accomplishes what it was meant to accomplish. Jesus spoke often of His confidence in His Father’s ability to give to Him in an effectual way particular individuals who are “given”:

“...you do not believe because you are not My sheep...My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” (John 10:26-27)

“...You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.” (John 17:2-3)

“I have manifested Your Name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.” (John 17:6)

“I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom you have given Me, for they are yours.” (John 17:9)

“...keep them through Your Name those who You have given Me...” (John 17:11)

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your Name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost....” (John 17:12)

“Father I desire that they also whom You have given Me may be with Me where I am...” (John 17:24)

In all of these passages, Jesus speaks in particular terms. That is to say that He prayed for specific ones that God had given instead of praying “for the world” so as to influence it in a generic way that would in some way compel some to believe. We see in all of these passages a decided end of which has effectual consequences. All that have been given surely do come. The issue being stressed is the “giving” and the corresponding “coming.” And in all these passages Jesus speaks in definite language. If our will is free we must interpret every one of these as hypothetical possibilities of which may or may not be met. If our will is free, then there is no assurance that *anyone* will be saved; and surely there is no

assurance that anyone can *stay* saved. Why? – Because everything is allegedly contingent upon man and not on God!

We do well to notice how Jesus puts the weight on His Father drawing and not on people coming. We do well to notice that we come when He draws. And we do well to notice that if He did not draw, none would come. This is what is meant by Paul's repetition of the word "none" in Romans 3. "None seek God." "None fear God." None have the will that is inclined to come to Christ apart from an effectual drawing.

2. Verse 44: **"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him."**

This next statement in John 6 is just as important as the last. "Drawing" implies a specific *activity*. This is something that is *done*. As opposed to "giving," "drawing" connotes an achievement of a different kind than "giving." The giving is necessary because it makes the drawing possible.

Look how definitive this statement is! "No one *can come*..." Why would we ever exalt a doctrine that says "all men *can* come to Christ"? Isn't Jesus declaring the exact opposite? I want to make sure you understand dear reader that if a man is not effectively drawn by God, He will not come. None will. The reason? – None "*can*".

What we are setting forth in this brief work is not "a product of "modern thought"; no indeed, it is at direct variance with it. It is those of the past few generations who have *departed* so far from the teachings of their scripturally-instructed fathers. In the thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England we read, "The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith, and calling upon God: Wherefore we have *no power* to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us (being beforehand with us), that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will" (Article 10). In the Westminster Catechism of Faith we read, "The sinfulness of that state whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is *utterly indisposed*, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and *wholly* inclined to all evil, and that continually" (Answer to question 25). So in the Baptists' Philadelphian Confession of Faith, 1742, we read, "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 good, and dead in sin, is not able by his own strength to

convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto".⁶³ I am praying that God would awaken this present generation to the reality of man's impotence. If we are not made aware of it, I fear for our children. How filthy is a Gospel that assures men that they can do the very thing Christ said that they could not do! How distorted a Gospel! We must emphasize the efficacious work of God to "draw" those who "cannot" come by their own will or strength.

This term "draw" is used quite often in Scripture. Like the angels *drawing* Lot out of Sodom, like the woman *drawing* Moses from the river, like the disciples *dragging* the full net of fish ashore (John 21:6, 11), like the Jews *dragging* Paul and Silas into the Forum (Acts 16:19), like the officials *dragging* Paul out of the Temple (Acts 21:30), like the rich *dragging* the poor before the judgment seats (James 2:6) and like Peter *drawing* his sword (John 18:10), we have been effectually *drawn* to Jesus.

Like the last, there are two interpretations of this passage. One is a universalistic one and the other a particular one. The Universalistic one sees the passage to merely imply that God the Father is the one who makes salvation possible and that without Him we would be without hope (which we affirm). The universalistic view would see the drawing as an activity that God works in all men everywhere making salvation possible. They see the crux point in man's decision to respond to God's drawing instead of God's drawing enabling a man's decision. So, in effect, God's drawing is not an effectual activity but a mere hypothetical one that can be thwarted should a man choose to exercise his free will against God's hypothetical activity. I wash my hands completely of this hypothetical salvation.

