

OUTLINES
OF
THEOLOGY.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE WILL AND OF HUMAN INABILITY.

1. *Is free-agency an inalienable attribute of the human soul, or has it been lost by sin ?*

Like conscience, free agency is an essential and indestructible element of human nature, and in every case necessary to moral accountability. Even devils and lost souls are as free, *i. e.*, voluntary in their sin, as saints in their holiness.—See below, question 4. For a definition of the essential elements of free agency, see above, Chap. XIV., question 6.

2. *What are the different senses in which the word will is used ?*

For a full answer see above, Chap. XIV., question 3.

3. *When is a man said to be free in willing ?*

When he wills in conformity with his prevailing dispositions or desires at the time, all things considered, in the view his understanding takes of the case.

A man, therefore, always is free in willing, and can never will otherwise than as free, because the volition, or executive action of the will is always determined by the man's subjective state of desire or aversion, and therefore is always free.

4. *Do not the Scriptures, however, speak of man's being under the bondage of corruption, and his liberty as lost ?*

As above shown, a man is always free in every responsible volition, as much when he chooses, in violation of the law of God and conscience, as in conformity to it. In the case of unfallen creatures, and of regenerated men, however, the permanent state of the will, the voluntary affections and desires (in Scripture lan-

guage, the heart), are conformed to the light of reason and the law of conscience within, and to the law of God, in its objective revelation. There are no conflicting principles then within the soul, and the law of God, instead of coercing the will by its commands and threatenings, is spontaneously obeyed. This is "the liberty of the sons of God;" and the law becomes the "royal law of liberty" when the law in the heart of the subject perfectly corresponds with the law of the moral Governor.

In the case of fallen men and angels, on the other hand, the reason and conscience, and God's law, are opposed by the governing dispositions of the will, and the agent, although free, because he wills as he chooses, is said to be in bondage to an evil nature, and "the servant of sin," because he is impelled by his corrupt dispositions to choose that which he sees and feels to be wrong and injurious, and because the threatenings of God's law tend to coerce his will through fear.—See below, questions 13 and 17.

5. *What are the two senses in which the word motive, as influencing the will, is used?*

1st. A motive to act may be something *outside the soul itself*, as the value of money, the wishes of a friend, the wisdom or folly, the right or the wrong of any act in itself considered, or the appetites and impulses of the body. In this sense it is evident that the man does not always act according to the motive. What may attract one man may repel another, or a man may repel the attraction of an outward motive by the superior force of some consideration drawn from within the soul itself. So that the dictum is true, "The man makes the motive, and not the motive the man."

2d. A motive to act may be the state of the man's own mind, as desire or aversion in view of the outward object, or motive in the first sense. This internal motive evidently must sway the volition, and as clearly it can not in the least interfere with the perfect freedom of the man in willing, since the internal motive is only the man himself desiring, or the reverse, according to his own disposition or character.

6. *May there not be several conflicting desires, or internal motives, in the mind at the same time, and in such a case how is the will decided?*

There are often several conflicting desires, or impelling affections in the mind at the same time, in which case the strongest desire, or the strongest group of desires, drawing in one way, determine the volition. That which is strongest proves itself to be such only by the result, and not by the intensity of the feeling it excites. Some of these internal motives are very vivid, like a thirst for vengeance, and others calm, as a sense of duty, yet often the calm motive proves itself the strongest, and draws the will its own way. This of course must depend upon the character of the agent. It is this inward contest of opposite principles which constitutes the warfare of the Christian life. It is the same experience which occasions a great part of that confusion of consciousness which prevails among men with respect to the problem of the will, and the conditions of free agency. Man often acts against motives, but never without motive. And the motive which actually determines the choice in a given case may often be the least clearly defined in the intellect, and the least vividly experienced in the feelings. Especially in sudden surprizes, and in cases of trivial concernment, the volition is constantly determined by vague impulses, or by force of habit almost automatically. Yet in every case, if the whole contents of the mind, at the time of the volition, be brought up into distinct consciousness, it will be found that the man chose, as upon the whole view of the case presented by the understanding at the instant he desired to choose.

