

# Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*:

## A Review and Analysis

By W. Gary Crampton, Th.D.

### INTRODUCTION

Samuel Hopkins, Jonathan Edwards' friend and first biographer, while compiling Edwards' memoirs, commented that "President Edwards was one of those men of whom it is not easy to speak with justice without seeming, at least, to border on the marvelous, and to incur the guilt of adulation".<sup>1</sup> The present reviewer agrees with Hopkins. And when we come to the study of *Freedom of the Will* it is perhaps particularly so. This book, which was first published in 1754, has been called Edwards' greatest literary achievement.<sup>2</sup> But as Paul Ramsey, the editor of this volume, more accurately stated:

Perhaps we should say that the *Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of the Freedom of the Will* is not the greatest of Edwards' works but the greatest of its

kind. For his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746) in defense and criticism of the Revival stands without many peers among writings on the philosophy and psychology of religion, as does *The Nature of True Virtue* among books on ethics. And the "Miscellanies" are often described as the greatest of Edwards' works. All these, and other writings that might be mentioned, have high merit each in its own kind, and there is not much profit in comparing them with each other in order to find a summit. There is more grandeur in a range of many summits, and in the scope of the many kinds of interest and competence that are to be found in the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Uncompleted at the time of his death, his system of thought is nevertheless more complete than that of most other men (8).

Edwards' brilliance is recognized, not just in one area here and another area there, but in the far reaching implications and applications of his biblical worldview. There is real "grandeur" in "a range of many summits ... to be found in the writings" of this man. The full-orbed worldview set forth in the entirety of the Edwards' corpus is nothing short of staggering. It is a view that is sadly missing today. John Piper commented: "Edwards' relentless God-centeredness and devotion to the biblical contours of doctrine are profoundly needed in our day."<sup>3</sup> And Mark Noll stated:

Evangelicals have not thought about life from the ground up as Christians, because their entire culture has ceased to do so. [Jonathan] Edwards' piety continued on in the revivalist tradition, his theology continued on in academic Calvinism, but there were no successors to his God-entranced worldview or his profoundly theological philosophy. The disappearance of Edwards' perspective in American Christian history has been a tragedy.<sup>4</sup>

---

THE AUTHOR: Dr. Crampton is the author of many books and articles and is a contributing editor to *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

1. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 1, edited by Paul Ramsey, *Freedom of the Will* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957) 1. The pagination found in the body of this article is from this edition of *Freedom of the Will*. The actual title of this work is: *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will, Which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* (vi). The text Edwards use as his frontispiece for this treatise is Romans 9:16: "It is not of him that wills."

2. In 1957, Yale University Press began to publish a new critical edition of Jonathan Edwards' works. It is far from coincidental that *Freedom of the Will* was the first work that Yale chose to publish.

3. John Piper, *God's Passion For His Glory* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998) xiii.

4. Mark Noll, "Jonathan Edwards, Moral Philosophy, and the Secularization of American Christian Thought," as cited in Justin Taylor, "Introduction," *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004) 13.

Jonathan Edwards was surely America's greatest philosopher and theologian, if not "the" greatest that God has ever raised up in the church of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> Edwards was unapologetically a Calvinist; not (simply) because it was the teaching of John Calvin, but because he believed it. Calvinism is biblical Christianity in its purest form.<sup>6</sup> B. B. Warfield pointed out that Edwards "stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America." He was "the greatest of American Calvinists," a man who had a "remarkable sense and taste for divine things." He was a man whose "analytical subtlety has probably never been surpassed." But with this "analytical subtlety" there was "combined a broad grasp of religious truth which enabled him to see it as a whole, and to deal with the several parts without exaggeration and with a sense of their relations in the system." The system to which he held and "gave his sincere adhesion, and to the defense of which, against the tendencies which were in his day threatening to undermine it, he consecrated all his powers, was simply Calvinism." And it is "Calvinism in its completeness."<sup>7</sup> No place is Edwards' defense of Calvinism seen more clearly than in *Freedom of the Will*. It is bold defense of a biblically based theological determinism.

Being the staunch and faithful Calvinist that he was, Jonathan Edwards was first and foremost a "biblicist." Scripture was foundational to his entire world-and-life view. As a biblicist, he was devoted to the concept that one should never attempt to erect a system of thought by combining secular and Christian notions. Edwards held to the Reformational principle of *sola Scriptura*. Scripture alone is the Word of God, and all studies, regardless of the subject matter, are to be judged by Scripture. Nothing stands in judgment over the Word of God. Scripture is sufficient not only for man to come to a sound and saving knowledge of God through Jesus Christ, but also to justify all knowledge and to interpret every area of life. He was a man "who put faithfulness to the Word of God before every other consideration."<sup>8</sup> He was a man who "refracted ... everything through the prism of Scripture."<sup>9</sup> For Jonathan Edwards, there was an absolute primacy and authority of the Word of God. According to David Brand:

The Edwardsian legacy represents a call to re-establish theology as the queen of the sciences, not in terms of a rigidity that stifles scholarship or scientific inquiry, but rather in the form of a lucid and forceful assertion of the Holy Scriptures as the fountainhead of all human endeavor.<sup>10</sup>

The view of *sola Scriptura* espoused by Jonathan Edwards was no different than that of the apostle Paul and the Westminster Assembly. In the words of Paul: "All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16–17). And as stated by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6), to which Edwards adhered:

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.<sup>11</sup>

The Bible infallibly, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in compliance with the Bible, both teach the all-sufficiency of Scripture. The Bible is sufficient for all the truth we need and all the knowledge we can have.

5. R. C. Sproul is of the opinion, as is the present writer, that Edwards was perhaps the most "prodigious thinker" that the church of Christ has had. See R. C. Sproul, "Foreword," *Altogether Lovely*, edited by Don Kistler (Moran, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997) v.

6. In *Freedom of the Will* Edwards wrote: "I should not take it amiss to be called a Calvinist, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught" (131).

7. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988) 515–516, 528, 530.

8. Ian H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987) 471.

9. George M. Marsden, "The Quest For the Historical Edwards," *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad* (edited by David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2003) 8.

10. David C. Brand, *Profile of the Last Puritan* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1991) 146.

11. See Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1834, 1974) 1.cxxi. Here Edwards writes: "As to my subscribing to the substance of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, there would be no difficulty." According to John H. Gerstner, the *Westminster Confession* was Edwards' "favorite creed"; *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Powhatan, Virginia: Berea Publications; Orlando, Florida: Ligonier Ministries, 1991–1993) 1.160. And Norman Fiering commented that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was Edwards' "dogmatic heritage," to which he held firmly; *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1981) 51. The citations in this essay from the Westminster Standards are from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow, Scotland: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994).

In the “Author’s Preface” to *Freedom of the Will* we read:

Of all kinds of knowledge that we ever can obtain, the knowledge of God, and the knowledge of ourselves, are the most important. As [the Christian] religion is the great business for which we are created, and on which our happiness depends; and as [the Christian] religion consists in an intercourse between ourselves and our Maker; and so has its foundation in God’s nature and ours, and in the relation that God and we stand in to each other; therefore, a true knowledge of both must be necessary, in order to true religion (133).

This is how Edwards begins his treatise. Without a knowledge of one’s self, there is no knowledge of God. But to know one’s self, as God’s image bearer, there must first be a knowledge of God. The more man “knows of God,” preached Edwards, “the more he will know of himself. . . . Indeed, he who does not have the true knowledge of God has no true knowledge of anything.” He who “has no knowledge of God knows nothing as he ought to know.”<sup>12</sup> God, then, must be the first object of knowledge. And according to Edwards, the only way for one to come to this knowledge of God (and the self) is by “the exploration of the heart, in light of Scripture.”<sup>13</sup> Like the apostle Paul and the Westminster divines before him, Jonathan Edwards began his theological and philosophical enterprise with epistemology (the theory of knowledge). And the epistemological starting point for the Puritan divine was the Bible as the Word of God. All knowledge is to be deduced from the axiom of God’s infallible and inerrant special revelation.

Jonathan Edwards, along with the Westminster theologians before him, also believed in the absolute sovereignty of God. “It is axiomatic in Edwards,” wrote Sang Lee, “that God is the absolutely sovereign and eternal ground of all existence and creativity.” Of supreme importance to him “was the principle of God’s absolute sovereignty in all aspects of reality, both the material and

the spiritual.” This doctrine “remained for him a fundamental principle of all that he thought and wrote.”<sup>14</sup> There was a time in his life, prior to his conversion, when he had reservations concerning this “horrible doctrine,” especially in matters of election and reprobation. But when God worked salvifically in Edwards’ life, bringing him into a state of genuine conversion, he “... seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to the sovereignty of God, and His justice in thus eternally disposing of men, according to His sovereign pleasure. . . . Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God” (Hickman, 1.xii–xiii).