Some may say, "But what of moral agency?! Are we not accountable to God as free-agents?" "Free moral agency' is an expression of human invention and...to talk of the freedom of the natural man is flatly to repudiate his spiritual ruin. Nowhere does Scripture speak of the freedom or moral ability of the sinner, on the contrary, it insists on his moral and spiritual *inability*."⁶⁴ This is why Jesus commands all men to come but in the same breath explains to them that they are incapable of coming. He states clearly that "you *are not willing* to come to me that you may have life (John 5:40)."⁶⁵ Their unwillingness to

⁶³ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*

⁶⁴ A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*

⁶⁵ CHARLES SPURGEON PREACHED ON THIS VERSE in 1855. He said "Our four points, [concerning John 5:40 are],— First, *that every man is dead*, because it says, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have *life*." Secondly, *that there is life in Jesus Christ*—"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Thirdly, *that there is life in Christ Jesus for every one that comes for it*—"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life;" implying that all who go will have life. And fourthly, the gist of the text lies here, *that no man by nature ever will come to Christ*, for the text says, "Ye will *not* come unto me that ye might have life." So far from asserting that men of their own wills ever do

come proves not that man has free-will but that his will is incapacitated by sin. Jesus is not speaking of the external call to obey the Gospel but of the inward call that is effectual. This is why Paul writes that "He who has begun a good work *in you*," *will* finish it. ⁶⁶ If no effectual call exists Paul was speaking in optimistic hyperbole to encourage the church at Philippi with a vain hope that could after all, be thwarted by man's pathetic will. I don't think that that's what Paul was saying in that passage.

The *particular* interpretation (as opposed to the universal) would also affirm the first point in that without the Father, salvation *would* be impossible. Where I would differ with this view is in the defining of the activity of "drawing." Scripture indicates that this is particular and not universalistic. While offensive, this is the nature of drawing. When God draws, it is effectual. Andrew Fuller writes, "There are *two kinds* of influences by which God works on the minds of men. First, That which is common, and which is effected by the ordinary use of motives presented to the mind for consideration: Secondly, That which is special and supernatural. The one contains nothing mysterious, anymore than the influence of our words and actions on each other; the other is such a mystery that we know nothing of it but by its effects-The former *ought* to be effectual; the latter *is* so." Consider how Luke understands of Old Testament prophecy and its fulfillment as he records it in Acts 13:

" Now the Lord commanded us: 'I HAVE SET YOU AS A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES, THAT YOU SHOULD BE FOR SALVATION TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.' [Universal] Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed [Particular]. (Acts 13:47-48)

Paul and Barnabas turn from the Jews (13:42-46) to the Gentiles (13:47-52). They quote a universal prophecy by which all of the Gentiles became eligible for salvation (supposedly). Luke then explains that those who saw the "light" and came to "salvation" were those who had been "appointed." The appointing makes the inclusion possible. In fact it sees to it:

"...you do not believe because you are not My sheep." (John 10:26)

such a thing, it boldly and flatly denies it, and says, Ye WILL NOT come unto me that ye might have life." Why, beloved, I am almost ready to exclaim, Have all free-willers no knowledge that they dare to run in the teeth of inspiration? Have all those that deny the doctrine of grace no sense? Have they so departed from God that they wrest this to prove free-will; whereas the text says, "YE WILL NOT come unto me that ye might have life."" (from the sermon: *Free-Will – A Slave*)

⁶⁶ Philippians 1:6

It seems from passages like these that the drawing of God is not a universalistic invitation but a particular effectual drawing whereby none come apart from it, and all come who are included in it. We factor this into our understanding of the nature of the human will by acknowledging that man cannot and will not come to the Son of God for salvation on his own.

3. Verse 65: **“No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”**

The final statement in the chapter that deals with this issue of the will has to do with God granting men to come. The first was about “giving,” the second was about “drawing” and this is about “granting.” In all three we see that Jesus stresses the divine prerogative to enable people to come. We also see that the will is explained as that which is in need of a divine quickening. “Granting” is distinctly different than giving and drawing in that it implies *administration*. This is something that is *decreed*.

This is the concept that brings with it the most confusion of the three. The reason for this is because it is easily applied to a universal context implying that “because God desires all men to be saved, all men can come.” I want to say clearly that this is not what this text is about.

I affirm the reality that God desires all men to be saved. But I reject the idea that this is what Jesus is talking about here. What we must do is affirm both passages allowing the tensions to exist instead of explaining them away in sharp “either/or” terms that end up blurring the central meanings of certain passages. There are three key passages that speak of the nature of God in His relationship to *all* men that we need to properly understand to make sense of passages like these laced throughout the book of John.

**“...God...who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”
(1 Timothy 2:3-4)**

“...longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

“For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies...” (Ezekiel 18:32)

To “grant” is in some sense of the word to “will.” With these three passages in mind, it seems as though we ought to view John 6:65 to be an all inclusive universal statement. I

think though, that to do so is Biblically unwarranted. I am confident of this because we do not have permission to throw blanket statements on complex subjects like the will of God. We need to explore the complexities of the hidden and revealed will of God. We need to bask in mysterious light of His eternal purposes. Let me demonstrate what I mean by asking a question:

Are there tensions between the will of God in *essence* and the will of God in *execution*? That is, does God always *will* (executionally) that which God *wills* (essentially)? I believe that He does not.

