

1. **Introduction:** How do people make choices? Should people be held accountable for all choices, moral or non-moral and under all circumstances or only in some circumstances?

- God is sovereign and in overall control of all events, yet somehow within his sovereign control people make real choices for which God holds them accountable.
- The human “will” is the faculty or principle of mind by which the mind chooses.
- Some people believe everyone has a libertarian “free will.” Libertarian free will means that the will functions as an independent neutral faculty of the mind making autonomous choices free from prior prejudice, inclination, disposition, or constraint from God. Some claim a person is only accountable for their choices if they have libertarian free will.
- If the will were truly such an independent neutral faculty, then choices would be arbitrary, made literally for “no reason.” As RC Sproul points out in Chosen by God (p. 51), such reasonless choices would have no motive and no moral significance.
- The Mind Choosing: Jonathan Edwards in (On the Freedom of the Will -1754) says people can do no other than always choose according to their strongest inclination at the instant of choice. That means, choices are not determined by an independent “will” but, rather, by whole mind choosing.
- The intellect, memory, emotions, and inputs from the 5 senses interact and produce inclinations and desires in the mind that are the basis for choices.

2. **Accountability:** People should be accountable when decisions are made without external coercion or compulsion, i.e., choices driven by their own desires and inclinations.

- Choices of a rational person are always based on a variety of factors or motives presented before the mind as they consider the decision. The “mind chooses” the available alternative that seems most desirable to the person at the instant of choice.
- Assessing the desirability of an option involves a complex interplay of their personality, values, beliefs, experiences, and the context in which they receive the information.
- As the “decider or chooser,” the will acts much like a balance scale weighing various inclinations generated by the intellect, emotions, memory, and external factors from the 5 senses. At the instant of choice, the inclination that is “heaviest” among available alternatives choice is chosen.
- External coercion can sharply reduce and constrain options in all types of decisions but can never eliminate choice. Even threat of immediate death if we don’t meet demands do leaves a choice to be made. Christians have faced the choice of death or recanting their beliefs and have died horrible deaths rather than refuse to acknowledge their Lord.

3. **Faculties of the Mind:** It is useful to distinguish between the faculties of understanding (intellect), emotion (affections), memory (retained information), and choice (will).

- It is often considered that each faculty of the mind is independent, the intellect does its thing, the affections make their contribution, and the will chooses.

- However, upon reflection, it is easily seen that these faculties do not and cannot operate independently. They interact constantly.

4.**Interactions:** Edwards uses the expression the “mind choosing” to mean that inclinations and desires determining choice, as well as the actual choice, are shaped by the whole mind, that is, by the interaction of intellect, emotions, memory, will, and inputs from the 5 senses.

- From experience, we know interactions are real. For example, the “understanding” and “affections” interact. Anger can cause us to “fly off the handle,” or cause us to imagine faults that have no basis in fact.
- In general, strong emotions often cause a loss of rational focus. Yet, some emotions can focus and sharpen our thoughts. Fear can dramatically focus one’s mind, driving out all thoughts except those having to do with immediate survival.
- On the other hand, thoughts can powerfully stimulate emotions. Thinking about a pretty woman 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 that was done to us can stir up hot anger. Emotions affect thoughts and thoughts affect emotions.

5.**Weak or Strong Will:** Considering the “will’s” role in making decisions often raises comments about weak and strong will. We say, “His will is weak. He just can’t resist temptation.”

- When we know we face a tough decision, we may think, “somehow, I’ve got to find the “strength of will” to make this decision.” That is a common concept, but strength or weakness in making quality decisions is determined by the accuracy and quality of inclinations and desires.

6.**The Will as a Balance Scale:** The mind’s function that makes choices (the will) seems to work much like a balance scale. Inclinations and desires generated in the mind are constantly weighed pro and con until the instant of decision when the strongest (or heaviest) inclination is chosen.

- External dangers, threats, or enticing opportunities can directly impact inclinations.
- The way to improve the likelihood of making a good decision is to seek more and higher quality information and a better understanding about pros and cons of each factor being considered.
- “A strong will” might be useful if the will was truly a neutral independent decision maker. It isn’t. The “strong or weak” description applies only to inclinations generated by the mind. Seek to produce strong valid inclinations. The “will” chooses the inclination with the strongest “pros.”
- The concept of “willpower,” can rightfully be associated with the sustained ability to control our thoughts and emotions so that we do not bend with every new notion that comes our way.

7.**Righteous Decisions:** For a believer to make righteous moral decisions, they must have a trained understanding of what God requires. The Bible is the primary source.