The doctrine of God’s sovereignty includes the fact that He has decreed all things which ever come to pass, thus rendering the future certain. This is the Reformed doctrine of “theological determinism.” As explained by the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 7), “The decrees of God are, His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory, He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.” The sovereignty of God in His decretive purposes, therefore, said Edwards, extends even to the Fall of man, and all other sins as well: “God has decreed every action of men, yea [even] every action that is sinful and every circumstance of those actions.” Sin “is foreordained in God’s decrees, and ordered in providence.” God decrees all things, and “even all sins.” Nothing falls outside of God’s eternal decrees. This, however, does not mean that God is the author of sin. He “orders” sin, but He does not “author” it (Hickman, 2.527–528, 534; 1.217).

God is the eternal “First Cause” of all things which ever come to pass (Hickman, 2.483). Yet, this does not negate or undermine the fact that in His sovereignty He chooses to use secondary causes to bring about His decrees.<sup>15</sup> This is explained in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (3:1; 5:1–2, 4) as follows:

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 . . . of second causes taken away, but rather established.

God the great Creator of all things does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

12. Jonathan Edwards, *Sermon on Isaiah 6:5*, cited in *The Puritan Pulpit*, edited by Don Kistler (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004) 143.

13. William J. Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1975) 132.

14. Sang Hung Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988) 8, 47–48.

15. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 23, edited by Douglas A. Sweeney, *The “Miscellanies” 1153–1360* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004), *Miscellany* 1263.

Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the First Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly: yet, by the same providence, He orders them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes.

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extends itself even to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God, who being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be, the author or approver of sin.

This doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty is very significant when it comes to Edwards' theory of causation (a theory which plays a very important role in *Freedom of the Will*, 180–185). In the view espoused by the Westminster theologians, and championed by Jonathan Edwards, "nothing ever comes to pass without a cause" (181). All effects necessitate a cause. And a cause, by definition, is "that after, or upon the existence of which, or its existence in such a manner, the existence of another thing [necessarily] follows."<sup>16</sup> God is the eternal First Cause of all things that ever come to pass; yet, He uses secondary causes to accomplish His decretive will. And the secondary causes (in the case of men and angels) are responsible for their actions (156–167).<sup>17</sup>

#### THEOLOGICAL SETTING

*Freedom of the Will* was written to counter the pervasive Arminian influence of the eighteenth century. Edwards saw Arminianism as a threat to biblical Christianity as a whole, and especially at the point of "free will." There is, he stated, "no one thing more fundamental in their [Pelagians and Arminians] schemes of religion: on the determination of this one leading point [free will] depends the issue of almost all controversies we have with such divines."<sup>18</sup> This being the case, Edwards wrote:

It is very necessary, that the modern prevailing doctrine concerning this point [free will], should be well understood, and therefore thoroughly considered and examined: for without it there is no hope of putting an end to the controversy about original sin, and innumerable other controversies that subsist, about many of the

main points of [the Christian] religion. I stand ready to confess to the fore-mentioned modern divines, if they can maintain their peculiar notion of freedom, consisting in the self-determining power of the will, as necessary to moral agency, and can thoroughly establish it in opposition to the arguments lying against it, then they have an impregnable castle, to which they may repair, and remain invincible, in all the controversies they have with the Reformed divines, concerning original sin, the sovereignty of grace, election, redemption, conversion, the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, the nature of saving faith, perseverance of the saints, and other principles of the like kind (*Works*, 3.376).

Said another way, if the Arminian view of a self-determined free will (a form of libertarianism) can be rationally established, then the system of truth known as Calvinism would fall into ruin; God's gracious plan of sovereign salvation would be in shambles. Christianity would be false.<sup>19</sup> No longer could it be said that "salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). This is no small matter. In 1757, Edwards wrote his friend John Erskine about the seriousness of this situation:

The doctrine of a self-determining will, as the ground of all moral good and evil, tends to prevent any proper exercises of faith in God and Christ, in the affair of our salvation, as it tends to prevent all dependence upon them. For, instead of this, it teaches a kind of absolute independence on all those things, that are of chief

16. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 6, edited by Wallace E. Anderson, *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980) 352.

17. Jonathan Edwards held to the philosophical view of "occasionalism," i.e., that God is the efficient cause of all things, whereby with every "occasion" of the consent of the mind of man to act in a certain way, God moves to bring about that act. The movement of the creature is only the "occasion" in which God acts according to His customary manner of acting; see Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 18, edited by Ava Chamberlain, *The "Miscellanies"* 501–832 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), *Miscellany* 629. This being so, God is the only real and efficient cause of all things. But this does not rule out the existence of secondary causes. God uses secondary causes to bring about His purposes.

18. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 3, edited by Clyde A. Holbrook, *Original Sin* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1970) 375.

19. Dr. John Gerstner pointed out to the present writer that if the Arminian concept of a "self-determined" will is correct (which it is not), then it would be a sin to preach the gospel to the fallen sinner. The reason being that it would be an attempt to have the fallen sinner make a choice based on motive, which involves causality, i.e., something "determining" the will from outside of itself.

importance in this affair; our righteousness depending originally on our own acts, as self-determined. Thus our own holiness is from ourselves, as its determining cause, and its original and highest source. And as for imputed righteousness, that should have any merit at all in it, to be sure, there can be no such thing. For self-determination is necessary to praise and merit. But what is imputed from another is not from our self-determination or action. And truly, in this [Arminian] scheme, man is not dependent on God; but God is rather dependent on man in this affair: for He only operates consequentially in acts, in which He depends on what He sees we determine, and do first.... The nature of true faith implies a disposition, to give all the glory of our salvation to God and Christ. But this [Arminian] notion is inconsistent with it, for it in effect gives the glory wholly to man (468–469).

For Edwards, said Ramsey, “the issue is a simple one: either contingency and the liberty of self-determination must be run out of this world, or God will be shut out” (9). However, as Edwards went on to say: “But I am under no apprehension of any danger, the cause of Christianity or the religion of the Reformed is in, from any possibility of that notion’s being ever established, or of its being ever evinced, that there is not proper, perfect, and manifold demonstration lying against it” (*Works*, 3.376). *Freedom of the Will* was written to be such a “manifold demonstration lying against it.”<sup>20</sup>

Jonathan Edwards addressed his arguments, first from the propositions of biblical revelation, and then, in an *ad hominem* (“to the man”) fashion, from rational argumentation. Whether “these things are agreeable to Scripture,” said the Puritan divine, “let every Christian, and every man who has read the Bible, judge: and whether they are agreeable to common sense [rational thinking], let everyone judge, that have human understanding in exercise” (326).

The fundamental issue in this treatise is that of moral responsibility. The thrust of Edwards’ argument is the denial of and refutation of the Arminian view of what it is that constitutes responsibility. The author then sets forth the Calvinist view which is in actuality absolutely essential to moral responsibility.<sup>21</sup> Edwards’ overall thesis is given in the concluding chapter of the work as follows:

20. Clyde A. Holbrook, *The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards: Morality and Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 1973) 38–39.

21. C. Samuel Storms, “Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of the Will,” *Trinity Journal* 3 NS (1982) 132.

It is easy to see how the decisions of most of the points in controversy, between Calvinists and Arminians, depends on the determination of this grand article concerning the freedom of the will requisite to moral agency; and that by clearing and establishing the Calvinistic doctrine in this point, the chief arguments are obviated, by which the Arminian doctrines in general are supported, and the contrary doctrines demonstratively confirmed. Hereby it become manifest, that God’s moral government over mankind, His treating them as moral agents, making them the objects of His commands, counsels, calls, warnings, exhortations, promises, threatenings, rewards and punishments, is not inconsistent with a determining disposal of all events, of every kind, throughout the universe, in His providence; either by positive efficiency, or permission. Indeed such an universal, determining providence, infers some kind of necessity of all events; such a necessity as implies an infallible previous fixedness of the futurity of the event: but no other necessity of moral agents, or volitions of intelligent agents, is needful in order to this, than moral necessity; which does as much ascertain the futurity of the event, as any other necessity. But, as has been demonstrated, such a necessity is not at all repugnant to moral agency, and the reasonable use of commands, calls, rewards, punishments, etc.

The things which have been said, obviate some of the chief objections of Arminians against the Calvinistic doctrine of the total depravity and corruption of man’s nature, whereby his heart is wholly under the power of sin, and he is utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace, savingly to love God, believe in Christ, or do anything that is truly good and acceptable in God’s sight. For the main objection against this doctrine is, that it is inconsistent with the freedom of man’s will, consisting in indifference and self-determining power; because it supposes man to be under a necessity of sinning, and that God requires of him, in order to his avoiding eternal damnation, which he is unable to do; and that this doctrine is wholly inconsistent with the sincerity of counsels, invitations, etc. Now this doctrine supposes no other necessity of sinning than a moral necessity; which, as has been shown, does not at all excuse sin; and supposes no other inability to obey any command or perform any duty, even the most spiritual and exalted, but moral inability, which, as has been proved, does not excuse persons in the nonperformance of any good thing, or make them not to be the proper objects of commands, counsels and invitations. And, moreover, it has been shown, that there is

not, and never can be, either in existence, or so much as in idea, any such freedom of will, consisting in indifference and self-determination, for the sake of which, this doctrine of original sin is cast out; and that no such freedom is necessary, in order to the nature of sin, and a just desert of punishment (431–433).