Jonathan Edwards explained that God has a *preceptive* will and a *decreed* will. This was to say that God desires things perceptively *by nature* and that God decrees things *because of His purposes*. There are hundreds, if not thousands of passages that reveal this. Consider these:

“...Him, being delivered by the predetermined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death....” (Acts 2:23)

“For truly against Your Holy Servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined beforehand to be done.” (Acts 4:27-28)

In light of what Luke records here, *was it God’s preceptive and essential will before the foundation of the world to have His Son brutally slaughtered?* That is, *apart from His predetermined purpose*, would God have ever had a longing, a desire, or an attribute that would lead Him to want to kill His Son? We must answer by saying absolutely not! Let’s ask it another way: If God had no purpose in mind, would He ever desire to nail His Son to a Cross beam to watch His divine blood cover the ground? No. He decreed it, that is, He willed it, because it was according to His purpose.

Was it God’s decreed will to kill His Son? That is, though it was in tension with, and even in contradiction to His essential nature (seemingly), was it something that He saw fitting? Did He decree His Son’s death though He did not *essentially* desire it? We must answer by saying absolutely yes!

So if the question is asked one way, we can confidently answer that it is not God's will to kill His Son. But if asked another way, the answer is clearly that it is. This principle is critical to understand if we want to make sense of God's desire for all men to be saved and His obvious decree that is in tension and opposition to this desire. Does this principle sound Biblically unwarranted? Consider the Cross for a moment longer and then make your conclusion.

Preceptively speaking, God wills that no one kill anyone ever. This is seen in the Commandment that says "Thou Shall Not Kill." But here we have Peter saying that God willed that Herod, Pilate, the Jews and the Gentiles would kill Jesus! What are we to think of God's will? We should think that God wills things according to His nature but decrees things that seem to be in tension and in contradiction to it.

So, could God *will* that all man be effectively called and yet *will* that only a remnant be effectively called at the same time? If man's regeneration is waiting upon God's initiative and is contingent upon it, then who is eligible? It would be an unbiblical statement to say that God desires all men to be saved therefore all men can be; especially after Jesus has made it clear that not all *can*. And it would also be an unbiblical statement to say that God does not desire that men be saved because He only saves a remnant. Instead, we must say that God desires in essence according to His nature that all men be saved but wills effectually that only a remnant will be. And what is so obvious from these three texts is that the human will is not factored into the salvific equation! The prerogative is God's and God's alone.

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13)

In conclusion to this proposition, I believe that we ought to understand these three statements in John 6 as deterministic, effectual, particular and final as well as in juxtaposition to God's essential nature and perceptive will. Furthermore, and in keeping with our subject, it is this effectual call that determines whether a man can come to Christ or not – not his ultimate self-determination. For he is determined to scorn Him and always will unless God "gives", "draws" and "grants" in an effectual way.

6. SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH IS EFFECTED BY THE LIBERATING OF THE BOUND WILL

In 1734 Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon that has forever changed my life. The sermon was titled *“The Divine and Supernatural Light Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God.”*⁶⁷ I will make reference to this sermon here and there as we look at this passage in 2 Corinthians 4 because Edwards gives incredible insight into the nature of regeneration. And we require this understanding in our brief consideration of the bondage of the will.

Having briefly looked at the condition of men in their unbelief, in John 8, we now come to this sublime passage to consider the glory of the act of the illumination of the dead human heart. We see in this passage the fact that salvation by grace through faith is, in effect, the liberating of the bound will through the shining of the light of the glory of God into the blinded hearts of unbelievers. My hope in this proposition is to show that if God does not shine the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ into our darkened hearts, then we will not will to come to Christ. It is this illumination, this regeneration, this emancipation that enables the will to voluntarily choose to love God; and not a minute sooner. It is this impartation of supernatural light by the Spirit of God that effectually enables us to come to Christ. And without it we will always reject Him and scoff at His blood. Paul writes:

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. 4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we proclaim is not

⁶⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Select Sermons*. The Sermon was preached at Northampton, and published at the desire of some of the hearers, in the year 1734.

ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." (2 Corinthians 3:18-4:7)

We'll focus most of our time on this passage of Scripture. But first, I want to quote Edwards in order to establish a foundation to place the truths in 2 Corinthians on. To begin his sermon, Edwards quoted Matthew 16:17 when Jesus said to Peter:

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."

