

## **God's Sovereignty and Man's freedom/responsibility**

The way of interaction without denial of these two truths - the absolute sovereignty of God and man's true freedom of choice - and thus real accountability - is expressed Biblically thus:

1. **Man** freely chooses to act (within his physical powers), making such free choices between options based on those issues either singly or in combination (see Jonathon Edwards on the Will of Man) which lay hold upon his affections; thoughts of right/wrong, desires, joys, and all combinations of such, which come from stimuli reaching him in all its manifold ways (even incl. Satan and his powers). As Edwards summarizes, man makes choices thru stimuli etc., those choices being "most agreeable to him." This (choosing/willing) again based on the aggregate perceptions and experiences both real and pondered, dreamed, or otherwise that come to his experience, or, to use Kantian phraseology, all stimuli/aspects of existence whether "apriori" (issues [e.g. nature of parents] that influence choices apart from "experience") or "apostiori" (experienced issues that influence choices). ***This is Man's human freedom of choice which is truly both real and free.***

### **\*NOTE: Meaning of "free" in free will**

Edwards defined "free will" as the "faculty or power or principle...of choosing or choice." Moreover, to avoid error, I must quote Edwards to dispel the idea that man's will is ***choices made in a kind of vacuum***, nothing influencing him, otherwise (some say) we cannot truly say man possesses "free will," thus making true, free choices, and thereby be truly responsible. Edwards stated correctly in his work on free will, as summarized by Colin Brown: "...Edwards saw freedom not as some indeterminacy, unaffected by circumstances, character, past or present habits. To him such a notion was a figment of man's imagination." Surely Edwards is correct. It is free choice man has, but *there is no such thing as sovereign freedom* (i.e. freedom untouched by absolutely anything, even our own thoughts/experiences/life-encounters etc.). After Edwards and others of his day, Nathaniel Taylor came to a new conclusion at Yale, stating that man has a "natural" free will, saying whether he knew it or not that man both knows and determines the *nature* in "*natural*."

Yet, no thinking man would ever claim such powers for the "dust" which God made into MAN (Gen 2), but truly such knowledge/understanding/freedom only omnipotence could possibly and rightly claim. What, I assume, Taylor desired to say (and thought?) was: 1) man has God-like qualities (actually more) in that EVERY stimuli has neither more or less affect or power upon his heart and thus his will/choosing; and 2) man has the ability to make contrary-to-himself decisions, or what D.A. Carson calls "power to

contrary” choices on the moral level (i.e. similar on the physical level to a male deciding to have children, and via this choice giving birth). Taylor would say (I guess) that man’s uniform experience/ability his entire life is one of everything being absolutely even on an even playing field and nothing has greater nor lesser influence – and thus (Taylor would say) can make truly “free” choices, *his will* having the power above all else. *This is not* the “free” in free choice.

Just as an aside, this “freedom” is not even true in God’s case, for as Titus 1:2 testifies, God cannot lie, so that sin and righteousness *are unequal* relating to God’s affections (and so to man!), and this from eternity, Titus 1:2 as well as Hebrews 6:13-18 proclaiming that God cannot make any “contrary-to-nature” actions (e.g. lie, be unjust, etc.).

2. **God** freely determines, (as shall be illustrated later like the sun, its energy, and the earth’s atmospheric interaction with the sun’s rays upon the earth), what and which stimuli shall reach and touch each and every aspect of this world, including of course man (cf. Job), all based upon His good pleasure and free will; both (1) determining, and (2) thus knowing the consequence(s) of such abundance upon every mind, and all (as noted previous) according to His free purpose and will (cf. Ephesians 1:5,9 - “good pleasure”). ***This is God’s true and real sovereignty in all spheres of His created universe.***
3. **Combining #’s 1 and 2**, this is how both **1)** man truly makes free, unforced choices - free and accountable - and at the same time, **2)** God’s will is done both in heaven and on earth, according to His pleasure in His universe, not just foreknowing (although true), but ordaining everything which comes to pass for His glory (cf. note James’ expression in Acts 15:19, where “known” equals both “know(n)” [2], but founded upon His “determined” [1]; cf. Peter’s sequence of decree and [fore]knowledge, re: God, Acts 2:23;4:27f). ***This is the Biblical truth of man’s choices being unforced, and at that same moment, and at the same time regarding the same incident, God’s will is done in heaven and earth.***

### **Illustration**

**So as to make clear the above doctrine of God’s sovereignty/man’s free choice, the following illustration is hopefully helpful:**

- a) **God actions** ←-----→ *illustrated* by the sun, its energies and impact upon this world.

