

1. **Introduction:** The relationship assumed between the "human will" and the "Sovereignty of God" is key to understanding many theological differences.
 - The human "will" is considered to be the mental faculty by which we deliberately make choices. How does that work?
 - Is the "will" an independent decision maker, or do other mental faculties like the intellect and emotions get involved? Should people be held accountable for their choices? If so, always accountable, or only under some circumstances?
 - Arminianism and Calvinism each have one key presupposition considered to be "absolute." For Arminianism, the absolute presupposition is "libertarian free will."
 - For Calvinism, the absolute presupposition is "God's sovereignty."
 - For Arminianism that means all other presuppositions, interpretations of Scripture, and conclusions must be consistent with "libertarian free will."
 - For Calvinism, that means all other presuppositions, interpretations of Scripture, and conclusions must be consistent with "God's sovereignty."
2. **Making Decisions:** The different presuppositions mean Arminians and Calvinists hold to different beliefs about the way the human decision-making process works and about the requirement necessary to be accountable for decisions.
 - Most Arminians hold that a person can only be held accountable for decisions if the "will" is "free." That usually means the will is considered an independent neutral faculty making choices autonomously – free from prejudice, inclinations, and disposition (libertarian free will).
 - If the will were truly free in that sense, choices would be arbitrary, made literally for "no reason." As R.C. Sproul points out in **Chosen by God** (p. 51), such reasonless choices would have no motive and no moral significance.
 - From experience our "decision-making process" seems to be affected by our intellect and affections, what we think and what we feel.
 - Regarding accountability, a better fit to reality seems to be holding people accountable for choices made without external compulsions and in accordance with their own desires and inclinations.
3. **Free Will:** Jonathan Edwards book **On the Freedom of the Will** (1754) presents that case. His view is that the human will functions like a balance scale weighing inclinations and desires for and against the choice being considered.
 - The intellect and affections together produce inclinations, and the will responds by choosing according to the strongest inclination at the instant of decision.
 - Willpower refers to a sustained ability of the mind and emotions to produce adequate, pertinent inclinations to be weighed by the will.

- Willpower then does not mean the will is a powerful independent decision maker
 - Edwards distinguishes between “natural” and “moral” ability of freedom. Natural ability refers to the underlying ability to make choices. Moral ability refers to the specific ability to choose between good and evil.
 - Since every choice is determined by the greatest inclination at the instant of choice, the ability to make righteous choices requires righteous inclinations.
 - According to Scripture, righteous inclinations is just what fallen people lack.
 - Fallen people retain the necessary natural equipment to make choices but have lost the moral disposition or inclination to righteousness. They have freedom to choose what they want, but they have no desire or “want” for true righteousness.
 - Regeneration changes that picture by restoring the inclination to be righteous.
 - John Calvin in **Institutes of the Christian Religion** (2:7) says, *“In this way then, man is to have free will, not because he has a free choice of good and evil, but because he acts voluntarily, and not by compulsion.”*
 - Edwards says “free will” means being able to make choices according to one’s own desires and inclinations. External coercion might sharply reduce options but can never eliminate all choice.
 - Even the threat of immediate death if we fail to do what someone demands leaves a choice to be made. Christians have faced the choice of death or recanting and have died horrible deaths rather than refuse to acknowledge their Lord.
4. **The Whole Mind Choosing**: In thinking about the mind, it is useful to distinguish between the faculties of understanding (intellect), emotion (affections), and choice (will). It is often thought that each faculty operates independently.
- The intellect does its thing, the affections contribute, and the will determines what we do. However, with a little reflection, we recognize these faculties do not and cannot operate independently.
 - Edwards uses the expression the “mind choosing.” He meant the inclinations that determine choice, as well as the actual choice, are shaped by the whole mind.
 - The intellect, emotions, and will interact to produce the inclinations used in choosing. The whole inner person is what Scripture refers to as the “heart.”
 - From experience, we know the “understanding” and “affections” interact. Anger can cause us to “fly off the handle.” Jealousy can cause us to imagine faults that have no basis in fact. Strong emotions can cause us to lose rational focus.
 - Yet, some emotions focus and sharpen our thoughts.
 - Fear can dramatically focus our mind by driving out all thoughts except those having to do immediate survival. On the other side of that coin, rational thoughts can powerfully stimulate the emotions. Thinking about a beautiful women can stir up a man’s lust.
 - Patriotic thoughts can bring tears to our eyes.

- A beautiful poem about home can cause intense yearning. Thoughts about a wrong done to us can stir up hot anger.
 - Emotions affect thoughts and thoughts affect emotions. Inclinations and desires that determine choices arise from thoughts and emotions.
5. **Concept of Strength of Will:** The ability to make choices is often considered to be a matter of “strength of will.” We might say, “He has a weak will and just can’t resist temptation.”
- Or, if we face a tough decision, we may think Somehow, I’ve got to find strength of “will” to make this decision. Thinking in terms of strength or weakness of the will confuses the issue. It is strength of inclination that is the determiner.
 - According to Edwards, we should think of the will as a faculty that weighs desires and inclinations like a balance scale for inclinations. The outcome is always determined by the strongest inclination at the instant of choice.
 - While the will is the immediate cause of all action, it is not the primary cause of any action. The intellect and affections regulate decisions and are in turn affected by a variety of influences including, for a believer, the indwelling Holy Spirit.
6. **A Choice Rejects Some Things and Accepts Others:** Distinctions (such as good or bad, bad or worse, good or better) between alternatives must be present in the mind before there can be a choice.
- Every act of choosing is an expression of preference – the desiring of one thing more than others. Where there is no preference, where there is only complete indifference, there can be no volition, no choice.
 - “To will” means “to choose” and “to choose” means to pick one alternative over others. In choosing there is always something that influences the choice.
 - Human choices are freely made when the influences and inclinations driving the choice come from within – unforced self-choice being the key.
7. **The “Will” is Not an Independent Self-determining Agent:** Acts of the will do not come to pass of themselves. Choices are not independent of the influence of the understanding and affections. The will does not generate inclinations.
- In a very real sense, the will is a servant of the understanding and affections.
 - To think that the will chooses one thing in preference to another, while the understanding and affections are in a state of complete indifference, seems to be contradictory. Yet, that seems often to be what is meant by “free will.”
 - The free-will assumption usually means the will choosing as it pleases, acting as an independent agent, receiving no information from other faculties.
 - I think that view is erroneous and is probably the greatest obstacle to understanding how predestination and human accountability are both true.
8. **Summary:** Choices are determined by inclinations (understanding) and desires (affections). The strongest inclination at instant of choice determines the choice.