What an excellent place to start a discourse on the necessity of illumination and regeneration! It's helpful to start here because we see Jesus' commentary on the nature of revelation and understanding – that it issues forth from God. And the natural man knows nothing of it. It's important to see this because there exists an intimate relationship between a man's exertion of his will and sovereignly revealed truth. I hope to show you that our wills function in direct conjunction to the revelation of God that has been given to us. If we possess none, our wills operate according to that measure. If we possess some, our wills operate according to *that* measure.

Edwards says that we observe from the text that: "...Peter is pronounced blessed on this account. *Blessed art thou* -- "Thou art a happy man, that thou art not ignorant of this, that I am *Christ, the Son of the living God*. Thou art distinguishingly happy. Others are blinded, and have dark and deluded apprehensions, as you have now given an account, some thinking that I am Elias, and some that I am Jeremias, and some one thing, and some another; but none of them thinking right, all of them misled. Happy art thou, that art so distinguished as to know the truth in this matter." "...*"The evidence of this his happiness declared; viz., that God, and he only, had revealed it to him. This is an evidence of his being blessed."* See, he is arguing that God has done a work in Peter that has not been done in all. He is saying that Jesus' words speak of a glorious and mysterious work of revelation that can come solely by the work of the Spirit by decree of the Father. In other words, no matter how hard men try, it is up the Father who is "pleased to reveal these things to babes" and to "hide them from the wise and prudent."⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Matthew 11:25

Edwards continues: “It evidences his blessedness also, as it intimates that this knowledge is above any that *flesh and blood* can *reveal* – “This is such knowledge as only my *Father which is in heaven* can give: it is too high and excellent to be communicated by such means as other knowledge is. Thou art *blessed*, that thou knowest that which God alone can teach thee.”” In other words, Peter’s happy condition, that is, his blessedness, was a result of God revealing truth to him that is impossible for flesh to conceive of. Jesus is speaking here of the inability and impotency of the flesh to know truth about Him.

Lastly I quote Edwards’ understanding of the origin and nature of the revelation given to Peter: “The original of this knowledge is here declared, both negatively and positively. *Positively*, as God is here declared the author of it. *Negatively*, as it is declared, that *flesh and blood* had *not revealed it*. God is the author of all knowledge and understanding whatsoever. He is the author of the knowledge that is obtained by human learning: he is the author of all moral prudence, and of the knowledge and skill that men have in their secular business. Thus it is said of all in Israel that were *wise-hearted*, and skilled in embroidering, that God had *filled them with the spirit of wisdom*, Exodus 28:3. God is the author of such knowledge; but yet not so but that *flesh and blood reveals it*. Mortal men are capable of imparting the knowledge of human arts and sciences, and skill in temporal affairs. God is the author of such knowledge by those means: *flesh and blood* is employed as the *mediate* or *second* cause of it; he conveys it by the power and influence of natural means. But this spiritual knowledge, spoken of in the text, is what God is the author of, and none else: he *reveals it*, and *flesh and blood reveals it not*. He imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural causes, as he does in other knowledge.”

With Matthew 16 in mind, and with 2 Corinthians 4 in view, Edwards says that “....there is such a thing as a spiritual and divine light immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means.”

What *is* this light? What shall we call it? I agree with Edwards that the command of God to shine light into our hearts (which is soon to be explained) *is regeneration, is the new birth, is salvation, is deliverance, is quickening and is the liberation of the bound will*. And I argue that regeneration is the gift of illumination whereby men with darkened hearts are awakened to the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ; that is, they *see Christ in all of His worth and Excellency*.

Furthermore, I argue with Edwards that regeneration is, in effect, the impartation of the knowledge of God into the soul a once dead and unresponsive man. And that salvation is the quickening of the will *through* the impartation of the knowledge of God. "We are there abundantly taught, that the saints differ from the ungodly in this, that they have the knowledge of God, and a sight of God, and of Jesus Christ. I shall mention but few texts of many. 1 John 3:6, "Whosoever sinneth, has not seen him, nor known him." 3 John 11, "He that doth good, is of God: but he that doth evil, hath not seen God." John 14:19, "The world seeth me no more; but ye see me." John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." This knowledge, or sight of God and Christ, cannot be a mere speculative knowledge; because it is spoken of as a seeing and knowing, wherein they differ from the ungodly. And by these Scriptures it must not only be a different knowledge in degree and circumstances, and different in its effects; but it must be entirely different in nature and kind."