- b) 2. **God's will and its interface w/man** ←-----→ *illustrated* by the sun's energy output (above); with God's sovereign actions/choices illustrated by the atmosphere which both 1) prevents and 2) lets in the sun's energy – this sun-activity falling upon who and what God wills, and producing what God desires in all of His creatures/creation.
- c) **Man's will and its interface with God's will/rule** ←-→ *illustrated* by: **1)** the energies/actions/interface with the sun, plus; **2)** man's interface with such stimuli that reaches him in life (e.g. rays/energy of the sun) via way of the atmosphere's filter (God's will and determination as to what comes into any individual life), resulting in; **3)** both God and man are free in their actions simultaneously – a) God's acts being Sovereign, and, b) man acts are free and unforced.
4. As mentioned previously in passing in point #2, God's sovereign will and its design for each and every man is similar to God's creating the sun, with its interaction with the earth and its atmosphere: God making all things in particular ways, as well as purposing all interactions within this world; and in all of this, God's freely determines sovereignly His choices as to what occurs (e.g. in our illustration, the rays of the sun and the atmosphere being analogous to the governing work by the Lord of His universe, e.g. Job chp 1). Now God being Lord of all, makes all things, and works all things, for His glory – yet in that work man still chooses freely what he will do in each circumstance.

Now in our illustration, instead of plants and their actions via its unthinking cells, think of men and actions willed via the mind; instead of energy-stimuli via the sun, think of all-stimuli in the live(s)/experience of man; instead of reflexive production via photosynthesis of the plants (and this is most important in the illustration), think of man - unlike a plant which has no reflective pondering – receiving and choosing freely via, 1) favoring and thus, 2) selecting a given preference between alternatives in the midst of this multi-stimulus world. Again, instead of atmosphere, think of that which God lets in/out of our life-experiences as our atmosphere lets in/out the sun's rays – man's preferences born of the interaction of his life-experiences and God's will/influences. This, in short, is the interaction of man's free choices with God's free Lordship of His world and its working; man, determining his response influenced by what and where the stimuli touches him, and God's purpose determining as to how and who the stimuli reaches, and thereby producing various alternatives (choices) for man.

*Thus, in Genesis 50:20 (see also Gen 45:5-8), it is absolutely true in the selling of Joseph by his eleven brothers – in God and man; the same issues, stimuli, activities, wills, at one and the same time/place/freedom - that **the brothers** “thought (**meant**) [it for] evil, but **God meant** it unto good...,” both the brothers and God freely; 1) willing a purpose, 2) willing that purpose at the same time regarding the same situation.*

5. Proof that those who believe in free-will similar as defined to N. Taylor, or any modern form, proclaiming that men are robots in a sovereign God’s universe unless God grants them to have the choice/ability to do what their will desires, and 2) they cannot be held responsible unless they have the above ability. Anything else, suggest some, is robotic - men without freedom and thus no true love, sin, responsibility, judgment, et.al. Yet I want to give examples of areas of man’s inability to choose, and thus in such cases man would not be free, but rather robotic without the following freedoms listed. Yet, I would submit, none of those who agree with the following truths would claim man is “robotic” with such “inabilities,” such clearly Biblical truths believed by those who claim their necessity, otherwise they proclaim God is cruel, unjust, etc. regarding man. Yet, inability of free choice in the following Biblical situations has never made theologians of ANY persuasion to shout “robot” in these predestined Biblical revelations:
  - a. Heaven – and extracting their loved ones out of perdition (i.e man cannot freely choose this option, yet none consider the lack of choice here as making man “robotic.”
  - b. Hell – desiring, like the rich man (Lk 16), to not have his kin be fool hearty, and he the agent of such messages of warning to accomplish the same. (again, rich man cannot choose the option of sending a man to warn his kin).
  - c. (Mt 12:29ff); the will/freedom to be able to be forgiven regardless of sins committed.
  - d. The initial non-choice of parents, and all such influences we are unaware of as opposed to others who are understanding, or even aware of choices and their impact – in all cases there is inequality, errors in understanding and thus evaluation of alternatives, etc. etc.
  - e. Demons desire to be elsewhere than where they shall be (cf. Mt 8:26ff; note v29 vs. v31)

- f. **EXAMPLE OF DUALISM** (freedom & interaction of God and man) – THE WRITTEN SCRIPTURES (Psalm 95 is attributed to the Holy Spirit in Heb 3:7 and to David in 4:7)!

**Application**

6. To add the practical implication to this, it is therefore the wisest of guides to read God's will in His Word to find out what holy responses a Holy God would have to issue from any given situation created by given stimuli (cf. Jn 17:17; Rom 12:1,2) – for our choices are not just reflexive but are truly pondered, desired, and “agreeable” or not. Yet if they agree not with desire agree rather with truth, we are acting in accordance with God's will, which again is revealed in His Word. *This is both true and holy freedom, which is both glorious, and gives all glory to God.*