7. *What is the distinction between a transient affection or desire, and a permanent principle or disposition of the will? (Will here understood in the wide sense of the term, as including the phenomena of desire as well as of volition.)*

See above, Chap. XIV., question 4.

8. *If the immediately preceding state of the man's mind certainly determines the act of his will, how can that act be truly free if certainly determined?*

This objection rests solely upon the confusion of the two distinct ideas of liberty of the will as an abstract faculty, and liberty of the man who wills. The man is never determined to will by any thing without himself. He always himself freely gives,

according to his own character, all the weight to the external influences which bear upon him that they ever possess. But, on the other hand, the mere act of volition, abstractly considered, is determined by the present mental, moral, and emotional state of the man at the moment he acts. His rational freedom, indeed, consists, not in the uncertainty of his act, but in the very fact that his whole soul, as an indivisible, knowing, feeling, moral agent, determines his own action as it pleases.

9. *Prove that the certainty of a volition is in no degree inconsistent with the liberty of the agent in that act.*

1st. God, Christ, and saints in glory, are all eminently free in their holy choices and actions, yet nothing can be more certain than that, to all eternity, they shall always will according to righteousness.

2d. Man is a free agent, yet of every infant, from his birth, it is absolutely certain that if he lives he will sin.

3d. God, from eternity, foreknows all the free actions of men as certain, and he has foreordained them, or made them to be certain. In prophecy he has infallibly foretold many of them as certain. And in regeneration his people are made "his workmanship created unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."

4th. Even we, if we thoroughly understand a friend's character, and all the present circumstances under which he acts, are often absolutely certain how he will freely act, though absent from us. This is the foundation of all human faith, and hence of all human society.

10. *What is that theory of moral liberty, styled "liberty of indifference," "self-determining power of the will," "power of contrary choice," "liberty of contingency," etc., held by Arminians and others?*

This theory maintains that it is essentially involved in the idea of free agency, 1st, that the will of man in every volition may decide in opposition, not only to all outward inducements, but equally to all the inward judgments, desires, and to the whole coexistent inward state of the man himself. 2d. That man is conscious in every free volition that he might have willed pre-

cisely the opposite, his outward circumstances and his entire inward state remaining the same. 3d. That every free volition is contingent, *i. e.*, uncertain, until the event, since it is determined by nothing but the bare faculty of volition on the part of the agent.—Hamilton's Reid, pp. 599—624.

The true theory of moral certainty, on the other hand, is that the soul is a unit; that the will is not self-determined, but that man, when he wills, is self-determined; and that his volition is certainly determined by his own internal, rational, moral, emotional state at the time, viewed as a whole.

In opposition to the former theory, and in favor of the latter, we argue—1st. That the character of the agent does certainly determine the character of his free acts, and that the certainty of an act is not inconsistent with the liberty of the agent in his act.—See below, question 12.

2d. The Christian doctrines of the divine foreknowledge, foreordination, providence, and regeneration. For the Scriptural evidence of these, see their respective chapters. They all show that the volitions of men are neither uncertain or indeterminate.

3d. We agree with the advocates of the opposite theory in maintaining that in every free act we are conscious that we had power to perform it, or not to perform it, as we chose. "But we maintain that we are none the less conscious that this intimate conviction that we had power not to perform an act is conditional. That is, we are conscious that the act might have been otherwise, had other views or feelings been present to our minds, or been allowed their due weight. A man can not prefer against his preference, or choose against his choice. A man may have one preference at one time, and another at another. He may have various conflicting feelings or principles in action at the same time, but he can not have coexisting opposite preferences."

4th. The theory of the "self-determining power of the will" regards the will, or the mere faculty of volition, as isolated from the other faculties of the soul, as an independent agent within an agent. Now, the soul is a unit. Consciousness and Scripture alike teach us that *man* is the free, responsible agent. By this dissociation of the volitional faculty from the moral dispositions and desires the volitions can have no moral character. By its dissociation from the reason the volitions can have no rational

character. Since they are not determined by the inward state of the man himself, they must be fortuitous, and beyond his control. He can not be free if his will is independent alike of his head and his heart, and he ought not to be held responsible.—See Bib. Rep., January, 1857, Art. V.