"And this light and knowledge is always spoken of as immediately given of God, Matthew 11:25-27: ***"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father: neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."*** Here this effect is ascribed alone to the arbitrary operation, and gift of God, bestowing this knowledge on whom he will, and distinguishing those with it, that have the least natural advantage or means for knowledge, even babes, when it is denied to the wise and prudent. And the imparting of the knowledge of God is here appropriated to the Son of God, *as his sole prerogative.*"

All that to say: Men cannot conjure up the knowledge of God anymore than they can exert their dead wills to respond to commands of God. It is God's sole prerogative to give supernatural knowledge to a man and to quicken the will of that man.

Having established the origin and nature of the knowledge of the Holy, let's examine Paul's understanding of the salvation of a fallen unregenerate human. Paul declares three truths related to the nature of regeneration in this part of the passage:

4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

In this passage we have three truths given. We'll examine each truth to present a case for salvation being the liberation of the will through the impartation of the knowledge of God.

TRUTH #1: Unbelievers are blind and incapable of seeing the light of the Gospel.

"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers..."

As was shown in John chapter 8, all of humanity is incapable of receiving Christ. None are able in and of themselves to *see or behold the essence of the Gospel*. That is, they hate it and reject it. This is why in John 1:12-13, John says that it is he who has born of the will of God that has received Jesus and has become a child of God.

Paul makes clear that the mind of every unbeliever on earth has been blinded by Satan. I want to suggest that a *blind mind* is inescapably connected to a *bound will*. John Darby, writes, "If Christ came to save that which is *lost*, free will has no place. Not that God prevents men from receiving Christ-far from it. But even when God uses all possible inducements, all that is capable of exerting influence in the heart of man, it only serves to show that man will have none of it, that so corrupt is his heart, and so decided his will not to submit to God (however much it may be the devil who encourages him to sin) that nothing can induce him to receive the Lord, and to give up sin. If by the words, 'freedom of man,' they mean that no one forces him to reject the Lord, this liberty fully exists. But if it is said that, on account of the dominion of sin, of which he is the slave, and that voluntarily, he cannot escape from his condition, and make choice of the good-even while acknowledging it to be good, and approving of it-then *he has no liberty whatever* (italics ours). He is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be; hence, they that are in the flesh cannot please God."⁶⁹ To say that it is a simple decision of a man that keeps Him living and dying without Christ flies in the face of everything Paul is saying here. *He cannot come!* The god of this age has blinded him making him incapable of coming!

⁶⁹ While I quote Darby here on this issue I heartily disapprove of his other doctrinal stances; specifically of dispensationalism and Pre-Tribulation Rapture. Often seeing a name in a footnote can mean for some that the author is in agreement with the man quoted. I appreciate this statement of Darby's but wish most of the other things he said would be erased from history.

One may say, “Well I don’t believe being blinded necessarily keeps men from coming to Christ! It simply means that Satan has attacked us in other various ways.” This ‘warfare theology’ – typical of Open Theists – fails to do justice to what Paul is saying. In the very same passage we see that this blindness hinders them from seeing the glory of Christ. In other words, Satan’s primary preoccupation is to distort, disfigure and defame the person of Christ in the minds of all men. So to say that Paul isn’t referring to man’s ability to exercise his will to come to Christ is absurd.

All men that reject the Gospel, Paul says, are blinded by Satan. Note the complete inclusion of all men. I want to add to this idea by saying that to be blinded by Satan is to follow Satan. For in another place Paul writes:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:1-3)

And, as we’ve already seen, to be blinded by Satan is to be a child of Satan:

“Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my Word. You are of your father the devil, and you want [will and long] to do the desires [lusts] of your father.” (John 8:43-44)

“The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the Kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil.....” (Matthew 13:38-39)

Why then, if Paul says men do not believe upon Christ because of Satanic deception, do we ascribe men’s unwillingness to come to Christ to their will alone? Should we not say that the will is unresponsive because it is bound and enslaved? Isn’t this what Paul’s argument is? Are we to assume that Paul believes in the freedom of the will? Let’s look at the next point of the passage.

TRUTH #2: The Gospel is “the glory of Christ.”

“...to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God...”

The Gospel *is* the glory of the Person and the Work of Christ. The sum and substance of the Gospel is the beauty of Jesus. What an incredible statement? We’re wise to take in every word in this passage. Its richness is astounding.