According to Jonathan Edwards, then, "the decision of most of the points in controversy, between Calvinists and Arminians, depends on the determination of this grand article concerning the freedom of the will requisite to moral agency." *In nuce*, the Arminian view is that three things are necessary for such freedom to exist: 1) The will must have a self-determining power, i.e., a certain sovereignty over itself whereby it determines its own acts; 2) There must be a state of indifference, wherein the will is without antecedent bias; it must be entirely free of any prior inclination to choose one thing or another; and 3) The acts of the will must be contingent, i.e., opposed to all constraint and to all necessity as well; there must be no certain connection with a previous ground for these acts of the will; nothing outside of the will must affect the choices made by the will.

The Calvinist view, on the other hand, as championed by Jonathan Edwards, avers that the concept of a self-determined will is without meaning. It is a violation of the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, i.e., nothing can come from nothing; there is no such thing as an effect without a cause. The very idea of the will exerting a choice while at the same time being in a state of perfect indifference is palpably absurd. One cannot choose without making a choice; one cannot have a preference without preferring. And due to the fact that nothing can ever come to pass without something causing it to come to pass, the acts of the will can never be contingent, or without necessity. Every act of the will is necessarily determined by something prior to the act, and this means that there is a moral necessity for the will to act as it does.

The Edwardsian view is taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (9:1) as follows: "God has endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil." As explained by Robert Shaw: "The liberty of a moral agent consists in the power of acting according to his choice; and those actions are free which are performed without any external compulsion or restraint, in consequence of the determinations of his own mind." Indeed, the very essence of the freedom of the will is found in its making a choice for either this thing or that thing, or refusing

to choose either this thing or that thing, without any external compulsion or constraint, but according to the rational principles which God has given to man.<sup>22</sup> According to the *Confession*, man has been endowed with the inalienable or natural right and ability to freely choose what he desires to choose; in fact, he could not do otherwise. Man has a will which is not "naturally" forced to do good or evil; he is free to make choices.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, when a man "necessarily" acts in conformity with his own desires, he is at liberty to do so. He has the natural, God-given ability to make such uncompelled choices. This necessity is a moral necessity for which man is held responsible.

This is the view adhered to by Edwards. In this view:

Freedom, or liberty, must be identified with the absence of constraint, or the power one has "to do as he pleases." But this is clearly a freedom which is consistent with necessity, and with the strictest predestinarian claims. One has the power to do what he will, although his will is determined by God.<sup>24</sup>

This is the basic theological setting in which *Freedom of the Will* was written. A more in depth review and analysis of Edwards' rebuttal of the Arminian doctrine of libertarianism, along with his rational defense of the Calvinistic teaching will be studied below. But first it will be helpful to look at the historical setting in which this volume was written.

#### HISTORICAL SETTING

According to Edwards' nineteenth-century biographer and great-grandson, Sereno Dwight, Edwards expressed an interest in joining the argument with the Arminians seven years before the work was actually written. In 1747, just subsequent to the publishing of his *Religious Affections* (1746), he wrote the Reverend John Erskine, a teaching elder in the Church of Scotland, informing his correspondent of his desire to address this matter:

22. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1845, 1980) 115–116. The present writer has used Shaw's explanation of the Edwardsian view in this section of his "Exposition."

23. John H. Gerstner, Douglas F. Kelly, and Philip Rollinson, *A Guide to The Westminster Confession of Faith: Commentary* (Signal Mountain, Tennessee: Summertown Texts, 1992) 54.

24. William L. Reese, "Jonathan Edwards 1703–1758," *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* (Atlanta Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980) 142.

I have thought of writing something particularly and largely on the Arminian controversy, in distinct discourse on the various points of dispute, to be published successively, beginning first with a discourse concerning the freedom of the will, and moral agency; endeavoring fully and thoroughly to state and discuss those points of liberty and necessity, moral and physical inability, efficacious grace, and the ground of virtue and vice, reward and punishment, blame and praise, with regard to the dispositions and actions of reasonable creatures (2).

Edwards recognized Arminianism as a threat to the gospel of Jesus Christ. For Edwards, and Puritanism in general, this is “another gospel.”<sup>25</sup> This false view has “departed from God,” and “eats out the heart of [the Christian] religion.”<sup>26</sup> Although the Arminian theologians “disclaim the popish doctrine of merit, and are free to speak of our utter unworthiness and the great imperfection of all our services,” nevertheless, in this false system of thought, “it is our virtue, imperfect as it is, that recommends men to God, by which good men come to have a saving interest in Christ and God’s favor . . . and these things are bestowed in testimony of God’s respect for their goodness.” So that whether or not they allow the term “merit,” they hold “that we are accepted by our own merit in the same sense, though not in the same degree, as under the first covenant.”<sup>27</sup> Or as summarized by Shaw: “The Arminians, in words, ascribe the conversion of the sinner to the grace of God; yet they ultimately resolve it into the free will of man” (Shaw, 117).

Edwards’ desire to write on the doctrine of the freedom of the will was postponed for several years, due

25. Don Kistler, *Jonathan Edwards: His Life and Legacy*, a tape series (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 2003) tape 3.

26. Edwards, *Sermon on Jeremiah 2:5*, cited in Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Powhatan, Va.: Berea Publications; Orlando, Fla.: Ligonier Ministries, 1991–1993) 2:78.

27. Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, edited by Don Kistler (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000) 146–148.

28. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 8, edited by Paul Ramsey, *Ethical Writings* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989), “Concerning the End for Which God Created the World” (403–536); “The Nature of True Virtue” (537–627). Edwards wrote these two volumes with the intention that they be published together; he referred to them as the “Two Dissertations” (400).

29. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 9, edited by John F. Wilson, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1989).

30. The moniker “hesitating Calvinist” was given to Isaac Watts by Dr. John Gerstner, due to the hymn writer’s inconsistent way of expressing a seemingly “Calvinistic” theology; Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3:259.

to a “remarkable series of events.” First came the death of David Brainerd in 1747, and shortly thereafter the death of his daughter Jerusha in 1748. Again, in 1748, Edwards wrote two more letters to Erskine informing him of the events that had “remarkably hindered” the intended publication, and asked for his prayers. He then began to write *An Account of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*, which was published in 1749. Then in 1750, the controversy over qualifications for communion, which had begun a year earlier between Edwards and the Northampton, Connecticut parishioners, came to a head, and the Northampton pastor was dismissed from the pulpit he had occupied since 1729 (3–5).

In 1751, Edwards moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he served as minister of the church and missionary to the Housatonic Indians. Although there was much work to be done as pastor and missionary, the transition allowed the Puritan theologian to spend more time writing. During the next several years, Edwards wrote some of his weightiest and most influential treatises: *Freedom of the Will*, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, *Concerning the End For Which God Created the World*, and *The Nature of True Virtue*.<sup>28</sup> Here in Stockbridge, he also finished *The History of the Work of Redemption*,<sup>29</sup> a work he had begun earlier. In July 1752, Edwards once more wrote to Erskine, informing his friend that he now intended to begin the work he had wanted to write for so long. In August 1752, he began to write the treatise, but again there was a slight interruption until November of that year. It took him four months and a half to finish the first draft, and in April 1753 he sent Erskine a letter telling him that at last the work was ready to be published. Actual publication was delayed until early 1754, however, in order to enlist some subscribers in Scotland (5–8).

In this treatise, those whom Edwards chose as representatives of the Arminian position were the deist Thomas Chubb (1679–1747), the Anglican Daniel Whitby (1638–1726), and the “hesitating Calvinist” and hymn writer Isaac Watts (1674–1748). Watts was much more in line with Edwards’ doctrinal views than Chubb and Whitby, even though he was inconsistent in his theology<sup>30</sup> (65–118). As editor Paul Ramsey commented, the three “opponents represent sufficient diversity of opinion to be representative of the thought prevailing at the time; and it would be easy to show that if Edwards’ argument against them is really sound, it can be applied with equal force to other proponents of libertarianism. In fact, in the range of opinion and churchmanship among them is to be found the best reason for their selection” (66).

When Edwards set out to write this treatise, wrote Allen Guelzo, "he would bend his energies to two tasks: undermining the notion that the human will possesses some sort of unique autonomy, or 'self-determination,' and showing that a universe in which all events have been determined by God is not inconsistent with human liberty."<sup>31</sup> But, from a theological and historical perspective, what was the impact of this volume? From a human standpoint, of course, it is impossible to measure such things. But there are reasons to believe that this work did indeed have an impact beyond its immediate setting. Arminianism was on the rise in Edwards' day, and as we have seen, he found this system of thought to be a threat to the gospel itself. He wrote to combat it, and he was successful in his attempt. In the final analysis, Warfield may well be correct in his assertion that:

The [Arminian] movement against Calvinism which was overspreading the land was in a great measure checked, and the elimination of Calvinism as a determining factor in the thought of New England, which seemed to be imminent as he wrote, was postponed for more than a hundred years.<sup>32</sup>

#### THE TEXT OF FREEDOM OF THE WILL

After the "Author's Preface," the volume is arranged into Parts I–IV, followed by a Conclusion.