11. *What are the essential conditions of moral responsibility?*

See above, Chapter XIV., question 7.

12. *Why is a man responsible for his outward actions; why for his volitions; why for his affections and desires; and prove that he is responsible for his affections?*

“A man is responsible for his outward acts, because they are determined by the will; he is responsible for his volitions, because they are determined by his own principles and feelings (desires); he is responsible for his principles and feelings, because of their inherent nature as good or bad, and because they are his own and constitute his character.”—Bib. Rep., January, 1857, p. 130.

It is the teaching of Scripture and the universal judgment of men, that “a good man out of the good treasures of his heart bringeth forth that which is good,” and that a “wicked man out of the evil treasures of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil.” The act derives its moral character from the state of the heart from which it springs, and a man is responsible for the moral state of his heart, whether that state be innate, formed by regenerating grace or acquired by himself, because, 1st, of the obliging nature of moral right, and the ill desert of sin; 2d, because a man’s affections and desires are himself loving or refusing that which is right. It is the judgment of all, that a profane or inalignant man is to be reprobated, no matter how he became so.

13. *What is the distinction between liberty and ability?*

Liberty consists in the power of the agent to will as he pleases, in the fact that the volition is determined only by the character of the agent willing. Ability consists in the power of the agent to change his own subjective state, to make himself prefer

what he does not prefer, and to act in a given case in opposition to the coexistent desires and preferences of the agent's own heart.

Thus man is as truly free since the fall as before it, because he wills as his evil heart pleases. But he has lost all ability to obey the law of God, because his evil heart is not subject to that law, neither can he change it.

14. *But may not an unregenerate man truly desire to obey the law of God ; and, if so, why does not that desire control his will ?*

An unregenerate man often does heartily desire to avoid the penalty of God's law, and consequently, through fear of the consequences of his sin, may be said to desire to eradicate the prevalent principle of sin from his heart. He may even, as a matter of taste and judgment, desire to obey the law of God in certain particulars wherein that law does not directly oppose his dominant dispositions. But no unregenerate man can love holiness for its own sake, and earnestly desire to fulfill the whole law of God in the spirit as well as the letter ; for if he did so, the law in his case would be fulfilled.

15. *What are the Pelagian and the Arminian theories as to the ability of the sinner to obey the commands of God ?*

The Pelagian doctrine is that it is the essence of liberty that the sinner is as free to cease from sin as to continue it. That man consequently is as able now to obey God's law perfectly as Adam was before he fell, and hence that regeneration is the sinner's act of simply ceasing to do evil, and commencing to do well.

The Arminian view is that man, by nature and of himself, is utterly unable to change his own depraved heart, or to obey the law of God, or savingly to receive the gospel, yet that God, for Christ's sake, gives to every man sufficient grace, if improved, to enable him to do all that he is responsible for doing. Without grace no man has ability to obey, with grace every man has ability either to obey or disobey.—Apol. Conf. Remonstr., p. 162., b.

16. *What distinction is intended by the theological terms natural and moral ability ?*

By natural ability was intended the possession, on the part of every responsible moral agent, whether holy or unholy, of all the natural faculties, as reason, conscience, free will, requisite to enable him to obey God's law. If any of these were absent, the agent would not be responsible.—Edwards on the Will, Part I., sec. 4.

By moral ability was intended that inherent moral condition of these faculties, that righteous disposition of heart requisite to the performance of duty.

Although these terms have been often used by orthodox writers in a sense which to them expressed the truth, yet they have often been abused, and are not desirable. It is evidently an abuse of the word to say that sinners are naturally able, but morally unable to obey the law; for that can be no *ability* which leaves the sinner, as the Scriptures declare, utterly unable either to think, feel or act aright. Besides the word natural, in the phrase "natural ability," is used in an unusual sense, as opposite to moral, while in the usual sense of that word it is declared in Scripture that man is by nature, *i. e.*, naturally, a child of wrath.