The apostle tells us that the main thing that Satan wants to attack is man’s perception of the person of Christ. He does so to destroy them. Because elsewhere we read that those who do not believe “are perishing.” In John 10 we read that Satan has come to “steal, kill and destroy.” Paul is saying that the stealing, the killing and the destroying are first and foremost related to our perception of Jesus. Why? – Because if we see Jesus as pathetic or repulsive, we are sure not to come to Him in faith. Those who do not come do not come because of an act of their will. They do not believe because they are blinded by Satan. They are perishing and they do not believe because they cannot see the glory of the Person and the Work of Christ. So we’re meant to understand that salvation consists of the impartation of the true knowledge of God in the face of Christ. Paul is laboring to make the point that natural men cannot see the glory of Christ. And if they cannot and do not see it, they will not cherish it. And if they do not cherish it, they will not lavish their love on Him by an act of their will.

Look at the genius of this statement: “The LIGHT of the GOSPEL of the GLORY of CHRIST.” Deception is most centrally related to the Glory of Christ. All of the wicked forces in the universe are pitted against the Glory of Christ. The mission statement of darkness is to cover up and distort the glory of Christ.

The evidence of a man that has been redeemed is that that person adores and treasures the person and the work of Christ. That is the purpose of the light and the illumination as it is the heart of the Gospel.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Having made mention of demonic deception in this section, let us not view history as a sort of cosmic dualism by which God is threatened. That is not what is meant in these passages. God gave humanity over to depravity because of Adam’s freedom that was used to choose knowledge of good and evil over the knowledge God. And as a result, humanity plunged into depths of wickedness and perversion. Part of the penalty for Adam’s decisions is in our being subjected to the leadership of Satan. Satan has not thwarted God’s purposes but has aided it. Even in deception.

TRUTH #3: Salvation is God decreeing that the light of the knowledge of the glory of Christ [the Gospel] shines into our hearts that are darkened by Satan.

"For God, who *said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

Edwards, in light of passages such as these, saw regeneration as the quickening of a man to behold and partake of the Excellency of Christ. And I want to affirm that thought and add to it that in this act of regeneration the will is liberated. Once it knew nothing but darkness, but when God decrees the light to break forth and shine within us, our wills know His light. The light is defined as "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ"! Consider Paul's point. If a man receives the knowledge of the glory of God when light shines in Him at the new birth, then it's safe to assume that when his heart was darkened he knew not of this glory. And if a soul does not know of this glory, why would anyone exercise the will to honor it?

"The first effect of the power of God in the heart in regeneration is to give the heart a Divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish [for] the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature."⁷¹ If the appetite for the Divine nature is not in a man, that is, if he knows only darkness, why would we expect that that man would respond voluntarily to adore Christ and Him crucified? Should we not conclude that this adoration awaits God's quickening work wherein the darkened soul is liberated through the divine light that imparted to Him by the sovereign decree of God?

The nature of the natural human heart is "dark, void and without form" as was the earth in Genesis 1. In this depraved state, God commands light to break into our hearts. *This is regeneration.* And *this* is what is required for a man's will to be inclined to come to Christ voluntarily.

To conclude this third proposition, that salvation is the liberation of the will by the Spirit of God, I want to argue again that the will is, by an irrefutable law, bound to function in accordance to its nature. J. Denham Smith writes that "Man is impotent as to his will. He has no will favourable to God. I believe in free will; but then it is *a will only free to act according to nature.* A dove has no will to eat carrion; a raven no will to eat the clean food of the dove. Put the nature of the dove into the raven and it will eat the food of the dove.

⁷¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on Grace*, ed. by Paul Helm, (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1971), pp. 48-49

Satan could have no will for holiness. We speak it with reverence, God could have no will for evil. The sinner in his sinful nature could never have a will according to God. For this *he must be born again.*"

7. TO DEFEND MAN'S ULTIMATE "FREEDOM" IS TO ERECT AN IDOL BEFORE THE LIVING GOD

The final proposition will be very brief.

If, as we stated in proposition number one, man cannot choose to love God by the exertion of his will, and if, as we stated in proposition number two, man's will is governed by his fallen nature, and if, as we stated in proposition number three, a saved man is a man who's will has been liberated by the effectual work of the Spirit of God, then we ought to conclude that to say "God will not violate our free-will" is to project a man made law on God. And that is a troubling idea.

If we do in fact have a will that is free to choose Christ, then we have no reason to speak ill of the matter. *But*, if the Scripture says that we possess bound and corrupt wills, to say that God will not violate them is to fashion an idol and command God to bow down to it. As I have argued, I believe that our wills are not liberated outside of the new birth wherein the Spirit of God dwells in us and empowers us to freely lavish our affections on the One who loved us and purchased us.

Today many are so fervently announcing the idea that "God will not violate our free-will" that it makes me think we have built our own golden calf and have begun, like the stupid Israelites before us, to call it "Lord."

