

Doctrine of Total Depravity

Born to Sin According to Jonathan Edwards

1. In 1774 Jonathan Edwards published his work, *The Freedom of the Will*.
2. Edwards was responding in his book to Daniel Whitby, an Arminian minister of the Church of England who was known to be hostile to Calvinism. Said Whitby, "It is better to deny prescience than liberty." Prescience is a reference to God's foreknowledge.
3. Edwards argued that a person may freely choose whatever seems good, but that whatever it is that seems good is based on an inherent predisposition that has been foreordained by God, for the Bible teaches that God works all things, not some things, or most things, but all things according to the counsel of His own will.
 - *Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*
4. Theologians have always made a distinction between man's mind, affections, and will.
5. Edwards agreed with the distinction between the faculty of thinking, which is the mind, and the will.
6. In making the distinction between the mind, and the will, Edwards warned against separating them.
7. The mind, and the will, are intimately related. Edwards spoke of the willing mind, or the mind choosing.
8. What is involved in volition, or choosing, is not divorced from the law of causality, which teaches that every effect must have an antecedent cause.
9. What causes a person to choose one option over another is directly related to the preceding thought influencing the will.
10. It is impossible for an effect to happen spontaneously, without a cause.
11. When a human choice is made, the effect it produces requires a cause.
12. This led Edwards to consider the inclination, or bent, of the will.
13. The choices we make are made for a reason. The mind supplies the reason.
14. The choices we make are choices based upon what we deem to be good for us.
15. The term good does not mean, what is morally good, but what is pleasing to the person at that moment.

16. In the thought of what is pleasing, the role of desire becomes important.
17. Desire is not something that can be reduced to a physical appetite, such as an experience of hunger. The mind is involved.

Special Note.

If I have a physical appetite, and I feel hungry, I am aware of that consciously. My mind makes a judgment of what will be good, or pleasing at the moment. The mind's judgment influences the choice that will be made just as much as the desire itself. The mind is not bypassed.

18. The mind deems, or considers a particular action to be good, or pleasing to us, and on that basis a choice is made.
19. Edwards argued that all choices are caused by something. They do not just happen. What causes the choices, in the final analysis, are inclinations.
20. Choices are motivated, or driven, by inclinations.
21. As humans, we are complex creatures. We have complex thoughts in our minds. At times we have opposing value systems to think through, and struggle with. We also have complex motives and desires in our lives.
- *Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. 15 For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. 16 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. 17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*
22. Paul struggled with inner conflict. Paul knew there was a war in his soul between conflicting desires. Paul had a desire for God. However, sin compelled him to do something contrary to the known will of God. Sometimes, he followed the desires of the flesh, rather than the desires of the Spirit of God.
23. In the conflict of inclinations, we will always choose according to the strongest inclinations at the moment.
24. This does not mean that the ideal of determinism is correct.
25. Determinism is a philosophical construct that presupposes that our choices are made for us based on outside forces beyond the control of the individuals. The individual is compelled to do what has been determined they will do.
26. That is not a Biblical view of determination.
27. What is true, is self-determination.

28. Self-determination recognizes that a person has will, emotion, and intellect, which guides the choices that are made, without coercion. They are determined by us, not by something outside of self.
29. Still, the choices which individuals make are determined by something. They are determined by the inclinations of the person's desires, and what the mind deems to be good, or most pleasing to the person at that moment.
30. A person always chooses according to the strongest inclination at the moment.
31. A desire is a variable thing. There is a continuum line of desires. Sometimes, there is an intense, flaming desire. Other desires are a mild inclination.
32. At the moment of choice, the strongest desire will prevail, and that is the one that is chosen. This does not deny freedom, but establishes it.
33. The essence of freedom is to have the power, or ability, to choose according to one's inclinations. A person wants to choose what the mind deems to be good at that moment.
34. If the mind believes something to be preferable, and there is an inclination to choose it, but there was no ability to choose it, then there would be the loss of freedom.
35. The idea that we always choose at the moment what we believe to be in our best interest has in view the continuum line.

Special Note.

A person might go on a diet, reluctantly, because they know it would be better to be more healthy than not. On the continuum line of desires, the desire to go on a diet is more of an inclination than not going on a diet in order to feel better and avoid being fussed at by the doctor. A person might look better. Clothes would fit better. The choice is free. Of course, the desire changes from moment to moment. Following a large meal, the desire to diet increases. A few hours later, the desire changes, and a piece of chocolate cake is sought. That is what is desired.

Where a person sits in a room is indicated by the desire to sit one place instead of another. Usually, an extraordinary effort is not made to find a seat. However, there is a motive for where a person finally sits. It may be a weak motive on the continuum line, but the motive is present. A person may like to sit on the edge of a row to have leg room, or avoid a feeling of claustrophobia. A person may want to sit in the back to get lost in the crowd, or not called upon. There is a motive.

36. Without an inclination, there would not be a choice.
37. In his study of the will, Edwards was arguing with pagan philosophers, and some Christian theologians, who believe that the will is not free unless it is indifferent.

38. What Edwards wanted people to understand, is that the will is incapable of being indifferent for it is not a detached entity in a person.
39. The will is united to the mind and emotions. While distinct from the mind and emotions, the will is not divorced from them. That is the myth of free will. That is the belief of the pagan, not the Bible.
40. Again the pagan, and some Christians argue, that if the will is not independent of any influence upon it, then it is not truly free.

Special Note.

“One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. ‘Which road do I take?’ she asked. ‘Where do you want to go?’ was his response. ‘I don’t know,’ Alice answered. ‘Then,’ said the cat, ‘it doesn’t matter’” (Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland).

The choice of Alice would be an indifferent choice.

41. What Edwards argued for, is that an indifferent choice is an irrational choice for two reasons.
- If I choose one thing over another, in a completely arbitrary fashion, how could there be any moral significance to it?
- Biblically, the whole concept of intent, or intentionally, is essential in making a moral decision. We do not choose to have our hearts beat at a certain rate. That is an involuntary action of our body. For something to be a moral decision there has to be a reason, or intent behind it.
- If there is no inclination, one way or another, not only would it be impossible to have a moral choice, but it would be impossible to choose at all. Why? Because the choice would have no cause. There would be an effect without a cause. That is impossible. In the universe, as it is constructed, there cannot be an effect without a cause.
42. There was another important facet to Edwards’ theology. He made a distinction between Natural Ability, and Moral Ability.
43. This distinction is very close to the distinction that Augustine made centuries before between Free Will, and Liberty.
44. Edwards said that we have the natural ability to make choices. We are volitional creatures. We have a faculty of choosing, called the will. The will is not forced, or coerced by outside forces.
45. However, a person’s natural ability is limited by the sphere into which he exists. A person cannot naturally fly in the air by flapping arms, as birds have the natural ability to fly by flapping wings.
46. There are limitations to the will of man.

47. What man does not have, is the Moral Ability to choose what is pleasing to God.
48. Why?
49. Because in the Fall, man has lost his disposition, his desire, and his inclination to please God.
50. The reason why a person cannot choose God, until God chooses Him, is because man will not choose God.
51. A person cannot choose what is not wanted.
52. The problem with every person outside of Christ is located in the, “want to”. In the natural person, the desires of the heart are only wicked continually.
53. There is no natural inclination, disposition, or will for God, until the Holy Spirit creates that in the soul.