*Part I* (135–167) contains definitions: "Wherein Are Explained and Stated Various Terms and Things Belonging to the Subject of the Ensuing Discourse."

Defining terms used in theological discussions is always important, but in this case it is especially so. As Storms stated, "apart from a clear apprehension of Edwards's use of certain words, there is no possibility of following his argument." This part of the treatise, then, "aims to alleviate those misapprehensions of language which inevitably arise when discussing the freedom of the will" (Storms, 135).

#### THE WILL

Jonathan Edwards believed that the soul, or spiritual aspect of man, has two "faculties": the mind and the will, the latter of which is virtually identical with the "affections."<sup>33</sup> In *Religious Affections* he wrote:

God has endued the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns, and views, and judges of things;

which is called the understanding. The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined to them, or is disinclined, and averse from them; or is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things, as an indifferent unaffected spectator, but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the inclination; and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will: and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart.... The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will and inclinations of the soul, but only in the liveliness and sensibleness of exercise.<sup>34</sup>

When it comes to defining the "will," Edwards said that it "is that by which the mind chooses anything." It "is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing." An act of the will "is the same as an act of choosing or choice." There are different levels of "affections" involved in making choices, some higher than others, and vice-versa, depending upon the degree of like or dislike, pleasure or displeasure, etc. But "a man never, in any instance, wills anything contrary to his desires, or desires anything contrary to his will." It cannot be otherwise (137–140).

#### THE DETERMINATION OF THE WILL

By "determining the will," wrote Edwards, "if the phrase

31. Allen C. Guelzo, "Freedom of the Will," Sang Hyun Lee, editor, *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005) 116.

32. Warfield, *Studies in Theology*, 532. It should also be noted that *Freedom of the Will* is destructive of the views expressed by the "open theists," who maintain that God does not possess exhaustive foreknowledge. Commenting on such a position, Edwards wrote: "One would think, it should be wholly needless to enter on such an argument with any that profess themselves Christians" (239). That is, Edwards viewed the open theist's claim so preposterous (and blasphemous), that it was to be recognized as outside of the Christian faith altogether.

33. Jonathan Edwards did not adopt the faulty view of man known as "faculty psychology," which maintains that the spiritual aspect of man consists of the "faculties" of the mind, the will, and the emotions. Rather, he believed that these are three distinct "functions" of the one human person.

34. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 2, edited by John E. Smith, *Religious Affections* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1959) 96–97.

be used with any meaning, must be intended, causing that the act of the will or choice should be thus, and not otherwise: and the will is said to be determined, when, in consequence of some action, or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object." Necessarily involved here is the understanding that "to talk about the determination of the will, supposes an effect, which must have a cause" (141), because if the will is determined (which is an effect), there must be something that determined it (which is the cause). In the Edwardsian view, as noted above, "nothing ever comes to pass without a cause" (181). Hence, every effect necessarily needs a cause; an effect is something that is caused. Although Edwards does not develop this issue at this point in the treatise, the fact that every effect needs a cause reduces the Arminian concept of a self-determined will to the level of absurdity.

What is it (as a secondary cause) that determines the will? It is the "strongest motive." It is "that motive, which, as it stands in the view of the mind, is the strongest, that determines the will." And what is a motive? "By 'motive,' I mean the whole of which moves, excites or invites the mind to volition, whether that be one thing singly, or many things conjunctly." There may be a number of things which encourage or induce the mind to make a choice; some of these are weaker and some are stronger. But it is always the strongest motive that "determines the will." The strongest motive is the one which appears to be the most agreeable or attractive; or said another way, it is the "greatest apparent good." This being so, "the will always is as the greatest apparent good is." A man will always choose that which seems most agreeable to him at that time; he will always choose based on "the greatest apparent good." It will never vary from this. "The choice of the mind never departs from that which, at that time, and with respect to the direct and immediate objects of that decision of the mind, appears most agreeable and most pleasing, all things considered" (141–147).<sup>35</sup>

As stated by Wainwright:

35. Stephen Daniel points out that when Edwards wrote that "the will always is the greatest apparent good (as opposed to saying is *determined* by the greatest apparent good)," he was showing how "the intentionally of intellectual activity links the understanding intimately to the operation of the will." That is, that the mind is involved in the choice of the will. Edwards does this, says Daniel, by identifying the good with that which agrees with the disposition of the mind. See Stephen H. Daniel, *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994) 163.

36. William Wainwright, "Jonathan Edwards," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/edwards/>) [Accessed on October 3, 2006].

The argument from motivation depends upon Edwards' identification of willing or choosing with one's strongest inclination or preference. Since choosing is a prevailing inclination, it is logically impossible to choose in the absence of a prevailing motive. If there is a prevailing motive, however, then the will is necessarily determined by it, for if the will were to choose contrary to a prevailing motive, the agent would have two opposed preponderant inclinations at the same time. All choices, therefore, are necessarily determined.<sup>36</sup>

Implicit in Edwards' thought here is the biblical view concerning the fallen nature of man. The Reformed doctrine of "total depravity," as taught in Scripture (Romans 3:9–18; 8:7–8), and explained by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (6:2, 4), maintains that fallen man is "dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body." This being so, "we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." Because of this, as the *Confession* (9:3) goes on to say, "man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation." "God made man upright," says Solomon, "but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). And as taught in Jeremiah 13:23 ("Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil"), a person is not able to make choices which are contrary to his nature. Therefore, since man is in this state of total depravity, and "has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good," the greatest apparent good to fallen man will never be pleasing to God. Fallen man, as Paul states in Ephesians 4:17–19, always "freely" chooses to sin "with greediness." Man loves his sin, and he sins greedily. And God holds him accountable for his sin.

As the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (9:4–5) teaches, man only has the ability to choose that which pleases God when he is converted: "When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but does also will that which is evil." Yet, there will come a day when the "will of [Christian] man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone," but this is to be found "in the state of glory only."

Jonathan Edwards, commented that when a person is converted, there is not an essential change in this person's mind or will; that is, there is not a "new

faculty of understanding," nor is there a "new faculty of will" involved. What has changed is that the person has a new and inward "sense of the heart." There is now a "new and holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense"; there is a "new foundation laid in the soul" of the converted sinner that enables him to do those things, to make those choices which please God (*Works*, 2.206). This new sense will then necessarily be followed by certain "distinguishing marks" that reveal the inward work of God the Holy Spirit in the converted sinner's life.<sup>37</sup>

But here again, in this new state, the converted sinner is active in his response to God. God is sovereign, but man has a responsibility to act:

In efficacious grace we are not merely passive, nor yet does God do some, and we do the rest. But God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. For that is what He produces, viz. our own acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active (Hickman, 2.557).

#### NATURAL AND MORAL NECESSITY

According to Jonathan Edwards, something is said to be "necessary" when it "must be, and cannot be otherwise" (149). No matter what the opposition, if an event will necessarily take place, then nothing can successfully oppose it. It is impossible that it not occur.<sup>38</sup> But we must distinguish here between external acts and internal acts, or natural necessity and moral necessity. In the former sense, the idea of opposition is essential. For example, tomorrow morning is going to come no matter what the opposition to its coming. When we speak of internal acts or moral necessity, however, we use the word "necessity" in a different sense. Here we may use the word when no opposition is involved at all. For instance, a man may have a virtuous desire to do something, without any inclination to do the opposite. His choice will necessarily occur, and be virtuous, even though there is nothing opposing this choice. The choice is not less virtuous because the individual "necessarily" has made it without contrary inclinations (Gerstner, "A Deterministic Model," A1–A2).

Edwards goes on to speak of metaphysical or philosophical necessity, and says that it "is nothing different from certainty." Philosophical necessity "is really nothing else than the full and fixed connection between the things signified by the subject and predicate of a

proposition, which affirms something to be true" (151–152). Both natural and moral necessity are included in the definition of philosophical necessity. Natural necessity would involve a compulsion from "the force of natural causes" (such as gravitational forces); whereas moral necessity, "such as habits or dispositions of the heart," would not be forced or compelled by such outside acts (156–157). Natural necessity would occur when the will of man is compelled to make a certain choice. These are very rare, but when they occur, man is not blameworthy. Moral necessity, on the other hand, takes place when there is "that necessity of connection and consequence, which arises from such moral causes, as the strength of inclination, or motives, and the connection which there is in many cases between these, and such certain volitions and actions" (156). Here there is an internal desire, without opposition (in the strict sense), while at the same time there is a certainty of occurrence (in the philosophical sense). In the case of moral necessity, the "will" produces the choices and man is responsible for them (156–162).