This issue of the invalidity of the freedom of the will to come to Christ presents many problems for much of our modern theology that is so widely accepted. Most people will refuse to truly wrestle with these things that I have been arguing because of objections related to other things. For instance, "If we cannot come to Christ, how is God's universal command that "all men repent" sincere and genuine?" Also, "If we are incapable of coming to Christ, how are we held accountable for not coming to Christ?" These objections are important questions to ask. And they require answers. For now, I charge you to loosen your grip on this doctrine of a supposed "free-will" and fall upon Christ in dependency. After all, the purpose of salvation, that is, its design, is to ensure that "no flesh glory in His

presence;”⁷² something that is absolutely impossible if we owe our salvation in part to the exertion of our will apart from the effectual ministry of the Spirit.

In conclusion, it seems to me that we must stop saying “God will not violate our free-will” to begin preaching “We need God to liberate our enslaved and sinfully incarcerated wills.” For it is He who works in us both “to *will* and to *do*, according to His good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:12-13)

⁷² See 1 Corinthians 1 for Paul’s explanation of effectual calling and its ultimate purpose

8. APPENDIX 1: BEING FAITHFUL TO THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

I recommend A.W. Pink's book, *The Sovereignty of God* to you with much pleasure. It is one of the most illuminating books on the subject in print. What I love about it is Pink's faithfulness to the whole counsel of God. So, as an appendix to this brief treatise on the bondage of the will, I want to quote a few paragraphs from the final chapter of Pink's book. I quote them because of the obvious deficiency of this present work. I have labored to communicate only one side of the matter; that being inability. But in so doing, I do not want anyone to assume that I have written off the doctrine of man's responsibility because of it. And so I want to say that I believe a correct understanding of the bondage of the will and of human inability by virtue of depravity does not diminish or belittle the issue of man's responsibility, but in fact emphasizes it, magnifies it and stresses it. To this matter Pink writes:

"In our Foreword to the Second Edition we acknowledge the need for *preserving the balance* of Truth. Two things are beyond dispute: God is Sovereign, man is responsible. In this book we have sought to expound the former; in our other works we have frequently pressed the latter. That there is real danger of over-emphasising the one and ignoring the other, we readily admit; yea, history furnishes numerous examples of cases of each. To emphasise the Sovereignty of God without also maintaining the accountability of the creature tends to fatalism; to be so concerned in maintaining the responsibility of man as to lose sight of the Sovereignty of God is to exalt the creature and dishonour the Creator.

Almost all doctrinal error is really, Truth perverted, Truth wrongfully divided, Truth *disproportionately* held and taught. The fairest face on earth, with the most comely features, would soon become ugly and unsightly if one member continued growing while the others remained undeveloped. Beauty is, primarily, a matter of proportion. Thus it is with the Word of God: its beauty and blessedness are best perceived when its manifold wisdom is exhibited in its true proportions. Here is where so many have failed in the past. A single phase of God's Truth has so impressed this man or that he has concentrated his attention upon it, almost to the exclusion of everything else. Some portion of God's Word has been made a "pet doctrine," and often this has become the distinctive badge of some

party. But it is the duty of each servant of God to "declare *all* the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

To carry into actual practice what we have inculcated above will, most probably, lay the preacher open to the charge of being a Turncoat. But what matters that if he has his Master's approval? He is not called upon to be "consistent" with himself nor with any rules drawn up by man; his business is to be consistent with *Holy Writ*. And in Scripture each part or aspect of Truth is balanced by another aspect of Truth. There are two sides to everything, even to the character of God for He is "light" (1 John 1:5) as well as "love" (1 John 4:8), and therefore are we called upon to "Behold therefore the goodness *and* severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). To be all the time preaching on the one to the exclusion of the other caricatures the Divine character."

9. APPENDIX 2: BUT WHAT OF 'PREVENIENT GRACE'?

Having read this brief consideration of the bondage of the will, one who is versed in the controversy may ask "But what of prevenient grace?" Oden, an advocate of the idea says that Prevenient grace is when God "heals the nature vitiated by original sin and restores the liberty of the children of God"⁷³ in such a way that is not in itself to be understood as actual regeneration, but that which may or may not lead to it. In other words, it is a preparatory work that is altogether distinct from saving grace.

Prevenient grace is a sort of theological middle man – between degeneration and regeneration, death and life, darkness and light, blindness and sight, deafness and hearing, condemnation and justification, depravity and indwelling, etc. – that obviates the doctrine of irresistible grace that effectively regenerates the dead and unwilling spirit of those who were, prior to the event, incapable of choosing to follow Christ. It's a theological construct that is designed to deal with the offensive idea that regeneration is necessary for faith to exist in a depraved human heart. I want to give a few reasons in an appendix explaining why I reject this middle man doctrine.

