

Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, Lesson # 30
Objections to the Doctrine of Predestination - It is Inconsistent with the Free Agency and Moral
Responsibility of Man

WCF Chapter 3, God's Eternal Decree

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

I. The Problem of Man's Free Agency

The problem which we face here is, How can a person be a free and responsible agent if his actions have been foreordained from eternity?

[God's] will for the course of events is the primary cause and man's will is the secondary cause; and the two work together in perfect harmony.

II. This Objection Bears Equally Against Foreknowledge

Let it be noticed that the objection that foreordination is inconsistent with free agency bears equally against the doctrine of the foreknowledge of God. If God foreknows an event as future, it must be as inevitably certain as if fore-ordained; and if one is inconsistent with free agency, the other is also.

We must either say that future events are certain and that God knows the future, or that they are uncertain and that He does not know the future. The doctrines of God's foreknowledge and foreordination stand or fall together.

III. Certainty is Consistent with Free Agency

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

On other grounds also it may be shown that certainty is consistent with free agency... God controls our actions so that they are certain although we act freely. His decree does not produce the event, but only renders its occurrence certain; and the same decree which determines the certainty of the action at the same time determines the freedom of the agent in the act.

IV. Man's Natural Will is Enslaved to Evil

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

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

The actions of a creature are to a great extent predetermined when God stamps upon it a particular "nature" at its creation..An act is not free if determined from without; but it is free if rationally determined from within, and this is precisely what God's foreordination effects. The comprehensive decree provides that each man shall be a free agent, possessing a certain character, surrounded by a certain environment, subject to certain external influences, internally moved by certain affections, desires,

habits, etc., and that in view of all these he shall freely and rationally make a choice. That the choice will be one thing and not another, is certain; and God, who knows and controls the exact causes of each influence, knows what that choice will be, and in a real sense determines it.

Free-will tears the reins of government out of the hands of God, and robs Him of His power. It places the creatures beyond His absolute control and in some respects gives them veto power over His eternal will and purpose.

VI. The Way in Which the Will is Determined

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

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

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

The very essence of rationality is that the volitions must be based on the understanding, principles, feelings, etc., and the person whose volitions are not so based is considered foolish. If after every decision the will reverted to a state of indecision and oscillation equipoised between good and evil, the basis for confidence in our fellow men would be gone. In fact a person whose will was really "free" would be a dangerous associate; his acts would be irrational and we would have no way of knowing what he might do under any conditions.

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

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

VII. Scripture Proofs

Acts 4:27-28 27 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 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

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

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

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