#### NATURAL AND MORAL INABILITY

Edwards also makes the distinction between natural inability and moral inability. A man is naturally unable to do a certain thing when he cannot do it even if he desires to do so; it is naturally impossible for him to do it. Moral inability, on the other hand, has to do with a lack of desire or inclination to do a certain thing. Here there are contrary motives involved. With moral inability, it is not that the person does not have the natural ability to do a certain thing; rather, it is that he does not desire to do it. In the case of natural inability, man is prevented from accomplishing something. This is not the case with moral inability. In the latter, the only thing that is lacking is a willingness to do accomplish something. A person may have the "natural" desire to help a needy individual, yet not have the wherewithal to aid him, i.e., he is naturally unable to be of help. This is not blameworthy. But if the person may have the natural ability to help a genuinely needy individual, and lack the compassion or desire to do so, this is blameworthy. Here the problem is a lack of moral ability; the person

37. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 4, edited by C. C. Goen, *The Great Awakening* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1972), "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God" (213–288).

38. John H. Gerstner, "A Deterministic Model: Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of the Will" (a handout sheet used by Dr. Gerstner in his lectures on *Freedom of the Will*) A1.

simply (and wrongfully) does not want to be of help (156–162).

When this distinction is applied to man's responsibility to repent and turn to God, it is not that man does not have the natural ability to pray, to confess his sins, to seek God, and so forth. The problem is that fallen man does not desire to do this. As the apostle Paul writes: "There is none who seeks after God"; "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 3:11; 8:7–8). And in the words of Jesus Christ, men "loved the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). It is not so much, then, that men cannot "naturally" seek the light of the gospel; it is that they do not desire to do so, because they prefer to live in the darkness rather than in the light (Kistler, *Jonathan Edwards*, tape 3). Slavery to sin, then, leaves man without excuse, because his inability is moral, not natural.

Edwards also differentiates between "determinism" and "compulsion." As we have noted, according to the Westminster divines and Jonathan Edwards, every effect necessarily has a cause, and is therefore determined to occur. Since God has decreed all things that will ever take place (and therefore foreknows that they will occur), it is absolutely certain that they will take place. Nothing will ever change this necessity. This does not mean, however, that every event is a compelled event. There is a difference between a determined act and an act that takes place by compulsion. As stated by Ramsey, "free acts are uncompelled acts, not uncaused or undetermined acts" (37). These things being so, said the Puritan divine, theological determinism and moral necessity are not incompatible. Man is responsible before God to make moral choices, and he will be held accountable for the choices he makes (see, e.g., Matthew 12:36).

One of the places in Edwards' theology that we see this distinction between natural ability and inability and moral ability and inability most clearly, is in his doctrine of "seeking salvation." When the gospel is preached, some hearers are hardened by it and reject it outright. Others are convicted of their sin by the message and turn to Christ in faith and repentance for their salvation. But there are still others who are also convicted of their sin by the truth of God's Word, and are "awakened" to their "sottish" (i.e., lethargic) spiritual state. These sinners become aware of their desperate need for the Savior Jesus Christ, but they have not yet positively

responded to the call of the gospel. What are they able to do? Jonathan Edwards told them to seek their salvation. Although these persons are not "willing" to believe in the gospel and be saved, they do have the "natural" ability to prepare for it. John Gerstner explained:

Probably the most distinctive thing about Jonathan Edwards' evangelistic message is his theory of seeking. A natural man could do certain things (use the means of grace, obey the commandments of God outwardly, etc.) that would probably issue in his salvation. This theory falls between the Arminian, on the one hand, and the extreme Calvinist, on the other. According to the Arminian theory of salvation, the sinner was able of himself alone to repent, believe, and be saved: all without the working of regeneration having previously taken place. According to Calvinism, regeneration must precede such gracious acts as believing and repenting. When the message comes to the unconverted he has no ability to receive it savingly unless God, at the time the message is given, works faith in the person. He will then evince this regeneration by believing the gospel which is presented. But if God does not work faith, there is nothing, according to some Calvinists, that the sinner can do. At this point perhaps the Calvinist Edwards is distinctive (through certainly not among Puritans). He insists that there is something that the sinner can do; in that, he agrees with the Arminians. Still, he denies with vigor that the sinner can do what the Arminian thinks he can do. But at the same time he disagrees with those Calvinists who say there is nothing that the sinner can do. According to Edwards, he can do something non-saving but promising and hopeful: namely, seek.<sup>39</sup>

Edwards taught that apart from the gracious, salvific work of God in the sinner's heart, he would surely perish in his sin. But even though the sinner had no "moral" or "spiritual" ability to repent and believe the gospel, the "awakened" sinner, being under conviction of sin, and being aware of his spiritual condition and concerned about it, does have the natural ability to do those things which may lead to his salvation. The unregenerate man can and should go to church, where he will hear the Word of God preached. He can and should read the Bible. He can and should cry out to God for mercy. He can and should talk to his pastor and other Christians about his need for a Savior, asking them to pray for his salvation. None of these acts of "seeking" or preparation will merit the lost sinner anything before God. But God may use these to draw the sinner savingly to Christ (Gerstner, 71–88).

39. John H. Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: Evangelist* (Morgan, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995) 191–192.

## FREEDOM

Edwards defines freedom or liberty as the "power, opportunity, or advantage, that anyone has, to do as he pleases." The will, as defined by the Puritan divine, is the mind of the person choosing. And when the person is free from constraint, he possesses liberty. "The will itself is not an agent that has a will: the power of choosing, itself, has not a power of choosing. That which has the power of volition or choice is the man or the soul, and not the power of the volition itself." According to Edwards, it is the man who is free to choose; it is not the will that is free. "Let the person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, the man is fully and perfectly free" (163–164). The "proper question," then, "is not whether or not the will is free, but whether or not one wills freely."<sup>40</sup> As Holbrook explained, "to be prevented from carrying out an act of will because of some natural impediment and defect exterior to the will robs man of freedom and excuses him of guilt, but moral inability signifies lack of inclination to act and does not excuse" (Holbrook, *Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, 43–44).

Edwards concludes Part I by pointing out that Arminians and other antagonists "who oppose the Calvinists" have a different definition of liberty. As has been noted above, there are (at least) three elements which are added: 1) self-determination, wherein the will possesses a certain sovereignty over itself; 2) indifference, wherein the mind is viewed in a state of equilibrium prior to its choices; and 3) contingency, wherein it is asserted that there is an absence of all necessity in making choices, so that there is no fixity or connection between the choice and some prior reason of the choice being made (164–166). A goodly portion of the balance of the treatise is concerned with refuting these points.

## SUMMARY

So far we have seen that Jonathan Edwards believed that it is not possible for something to come to pass without a cause; every effect necessitates a cause, including every act of the human will. This means that every act of the will (which is the mind choosing) of man is caused by something. God, of course, is the eternal and ultimate First Cause of all things that ever occur, but He also brings about His purposes by means of secondary causes. The secondary cause for the will making a choice is the motive which appears to be most agreeable to the mind of the person at the time of his choice. The will is

as the greatest apparent good. The act of the will, then, is "necessarily" connected with the strongest motive as perceived by the mind. This is a moral necessity, and, unless compelled to make a choice (which is rare), man is held responsible for his choices, because the will is involved in the choices made. A man's freedom has to do with his doing as he pleases to do. In this, the Edwardian view, "a person is free to do what he wills; he enjoys freedom in the exercise of this liberty. But will, which is not its own cause, is determined by something outside and beyond itself."<sup>41</sup> The Arminian view, on the other hand, contends that for man to be free it must be self-determined or spontaneous, and/or indifferent, and/or contingent (See Storms, 148).

*Part II* (169–273) deals with the Arminian notion of freedom: "Wherein It is Considered Whether There is or Can be Any Such Sort of Freedom of Will, as That Wherein Arminians Place the Essence of the Liberty of All Moral Agents; and Whether Any Such Thing Ever Was or Can be Conceived of."