First, though the concept seems attractive (and for obvious reasons!), it cannot be found in Scripture. The most popular verse used by proponents of a prevenient grace is John 1:9. Schreiner writes:

Appeal is often made to John 1:9 "'There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.' This could as easily refer to (1) the influence of common grace, or (2) the operation of general revelation. Schreiner contends that 'enlighten' does not refer to inward illumination of the heart/mind/will, but rather means to *expose* the moral state of the heart, i.e., to shed light upon someone so as to reveal and uncover (see 3:19-21).⁷⁴

⁷³ Thomas Oden, *Transforming Grace*; pg. 58

⁷⁴ Tom Schreiner, *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*

Secondly, this view assumes and affirms that fallen and corrupt men are both able and willing to believe in Christ apart from the regenerating grace of God. In fact it is entirely predicated on this thought. This is a notion that Paul unequivocally denied in Romans 3:10-18 as he drew together many quotations from the Old Testament telling of the depravity and inability of the natural unregenerate man. Scripture is clear that it is the new birth, or the regeneration that makes faith possible. It has been explained by many as the heat or the flame of a spark. When a match head sparks (regeneration) immediately a flame appears giving off heat (faith). To deny this is to mutilate the Scripture. Furthermore it's to severely distort the Gospel. Why? - Because faith then is not a gift of God but is instead a work of man. And if we are saved by a faith that is a work of man we are essentially saved by a work and have reason to boast; which is my next point.

Thirdly, those who affirm that salvation comes via prevenient grace define faith as a decision that man makes in obedience to God. This definition is unbiblical for two reasons. First, because it gives man something of which he may boast in. It says that those who embrace the gospel are deserving of some credit for finding something of natural ability within their person that others cannot. And there is no Biblical vindication for this idea. Does this view undermine or diminish man's responsibility? – Absolutely not. It emphasizes it. Secondly, if man is presently condemned (See John 3:16-21) for not obeying God but choosing rather to disobey Him, isn't it absurd to define faith as an act of obedience? After all, what sets that act of obedience apart from all other acts? Are not men so rebellious that works cannot remedy the situation? Are we not in need of a complete and comprehensive justification? It's obvious that a salvation that is in anyway contingent upon man to perform an act that he is condemned for not being able to do is both unbiblical and quite ridiculous. And since advocates of a prevenient grace must necessarily view salvation in these terms – that is, conditional – I am compelled to reject both the idea of this prevenient (yet ineffectual) grace and the salvation that is contingent upon something within man.

Fourthly, the view is also predicated upon the interpretation of Romans 8:29 that projects "God's foreknowledge of our free-will decision to believe upon Christ" into it. I make note of this because Wesley, and those who have come into agreement with his interpretation of the text, implant the issue of free-will and faith into it. In other words, it isn't actually in there. There is no reference in the passage to either issue (which interestingly prevenient grace is riding on) as that which God foresees in men. Advocates of the view we're disputing claim that "foreknowledge" in verse 29 is God's foreknowledge of those who would by their own free-will believe upon Christ. The primary error of reading that into this particular text (which mentions nothing about faith or free-will) is that the interpreter must suspend the

work of God on the free-will of man when that is exactly the opposite of what Paul is arguing. And to make that sort of inference out of that text is to blatantly undermine the emphasis in Romans 8:28-38 on the sovereign and free work of God who foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies regardless of “him who wills or him who wills.” (Romans 9:16)

Fifthly, to hold to the view that God gives prevenient grace to prepare the heart to receive faith is to still be stuck with the problem of faith. That is, if it is a gift that comes from God, then prevenient grace wouldn't actually matter. Why? – Because either way the Scripture explains faith as that which is a gift from God not a product of man own volition.⁷⁵ And if faith is a gift from God, prevenient grace would simply be the preparatory activity of God to prepare the human heart to receive the gift that is God's sole prerogative to give. What the messenger of prevenient grace must do to defend his position is either (1) define faith as an act of man that he is capable of apart from God which in effect saves him (which is to say that we are saved by works and that we save ourselves), or (2) define faith as a gift from God that comes to the heart that has been adequately prepared to receive the gift of faith. If he picks the first option, he is on dangerous ground with absolutely no Biblical support whatsoever, and if he picks the second option, he has, in a roundabout way, described the sort of salvation that has been argued; that is, he defines grace as effectual, irresistible and unconquerable and defines faith, like Paul, as “a gift of God not of ourselves,” and more importantly, “*not of works that anyone should boast.*” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

⁷⁵ Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Acts 5:31; 11:18.