

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF
FAITH
IX. OF FREE WILL

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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I. MAN'S FREE WILL

God hath 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.

I. MAN'S FREE WILL

- Pre-enlightenment view of free will (i.e. not autonomy).
 - The Confession having already taught unconditional election and total depravity, confirms that man remains a responsible moral agent (Dt. 30:19; Jos. 15:24; Ja. 4:7).
 - The Confessions teaching here is true for all the states of man.
- “Natural Liberty”
 - We have freedom to make decisions, we do choose, and our choices have consequences.
- Not “forced” or determined “by any absolute necessity of nature.”
 - “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” (R. Shaw).
- Man therefore is fully responsible for his choices and actions because he freely willed them.
- We do, however, have powerful influences acting on and in us:
 - Upbringing and moral environment
 - Temptation and/or oppression
 - Sinful corruption of our nature.

THE FOURFOLD STATE OF MAN

State of
Existence:

Man Created

Man Fallen in Sin

Man Regenerated

Man Glorified

Moral/Spiritual
State:

Able to Sin

Not Able Not to Sin

Able Not to Sin

Not Able to Sin

Augustine:

Posse Pecarre

Non Posse non Pecarre

Posse non Pecarre

Non Posse Pecarre

2. THE STATE OF INNOCENCY

Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it.

- Note that pre-fall Adam had not only “freedom” but also “power” to will the good.
 - Adam was *able* not to sin; “God made man upright” (Eccl. 7:29).
 - For this reason, sin can never be traced back to man’s created condition.
- He was, however, able to fall from his righteous state by willing to sin.
- How a righteous person could will to sin is a mystery; however, the role of temptation and beguilement is highlighted in Scripture.
- “In the state of innocence, the natural inclination of man’s will was only to good; but it was liable to change through the power of temptation” (Shaw).

3. MAN IN HIS FALLEN STATE

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

3. MAN IN HIS FALLEN STATE

- Man's fallen state is called *total depravity*.
 - Total depravity argues against a limited depravity in which fallen men and women are able to will the good. Fallen man is *not able* to:
 - Submit to God's law (Rom. 8:7).
 - Please God (Rom. 8:8).
 - Understand spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14).
 - Come to Christ (Jn. 6:44).
- Pelagianism: man is fully capable to will the spiritually good
- Arminianism (semi-Pelagianism): man is hindered by sin from willing the spiritually good and therefore needs grace to assist him. Conversion is with grace but by the free will choice of the sinner.
- Calvinism: man is wholly unable to will the spiritually good, relying wholly on sovereign grace to convey life and change the will (Eze. 36:26-27; Acts 16:14; 1 Thess. 1:5).
- This spiritual inability is not externally constrained, nor does it lack true opportunity, but reflects the inability of the fallen nature (Eph. 2:1).
- Our view of man in sin will exercise a dramatic influence on our approach to evangelism and ministry.

4. THE STATE OF GRACE

When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but both also will that which is evil.

4. THE STATE OF GRACE

- Conversion is a *deliverance* for the power and rule of sin
 - “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14).
- Conversion involves a *regeneration* of our natures
 - “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).
 - “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11).
- This conversion is by grace alone: “You must be born from above” (Jn. 3:3); it is a spiritual resurrection (Eph. 2:4).
- Yet we retain the old sinful inclinations, habits, and desires, plus temptations: we *can* continue in sin.
 - We therefore must contend with our sinful natures (Eph. 4:21-24). We not only *should* not sin, but we *need* not sin. Still we *do* sin (Rom. 7:15-20).
- Christians in the state of grace are not yet perfect: we do not obey *only* and we never obey *perfectly* (Phil. 3:12).

5. THE STATE OF GLORY

The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone, in the state of glory only.

- Our entry into glory involves a final sanctification of our nature.
 - “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, . . . And to the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb. 21:22-23).
 - “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2).
- This glorification is Christ’s completion of his work done here below
 - “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy” (Jude 24).
- In glory, we attain to our highest freedom, unhindered by either sinful desire or temptation, and willing only that which is good and to God’s glory.