## THE SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE WILL

Jonathan Edwards begins his refutation of the Arminian view of freedom in Part II. In the Arminian view, the will of man is self-determined; it is the cause of its own choices. The cause must come solely from the will because the will must be self-determined. Nothing outside of the will determines the will. But for the will to determine itself is an act of the will. This being the case, what causes the will to "determine itself" must be a prior act of the will. The reason for this is that the will cannot produce its own choice as that would be an effect without a cause. Or said another way, if the will is actually "self-determined," then it would be at the same time both the cause (the "determiner") and the effect (that which is "determined"). This, of course, is a logical contradiction. So when asked what it is that caused the prior act of the will (since it cannot come from nothing), the only answer the Arminian is able to give is that it must have been another prior act of the will, and *ad infinitum*. This view reduces itself to logical absurdity, because there is no starting point to the actions of the will. If, on the other hand, we arrive at an act of the will which is not determined by a prior act of the will, then it would not be a "free" act (as per the Arminian view),

40. William J. Danaher, Jr., *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 161.

41. Harold P. Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) 119.

since it would not be self-determined (171–179). Conrad Cherry explained it this way:

The Arminian presupposition is that human freedom must consist in the will's determining itself when man acts. Edwards demonstrates on the Arminians' own ground that this way of conceiving human liberty contains a logical contradiction. For if the will freely determines itself in all its acts, then each act of will must be preceded by another free act. The chain of acts either leads *in infinitum* or stops with a first act which is not self-determined.<sup>42</sup>

And Storms commented that “the Arminian notion of freedom as self-determination either contradicts itself by positing an un-chosen choice, or shuts itself wholly out of the world by an infinite regress” (Storms, 149). In Edwards' own words:

If the will determines the will, then choice orders and determines the choice: and acts of choice are subject to the decision, and follow the conduct of other acts of choice. And therefore if the will determines all its own free acts, then every free act of choice is determined by a preceding act of choice, choosing that act. And if that preceding act of the will or choice be also a free act, then by these principles, in this act too, the will is self-determined; that is, this, in like manner, is an act that the soul voluntarily chooses; or which is the same thing, it is an act determined still by a preceding act of the will, choosing that. And the like may again be observed of the last mentioned act. Which brings us directly to a contradiction: for it supposes an act of the will preceding the first act in the whole train, directing and determining the rest; or a free act of the will, before the first free act of the will. Or else we must come at last to an act of the will, determining the consequent acts, wherein the will is not self-determined, and so is not a free act, in this [Arminian] notion of freedom: but if the first act in the train, determining and fixing the rest, be not free, none of them all can be free (172).

Edwards' conclusion is that “this Arminian notion of liberty of the will, consisting in the will's self-determination, is repugnant to itself, and shuts itself wholly out of the world” (174).

42. Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966, 1990) 190–191.

#### THE SPONTANEITY OF THE WILL

To “evade the force” of what has been just been observed (175), some Arminians opt for a form of spontaneity of the will, i.e., that the will acts without any cause at all; the acts of the will just spontaneously happen. Instead of asserting that the will is self-caused, this alternative suggestion is that the will is uncaused. This too involves a contradiction, for it is not possible for something to come from nothing; this is the principle of *ex nihilo nihil fit*. We have studied the Edwardsian view of causality above, and we noted how very important this is in his overall theological and philosophical dealings. It is very significant in the treatise presently under review and analysis. God alone is self-existent, eternally existing without a cause. Moreover, He is the eternal and ultimate First Cause of all things, yet He carries out His decreative will by means of second causes. As stated by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (5:2): “Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the First Cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly: yet, by the same providence, He orders them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes.” Hence, in the created universe, said Edwards, “nothing ever comes to pass without a cause” (181).

In another treatise, Edwards defined a cause as “that after, or upon the existence of which, or its existence in such a manner, the existence of another thing [necessarily] follows” (Edwards, *Works*, 6.352). Here, in a more philosophical way, he uses the word “cause”:

To signify any antecedent, either natural or moral, positive or negative, on which an event, either a thing, or the manner and circumstance of a thing, so depends, that it is the ground and reason, either in whole, or in part, why it is, rather than not; or why it is as it is, rather than otherwise; or in other words, any antecedent with which a consequent event is so connected, that it truly belongs to the reason why the proposition which affirms that event, is true; whether it has any positive influence or not. And in agreeableness to this, I sometimes use the word “effect” for the consequence of another thing, which is perhaps rather an occasion than a cause, most properly speaking (180–181).

Then in an *ad hominem* apologetical fashion, Edwards points out that if it were possible for things to come into existence without a cause, then the teaching of Paul in Romans 1:20 (“The invisible things of Him [God], from the creation of the world, are clearly seen; being understood by the things that are made; even

His eternal power and Godhead"), that God's created order gives us clear evidence of His eternal Godhead, would be rendered vacuous. If one temporal thing can come about without a cause, then there would be no reason to doubt that millions of such uncaused events could occur. Perhaps the whole universe could be an uncaused event. There would be no genuine evidence from general revelation for the Creator God. It is important to understand here that Edwards' "primary purpose" in this argument, "is to base cause on the commonly accepted knowledge of God, not ... to base the knowledge of God upon cause." In other words, his argument is a reasoning "from" special revelation, not from pure reason.<sup>43</sup>

Second, Edwards asserts that such an untenable view of spontaneity would lead to a form of solipsism, i.e., we would have no reason to believe that anything exists outside of our own minds. Finally, if the will of man acts spontaneously, and thus independently of man, how can the man be held responsible for his actions? There would be no act that could rationally be considered praiseworthy or blameworthy. The inconsistencies involved in this theory are legion (180–194).

#### THE INDIFFERENCE OF THE WILL

The indifference of the will of man is another necessary part of the Arminian view of freedom. The thought here is that for the will to be free, it must be completely indifferent when it makes its choices. This again is a logical absurdity. It is irrational to contend that one is able to make a choice without a prevailing motive. What this would mean is that the mind would have a "preference, at the same time that it has no preference." It is impossible to conceive of a situation wherein "the mind is indifferent before it comes to have a choice, or till it has a preference; which is the same thing, that the mind is indifferent until it comes to be not indifferent." To make a choice, one must prefer one thing above another, or one could not ever choose one thing rather than another. "The very act of choosing one thing rather than another, is preferring that thing, and that is setting a higher value on that thing." To suppose "the will to act at all in a state of perfect indifference, or to do anything else, is to assert that the mind chooses without choosing. To say that when it is indifferent, it can do as it pleases, is to say that it can follow its pleasure, when it has no pleasure to follow." Indeed, "choice and preference can no more be in a state of indifference, than motion can be in a state of rest." The Arminian theory here, as elsewhere,

is "full of nothing but absurdity and self-contradiction" (196–198, 207, 212).

#### THE CONTINGENCY OF THE WILL

We have noted that the Arminian notion of libertarianism contends that no act of the will is necessary. All such actions, therefore, must be contingent events; they may occur or they may not occur, but they certainly do not "necessarily occur. The Edwardsian response (as found also in the Westminster Standards) is that all effects necessitate a cause. No event, such as an act of the will (an effect) can possibly occur without a cause. This being so, the acts of the will cannot ever be contingent (213–216).

Moreover, as also studied above, every act of the will, every choice or refusal, is necessarily connected to an antecedent cause, which is not the will itself, but is a choice of the mind. The will is the mind choosing. And the (secondary) cause in every act of the will is the strongest motive. The will of man is governed by the cause of the greatest apparent good. Again we see that the actions of the will are not contingent (217–238).

Finally, Jonathan Edwards (and the Westminster theologians) taught that God comprehensively and immutably foreknows all things that will ever occur. This necessarily includes every human choice. God "has a certain and infallible prescience of the acts of the will of moral agents" (257). It is not possible, however, to foreknow something that is contingent; future contingencies cannot be "foreknown." "What a contradiction is this," wrote Edwards, "to say that God knows a thing will come to pass, and yet at the same time knows that it is contingent whether it will or no!"<sup>44</sup>

Since God's knowledge of the future is comprehensive and immutable (thereby rendering the future certain), then no future event, including every human choice, can possibly be contingent. At the same time, we must insist that because God foreordains all events to fall out by means of secondary causes (to include human acts of the will), the foreknowledge of God and human responsibility can be in perfect accord. On the other hand, however, comprehensive divine foreknowledge and contingency are unable to coexist. (239–269). Edwards draws the following conclusion:

43. Josh Moody, *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment* (New York: University Press of America, 2005) 126, 121.

44. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 13, edited by Thomas A. Schafer, *The "Miscellanies" a-500* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), *Miscellany* 16.

On the whole, I need not fear to say, that there is no geometrical theorem or proposition whatsoever, more capable of strict demonstration, than that of God's certain prescience of the volitions of moral agents is inconsistent with such a contingency of these events, as is without all necessity; and so is inconsistent with the Arminian notion of liberty (268–269).

John Gerstner summarized Edwards' assertions in Part II follows:

In essence, he [Edwards] shows that if choice is by "self-determination," from a state of "indifference," in a "contingent" of uncaused sequence ... then, choice would never occur. Self-determination would preclude means; indifference would preclude means; and, contingency would preclude means. There could be no means to influence choice and there could be no choice (Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology*, 2.180).

**Part III** (275–333) is on freedom and moral responsibility: "Wherein is Inquired, Whether Any Such Liberty of Will as Arminians Hold, be Necessary to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Praise, and Dispraise, etc."

The Arminians contend that the deterministic view espoused by Edwards and the Westminster divines disallows the concept of responsibility. Necessary actions, it is alleged, cannot be praiseworthy or blameworthy. But this is not so. First, as even the Arminians admit, God is necessarily holy; He cannot sin. "God is necessarily a good and gracious Being ... it is impossible but that God should do good." Does this mean that He is not worthy of our praise? On the contrary, "He is worthy of our supreme benevolence for His virtue." He "deserves to be thanked and praised for His goodness" (280). The necessity of God's doing good in no way alters His praiseworthiness. Herein "is *prima facie* evidence that necessity is not inconsistent with morality" (Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology*, 2.27).