- So, the will operates as a weighing device, constantly weighing pros and cons of inclinations until the instant of decision. For believers, inclinations come from their mind and from the Holy Spirit.
- When we talk about willpower, we should mean having well-thought-out positions that we are prepared to defend. An attitude of “I’m right and nothing can convince me otherwise,” probably indicates an attitude of stubbornness.
- The will is more a servant than a sovereign. The will is the faculty of decision, the immediate cause of all action, but it is not an independent faculty. It depends on inclinations and desires coming from the intellect, emotions, memory, and the 5 senses.
- Choice necessarily implies the rejection of some things and acceptance of others. Distinctions (such as good or bad, bad or worse, good or better) for various alternatives considered must be present in the mind before there can be a choice.
- Every act of the will is an expression of preference – desiring one thing rather than others. Where there is no preference but only complete indifference, there can be no volition, no choice.
- “To will” means to choose and to choose is to decide between two or more alternatives.
- There is always something that influences a choice, determines a decision. Choices are freely made when not pressured by external forces – self-determination of choice being the key.
- Choices, as acts of the will, cannot come to pass of themselves. Choices are not independent of the influence of the understanding, affections, memory, and inputs from the 5 senses.

8. **The Will is not an Independent Agent:** The will has no self-determining power. It weighs alternatives and chooses the one that seems to the best to the inclinations and desires presented by the intellect, emotions, memory and inputs from the 5 senses.

- The term “free will” is often used to indicate an independent agent that chooses as it pleases, unconstrained by other faculties.
- Some views hold that a person is governed by their will – the implication being that a person’s will somehow independently determines what they choose to do.

9. **Spiritual Heart:** But the Bible insists that the spiritual heart (innermost core of a person’s being - their intellect and affections) governs a person (Pr 4:23, Mk 7:21). The will is not an independent agent. Choices are always that which is most agreeable with our heart.

- Since Adam and Eve’s fall, the natural state of the spiritual heart of every person (except Jesus) is such that they are by nature opposed to God and his righteousness (Rm 3:10-12).
- Imagine an unconverted person confronted by two alternatives – a life of piety and virtue or a life of sinful indulgence. Which will they choose?
- They will choose the one most agreeable to themselves, one that corresponds to their innermost core of being. In their fallen state, they will likely choose a sinful life.

- Not because they are forced to do so, but because they prefer it. They prefer it because of their sinful state of being, the opposition of their heart toward God and his righteousness.
- This person could choose to live for God IF it was his preference. The “if” is the whole issue. The unconverted fallen person does not want to choose God and his righteousness, and he cannot choose that which his inclinations oppose.
- The same two alternatives confront every Christian. What will the Christian do? Because they have been regenerated, they will choose and strive to be obedient to a life of piety and virtue.
- Why? Not by being forced, but, having been regenerated, they prefer it. New understanding, attitudes, and affections are oriented toward God and his righteousness.
- This choice cannot be perfectly carried out because of the residual sin nature that battles the new nature. The new nature will ultimately win (Phil 1:6) but battles will be furious.
- In summary, a person makes choices based on their nature (their inner core of understanding and affections). The faculties of their mind generates inclinations, the “will” constantly weighs the inclinations and the strongest inclination at the time of choice determines the choice.

10. **Thinking Fast and Slow**: Daniel Kahneman and Almos Tversky(Thinking Fast and Slow, 2011) studied “decision making under stress.” I began following their work in 1974.

- They won a Nobel Prize by identifying two distinct categories of processes by which inclinations are produced and fed to the will. One process is very fast and is associated with intuitive thinking. It allows fast decisions (but with the quality of the decision heavily dependent on prior training and knowledge).
- The other process is slower and is associated with careful deliberate thought. It produces much slower (but often better) decisions. Their work determined that most decisions are of the “fast type” where inclinations are produced by intuition.
- Extensive training of the intuition is possible and invaluable for people who must make accurate fast decisions – soldiers, policemen, doctors, and nurses.
- Slower deliberate thinking is utilized for complex situations where quick response is not needed. The need for deliberate thinking may be the result of something unexpected slowing us down or something unusually difficult, totally new, involving many steps.
- Whether driven by fast thinking or by slow thinking, a decision is always determined by the strongest inclination at the instant of decision.
- Training people to respond in specific ways to inputs that indicate imminent danger to self or others is common for all types of first responders.
- The fact that most decisions are intuitive and subject to being biased by the way the information is presented can be used as a tool to influence other people’s decisions.
- Advertisers use that fact and so do propagandists.