- The strongest inclination is determined by a combination of influences that arise in the understanding and emotions. The strongest inclination can bounce around until that critical instant when the decision is made.
9. **Augustine's Four States of the Human Will**: The four states are described in terms of the ability to sin or to not sin.
- (1.) **Able to not sin (Original uprightness)**: This was the state of Adam and Eve's will before their disobedience. In their original pure and upright state, they possessed the ability to "not sin" but mutable so.
 - That is, they were able to make righteous choices but also had the ability to make unrighteous choices. But to make an unrighteous choice, there had to be unrighteous inclinations even though they didn't recognize them as such.
 - Their time of "probation" in the Garden ended when they choose to disobey God. By their bad decision, they plunged themselves and all future humans into moral ruin, since the consequences of their sin was passed on to all their progeny.
 - The fall of human nature into a morally corrupt state caused them to lose the ability to make righteous decisions (i.e., the right decision for the right reasons).
 - (2.) **Not able to not sin (fallen moral degeneration)**: Unless God regenerates them, the Fall caused Adam and Eve and all their progeny to lack the ability "to not sin." In the fallen moral state, there is no inclination to do the righteous thing for righteous reasons.
 - (3.) **Able to not sin but also able to sin (regenerated moral nature with a reduced sin nature)**: This is the state of the will of regenerated people who have been justified and are being sanctified. When God regenerates a person's spiritual heart, the ability to have righteous inclinations is restored through transformation of their mind, enabling them to make righteous decisions.
 - There continues to be a lingering sin nature that battles the newly regenerated nature causing conflicting inclinations, all of which are weighed by the will.
 - A regenerated person will on occasion sin, but, as their mind is progressively transformed in the process of sanctification, the tendency to sin declines.
 - Sin by a regenerated person causes anguish that leads to confession, repentance, and forgiveness. Sin is finally eliminated when the believer is glorified.
 - (4.) **Not able to sin (glorified – all sinful inclinations eliminated)**: This is the state of the will in glory and is realized when the redeemed person dies mortally and gloriously transformed into a moral likeness of Christ. The glorified person has no unrighteous inclination whatsoever, no temptation, and is unable to sin.
10. **God's Will**
- God is sovereign in all things. Theologians discuss three aspects of God's will.

- (1.) **God's sovereign or decretive will** by which God brings to pass whatsoever He decrees. In general, this aspect of God's will is hidden until it is executed. WE cannot change or violate God's sovereign will.
 - (2.) **God's preceptive or moral will** consisting of His revealed law or rules of conduct. We have the power to break this aspect of God's will, but not the right.
 - 3.) **God's will of disposition** describes God's attitude or disposition. It reveals what is pleasing to Him. We have the power but not the right of displeasing Him.
 - Scripture refers to all 3 forms of God's will. Confusing which one is intended leads to misinterpretation of what God intends.
11. **Summary of Arminianism & Calvinism:** Arminianism began within the Dutch Reformed Church, early in 1600's as a reaction to some parts of Calvin's teaching about the doctrine of salvation. Jacob Arminius was first to desire change.
- There were two non-negotiable presuppositions, one held by each side, that form the hinge on which the doctrinal differences turn. The presuppositions affect the way Scripture is interpreted and how the biblical doctrine of salvation is viewed.
 - Both Arminians and Calvinists believe their views are taught in Scripture, but their interpretations of Scripture are affected by the assumptions about God and man that they bring to their reading of the Bible.
 - Arminians but not Calvinists hold the absolute presupposition of human libertarian free will. Calvinists but not Arminians hold the absolute presupposition of God's sovereignty over creation and all it contains.
 - These two presuppositions are in conflict. If Calvinists are correct about God's absolute sovereignty, the human will must be subordinate to God's will.
 - If Arminians are correct about libertarian free will, then in some way God has constrained His sovereignty in favor of allowing the human will to be free at least in so far as is concerned in choosing to have faith in Christ.
 - Wesleyan Arminians believe God provides for libertarian free will based on Christ's atoning life and death by giving prevenient grace to all people that enables libertarian free will or the will of free choice.
 - Libertarian free will enables people to without constraint either choose or reject faith in Christ. The crucial decision is all up to the individual.
 - Other Arminians often do not include the step of prevenient grace but conclude that all people by their nature have libertarian free will.
 - Calvinists believe that a person can only come to faith in Christ if the Father draws them and they are given new spiritual life through regeneration.
 - They believe those actions were predestined by God before the universe was created. The predestination was totally God's choice for reasons known only to Him. That information belongs only to God (Deuteronomy 29:29).