Second, in His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ was necessarily obedient to every jot and tittle of the law of God. He was "necessarily holy," while at the same time He was "truly virtuous" (281). The impeccability of Christ was decreed by God before the creation of the world; then, it was prophesied in the Old Testament: He was to live a perfectly obedient life and die an atoning death. These things were necessary to occur because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Then too, God promised the Virgin Mary

that her Son would be the recipient of a kingdom that would never end, and He gave Him the Spirit without measure to carry out His task. Further, the hypostatic union that exists between the divine *Logos* and the human nature of Jesus Christ guarantees the impeccability of the Son of God.<sup>45</sup> All of these reasons (and more) assure us that it was "necessary" for Jesus Christ to be without sin, to be perfectly holy; He could not be otherwise. Yet, He was "truly virtuous," and worthy "to be praised" (281–294).

Third, if the Arminian belief that actions that are necessary are not worthy of praise or blame is true (which it is not), then those whom God has hardened so that they will necessarily sin (Psalm 81:12; Acts 7:42; Romans 1:24) would be found excusable. But this is unimaginable because God has told us in His Word that they are culpable even though He has hardened their hearts (295–301).

Fourth, the Arminian view of free will avers that if the Calvinist is correct that all acts are necessary, then the use of commands and prohibitions would be rendered meaningless. Edwards suggests that it is really the Arminian notion that destroys the use of commands and prohibitions. First, there is the problem of a self-determined will. The Arminian "notion of the freedom of the will consisting in the soul's determining its own acts of will, instead of being essential to moral agency, and to men's being the subjects of moral government, is utterly inconsistent with it. For if the soul determines all its acts of will, it is therein subject to no command or moral government." In actuality it is "the Arminian scheme, and not the scheme of the Calvinists, that is utterly inconsistent with moral government, and with all use of laws, precepts, prohibitions, promises, or threatenings" (303–304).

The same is true of the Arminian view of contingency or spontaneity, because laws are of no use to a will that acts by "perfect accident." When a person's choosing is determined by nothing but "chance," apart from "any cause or rule," then commands are useless (304). Further, the notion that the will is indifferent, in a state of equilibrium, without any previous bias or prior inclination to choose one thing over another, is just as useless when it comes to the use of commands and prohibitions. What virtue could there in an act wherein a person acts in obedience to a command when he is in a state of indifference (which is actually impossible) to his actions? "What dignity or privilege is there," asks Edwards (rhetorically), "in being given up to such a wild contingency as this, to be perfectly and constantly liable to act unintelligibly and unreasonably, and as much without

45. See also Edwards, *Sermon on John 14:2*, cited in Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 2.414.

the guidance of understanding, as if we had none, or were as destitute of perception as the smoke is driven by the wind!" (273). Scripture commands us to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. How can a heart that allegedly seeks to fulfill these commands from a state of total apathy or contingency be considered virtuous? This view of indifference would even have to claim that Jesus Christ Himself made choices from a state of indifference, even the thought of which is repugnant (320–327). As Storms explains, "the demand for indifference and self-determination precludes responsibility, for there can be then no virtue in such habits as humility, love, meekness, patience, or any preponderance to good" (Storms, 159).

Edwards concludes Part III as follows:

By these things it appears, that the argument against the Calvinists, taken from the use of counsels, exhortations, invitations, expostulations, etc., so much insisted on by Arminians, is truly against themselves. For these things can operate no other way to any good effect, than as in them is exhibited motive and inducement, tending to excite and determine the acts of the will (331).

John Gerstner, the following summarizes Edwards' teaching in Part III:

Again it is shown that self-determination admits of no moral means; indifference admits of no moral means; and contingency admits of no moral means. On this view there can be no choice; especially no moral choice. So far from "free will" being necessary to virtue it necessarily makes virtue impossible.... If, on the other hand, motives necessarily move the will [as in the Edwardsian "deterministic" view], means are vindicated as the fuel for all our psychological machinery. Causality, the very foundation of all necessitarianism, is the connective tissue of the web of existence (Gerstner, *Rational Biblical Theology*, 2.180).

Edwards hereby vindicated means and human responsibility in his system of theological determinism.

*Part IV* (335–429) has to do with the consideration for the reasons for self-determination: "Wherein the Chief Grounds of the Reasonings of Arminians, in Support and Defense of the Fore-mentioned Notions of Liberty, Moral Agency, etc. and Against the Opposite Doctrine, are Considered."

In this section Edwards rebuts Arminian libertarianism as he states and further argues that the doctrine of

"necessity" as expounded by the Calvinists is in perfect accord with human responsibility. On the one hand, there is a difference between natural necessity and moral necessity. The former has to do with a necessity of compulsion. Here the "will is compelled to make a choice by a force external to the will." In such cases, the person is not blameworthy (Gerstner, "A Deterministic Model," A1). But moral necessity (which is the view the Calvinists are asserting) has to do with those choices where there is no compulsion involved. The person freely chooses that which he desires to choose. The Arminians have confused this distinction, and therein is their error (337–364).

On the other hand, the Arminian objection has to do with a truncated understanding of the nature of human depravity. In the biblical view, as espoused by the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (9:3):

Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.

In Edwards' words, in this state of total depravity "men are naturally God's enemies" (Hickman, 2.134). Their "depravity is both odious, and also pernicious, fatal and destructive." Man "as he is by nature, is in a deplorable and undone state." He is "truly ruined and undone." He is "corrupt, miserable, and helpless," in a state of "spiritual death" (Edwards, *Works*, 3.129, 258). And when it comes to his free choices, the problem with fallen man is that "his heart [is] wrong." This individual "does as he pleases," but what he pleases is wrong because he has a wrong heart; "there is something bad in himself...he has a bad disposition." Nevertheless, the person is blameworthy because he freely chooses to do wrong from his sinful heart. That is to say that he is to blame for it because his will is in the choice; it is a choice that he willingly makes. "When a thing is from a man, in that sense, that it is from his will or choice, he is to blame for it, because his will is in it," and "so far as the will is in it, blame is in it, and no further" (357, 427).<sup>46</sup> Therefore,

If a man is not restrained from acting as his will determines, or constrained to act otherwise; then he has liberty, according to common notions of liberty, without

46. See Storms, "Jonathan Edwards on Freedom of the Will," 161; and Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, 192.

taking into the idea that grand contradiction of all the determinations of a man's free will being the effects of the determinations of his free will.... He that in acting, proceeds with the fullest inclination, does what he does with the greatest freedom, according to common sense [rational thinking] (359).

Finally in Part IV, we come to the objection that so many have leveled against the Calvinist teaching of "theological determinism," which is that if the Calvinist view is correct, then God must be the author of sin. We have addressed this subject above, but we need to review it again. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (5:4) teaches that:

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extends itself even to the first Fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be, the author or approver of sin.

This is the Edwardsian view as well. Edwards states it this way:

They who object, that this doctrine makes God the author of sin, ought distinctly to explain what they mean by that phrase "the author of sin." I know, the phrase, as it is commonly used, signifies something very ill. If by "the author of sin," be meant the sinner, the agent, or actor of sin, or the doer of a wicked thing; so it would be a reproach and blasphemy, to suppose God to be the author of sin. In this case, I utterly deny God to be the author of sin; rejecting such an imputation on the most High, as what is infinitely to be abhorred; and deny any such thing to be the consequence of what I have laid down. But if by "the author of sin," is meant the permitter, or not the hinderer, of sin; and at the same time, a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy, and most excellent ends and purposes, that sin, if it be permitted or not hindered, will most

certainly and infallibly follow: I say, if this be all that is meant, by being the author of sin, I don't deny that God is the author of sin (though I dislike and reject the phrase, as that which by use and custom is apt to carry another sense), it is no reproach for the most High to be thus the author of sin. This is not to be the actor of sin, but on the contrary, of holiness. What God does herein, is holy; and a glorious exercise of the infinite excellency of His nature. And I don't deny, that God's being thus the author of sin, follows from what I have laid down (399).