17. *State the common doctrine of the church as to the inability of the sinner to obey the law of God, or to accept the gospel, and state how far it is natural and how far moral?*

All men possess those faculties of their nature essential to constitute them rational, and moral, and free agents, and therefore all that is necessary to render them responsible for their obedience to God's law. But the moral state of these faculties is such, because of the perverted dispositions of their hearts, that they are utterly unable either to will or to do what the law requires. This inability is "natural" since it is innate and constitutional. It is "moral" since it does not consist either in disease, or in any physical defect in the soul, nor merely in the inordinate action of the bodily affections, but in the corrupt character of the governing dispositions of the heart. This inability is total, and, as far as human strength goes, irremediable.—Confession of Faith, Chap. IX., sec. 3. Article X. of Church of England, and Article XVIII. of Augsburg Conf.

18. *Prove the fact of this inability from Scripture.*

Jer. xiii., 23; John vi. 44, 65; xv., 5; Rom. ix., 16; 1 Cor. ii., 14

19. *How may the fact of this inability be proved from our consciousness and experience ?*

Consciousness teaches us that while the dispositions and desires determine the volitions, no volition can change the character of the governing dispositions and desires of our hearts themselves. Our experience teaches us that while many men have, for outside considerations of self-interest, desired to serve God, and therefore have endeavored to change their inherent evil dispositions, they have always entirely failed in such effort. A specific evil habit may be abandoned, but the disposition to sin remains, and always breaks forth with renewed violence under some other form

20. *How may it be proved from what the Scriptures say concerning human depravity, and the necessity of a divine influence in order to salvation ?*

The Scriptures declare that by nature all men, without exception, are dead in sin. That the affections are depraved. That the wicked man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil. Christ died for us while we were without strength. Sinners are the servants of sin. Men are said to be subject to Satan, led about by him at his will.

The change accomplished in regeneration is said to be, not a mere change of purpose, but a "new birth," a "new creation," a "begetting anew," a "giving a new heart," the result is the "workmanship of God." Christ gives repentance to Israel. All Christian graces are the fruits of the Spirit. The work in us is accomplished by the "exceeding greatness of the mighty power of God."—Eph. i., 18-20 ; John iii., 3-8 ; Rom. viii., 2 ; Gal. v., 17.

21. *How can the fact of man's inability be reconciled with his responsibility ?*

It is objected that "a man can not be justly responsible for doing that which he is unable to do." This maxim is self-evidently true when the inability arises either from the absence of the natural faculties proper to the agent, or from the want of opportunity to use them. Neither an idiot, nor a man devoid of the rudiments of a moral sense, nor a man whose volitions were not determined by the genuine disposition of his own heart, would be responsible.

But, on the other hand, it is just as clearly a matter of universal consciousness that when the cause of inability consists in the absence of the proper moral dispositions, that inability, instead of being inconsistent with responsibility, is the very ground of righteous condemnation. No matter whence the malignant or the profane disposition comes, whether innate or acquired, all men judge, 1st, that the stronger they are the less is the agent's ability to change them; yet, 2d, that the stronger they are the greater is the agent's ill desert on their account.

22. How can man's inability be reconciled with the commands, promises, and threatenings of God?

God righteously deals with the sinner according to the measure of his responsibility, and not according to the measure of his sinful inability. It would have been a compromise altogether unworthy of God to have lowered his demands in proportion to man's sin. Besides, under the gospel dispensation, God makes use of his commands, promises, and threatenings, as gracious means, under the influence of his Spirit, to enlighten the minds, quicken the consciences, and to sanctify the hearts of men.

23. How can man's inability be shown to be consistent with the rational use of means?

The efficiency of all means lies in the power of God, and not in the ability of man. God has established a connection between certain means and the ends desired; he has commanded us to use them, and has promised to bless them; and human experience has proved God's faithfulness to his engagements, and the instrumental connection between the means and the end.

24. What are the legitimate, practical effects of this doctrine?

This dreadful fact ought to lead us to feel, 1st, with respect to ourselves, humility, and self-despair. 2d. With respect to God, sincere gratitude and perfect confidence. And, 3d, to the practice of constant circumspection lest we grieve the Holy Spirit, and be left to our own helplessness.