The omni-benevolent triune God of Scripture cannot sin; neither can He be the author or approver of sin (397-419). Edwards lists numerous biblical passages where God is clearly shown to be the "permitter, or not the hinderer, of sin." He lists (among others) Exodus 4:21; 7:2-5; 9:12; 10:1-2; 14:4; Genesis 45:5-8; Psalm 105:17; Deuteronomy 2:30; Joshua 11:20; etc. (400-403). As to God, in these cases, not being "the actor of sin, but on the contrary, of holiness," God is decreeing and using the sinful actions of men to bring about a greater good: the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, wherein God will receive all of the glory. In the Edwardsian view, not only is the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q. 1) correct when it teaches us that "man's chief end to is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever," but it is also the case that God's chief end is "to glorify Himself, and to enjoy Himself forever" (Kistler, *Jonathan Edwards*, tapes 2 and 6); and in this case in the redemption of fallen elect creatures through Jesus Christ. Edwards developed this thesis more fully in his *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*. There, as stated by Piper, Edwards convincingly argues that God created the world, "first, that the glory of God might be magnified in the universe, and second, that Christ's ransomed people [the elect] from all times and all nations would rejoice in God above all things. And ultimately, these "two great passions" of God "are not at odds," but are really one.<sup>47</sup> In Edwards own words:

Thus we see that the great and last [or ultimate] end of God's works which is so variously expressed in Scripture, is indeed but one; and this one end is most properly and comprehensively called, "the glory of God"; by which name it is most commonly called in Scripture.... What has been said may be sufficient to show how those things, which are spoken of in Scripture as ultimate ends of God's works, though they may seem at first view to be distinct, all are plainly to be reduced to this one thing, viz. God's internal glory or fullness extant externally, or

47. Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 31, 33. Jonathan Edwards Jr. also stated that his father's concept of the chief end of God as His own glory and the good of elect sinners are "both [the] ultimate end of the creation, that they are only one end, and that they are really one and the same thing." See Hickman, 1.cxcii.

existing in its emanation. And though God in seeking this end, seeks the creature's good; yet therein appears His supreme regard to Himself.... The emanation or communication of the divine fullness, consisting in the knowledge of God, love to God, and joy in God, has relation indeed both to God and the creature: but it has relation to God as its fountain, as it is an emanation from God; and as the communication itself, or thing communicated, is something divine, something of God, something of His internal fullness; as the water in the stream is something of the fountain; and as the beams are of the sun. And again, they have relation to God as they have respect to Him as their object: for the knowledge communicated is the knowledge of God; and so God is the object of the knowledge; and the love communicated, is the love of God; so God is the object of that love: and the happiness communicated, is joy in God; and so He is the object of the joy communicated. In the creature's knowing, esteeming, loving, rejoicing in, and praising God, the glory of God is both exhibited and acknowledged; His fullness is received and returned. Here is both an emanation and remanation. The refulgence shines upon and into the creature, and is reflected back to the luminary. The beams of glory come from God, and are something of God, and are refunded back again to their original. So that the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and God is the beginning, middle, and end of this affair (*Works*, 8.530–531).

The Fall was necessary for this to be accomplished. Therefore, as God sovereignly decreed that the Fall occur, and then providentially brought it about, He was working all things together for a greater good, the glorification of Himself through the salvation of elect sinners.

Finally we come to the *Conclusion* (430–439). Above we saw that Jonathan Edwards believed that if the Arminian view of libertarianism were true (which it is not), it would destroy the Christian faith; it would undermine the great teachings of biblically based Calvinism, especially in the realm of soteriology. He wrote:

I stand ready to confess to the fore-mentioned modern [Arminian] divines, if they can maintain their peculiar notion of freedom, consisting in the self-determining power of the will, as necessary to moral agency, and can thoroughly establish it in opposition to the arguments lying against it, then they have an impregnable castle, to which they may repair, and remain invincible, in all controversies they have with the Reformed divines,

concerning original sin, the sovereignty of grace, election, redemption, conversion, the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, the nature of saving faith, perseverance of the saints, and other principles of the like kind (*Works*, 3.376).

Therefore, in the concluding pages of this volume, Edwards defends the "five points" of Calvinism, designated by the acrostic "TULIP": Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints.<sup>48</sup> Conrad Cherry explains the significance of this:

Edwards intended his *Freedom of the Will* to silence Arminian objections against the Five Points of the Calvinist Synod of Dort – objections against the total depravity of man, efficacious grace, the sovereign freedom of God's electing certain men to salvation, the limited atonement, and the perseverance of the saints. All five of Dort's points were claimed by Edwards as necessary defenses of God's power and glory in the salvation of man and as necessary means of preventing the ascription of power and glory to man instead. Man is totally corrupt and incapable of extricating himself from sin; the grace which does save him is given freely by the electing God through the "limited" atonement (i.e., limited to elected saints); and this efficacious grace alone is sufficient for man's perseverance in faith (Cherry, 189–190).

Was Edwards successful in his endeavor? As already noted, B. B. Warfield believed that Edwards work postponed the threat of Arminianism for about a century. But perhaps Samuel Storm's comments, with which the present writer is in agreement, come to the heart of the matter:

If there is one thing Edwards' treatise has proven ... it is that if man is to be saved it must be by a sovereign and miraculous work of grace. The doctrines of human inability, necessity, and constitutional depravity are not mere scholastic distinctions, but vocal testimony that salvation, if it is to be at all, must be of the Lord (Storms, 169).

*Continued on Page 302.*

48. For more on the "five points" of Calvinism, see David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 2004). See also Kenneth G. Talbot and W. Gary Crampton, *Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism, and Arminianism* (Draper, Va.: The Apologetics Group, [1990] 2006).

**John Calvin, the Nascent Sabbatarian, Continued from Page 14.**

Sabbath almost disappears from recorded Christian practice after Christ's resurrection," and that furthermore, "the indirect evidence is very strong, and shows not merely that the Lord's Day was kept by Jewish Christians, but that it originated with them," for it is likely "that the church in Palestine *originally* observed both the Sabbath and the Lord's Day."<sup>45</sup>

In short, Calvin's understanding of the biblical doctrine of the Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath, while off slightly due largely to an exegetical error, and (understandably) not so well developed as that of his Puritan successors, is in sufficient agreement with them on the central issues that he is certainly not 'non-sabbatarian' as some have suggested. In fact, one may justly categorize Calvin together with later sabbatarians; the term 'nascent sabbatarian' would seem most appropriate. ■

**Edwards' Freedom of the Will, Continued from Page 103.**

The present author concludes this review and analysis of *Freedom of the Will* by turning to the advice that Martyn Lloyd-Jones once gave to a man seeking to learn more about the doctrines of the Christian faith. Said Lloyd-Jones: "My advice to you is: Read Jonathan Edwards.... Read this man. Decide to do so. Read his sermons; read his practical treatises, and then go on to the great discourses on theological subjects."<sup>49</sup> Better advice could hardly be given. If one wants to know about the Christian faith in its richest Calvinistic form, he could do no better than beginning by reading Jonathan Edwards.

Soli Deo Gloria. ■

45. Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfrid Stott, *This is the Day: The Biblical Doctrine of the Christian Sunday in its Jewish and Early Church Setting* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott: 1978) 30–32.

49. From D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival," as cited in Justin Taylor, "Reading Jonathan Edwards: Objections and Recommendations," *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004) 269.

33. *Minutes of Session of the Zion Presbyterian Church, Glebe Street, August 15, 1869*, PHS. An announcement of the events of Sunday evening August 15, 1869 was published in the *Southern Presbyterian and Index*, nd., available on Microfilm #160, SCL.

34. Girardeau was elected Professor of Didactic and Polemic Theology in the Columbia Theological Seminary in 1875 and remained in that chair until 1893 when his failing health forced his retirement. He died a peaceful death in Columbia on June 23, 1898 and lies awaiting the resurrection of the body in Columbia's Elmwood Cemetery.

**Presbyterians in the South and the Slave, Continued from Page 222.**

Zion Session, the following Freedmen were nominated to serve in the office of Ruling Elder—Paul Trescot, William Price, Jacky Morrison, Samuel Robinson, William Spencer, and John Warren. On "Sabbath August 15, 1869, 8 ½ P.M." the congregation of Zion Presbyterian Church (Colored) met for worship and the ordination and installation of their Ruling Elders. Girardeau chose for his text on this occasion Acts 14:23—"And when they had appointed for them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting ... they commended them to the Lord." The records tell us, "Session did then with prayer and the imposition of their hands ordain the persons ... and install them in the same." Thus, Zion became the first Southern church governed by black elders.<sup>33</sup> Girardeau had done what Dabney and a host of other Southern churchmen would not consider doing. He had admitted that black men could be qualified to rule in the church. He had exhibited his approbation by participating in the holy service, even the laying on of hands. What Dabney and others doubted possible, Girardeau confirmed as real.

Sadly, Girardeau's experiment did not gain prominence in the Southern Church. In 1874, the Presbyterian Church US, under political and social pressures from within and without, voted to segregate their communion into black and white churches. Girardeau opposed the move, lost the vote, and lost his beloved Zion.<sup>34</sup> Within a few short years many black Presbyterians across the South affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA, leaving the Presbyterian Church US.

## CONCLUSION

All human weaknesses aside, the heritage of Davies, Jones, Adger, Smyth, and Girardeau is a good one. Their sacrificial labors could and should serve as a model for many today. Our elders and deacons should adopt a paternalistic model toward the precious sheep entrusted to them by our heavenly Father. A great sensitivity and shepherd like service would follow. The men we have considered loved their black brothers and gave themselves to the good work even in the face of social, political, and ecclesiastical difficulties. No doubt there are many rejoicing in the presence of our LORD today because of the loving ministries of these men and countless others like them. ■

**Seminary Education, Continued from Page 230.**

Catechisms as the guide to the survey. Readings are required in Calvin's Institutes as well as catechism memorization" (Greenville Catalogue).

Third, we seek to teach all doctrine courses exegetically. But when the truth has been established from Scripture, we use the summary found in the Standards.