

1. **Introduction:** God's interactions with people come in many forms. Some redirect a person's life (Abraham: Leave Ur and go to a country to which I will direct you.)(Moses: I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people out of Egypt.)
 - (Gideon: You are to defeat the Midianites.) To make sure the message was from God, Gideon asked God to make the fleece he put out be wet and the ground dry, then next that the fleece be dry and the ground wet. God did exactly that.
 - Other interactions deter people from sin (Abimelech via dreams; many people via Common Grace). Many other examples exist of interactions through direct contact, dreams, visions, angel visitation, the work of the Holy Spirit, and actions of the incarnate Son, and continuing actions of the risen Christ.
 - Thus, God interacts with minds in various ways producing inclinations and desires.
2. **Decisions:** A person's own nature causes their mind to process its data in certain specific ways using inclinations and desires to choose between alternatives.
 - The result will be God's predestined choice, but people, without compulsion, make their own choice according to their own nature. The intellect considers available information producing inclinations and desires used to make unforced choices.
 - Memory is important in the process of making choices. Training implants choices in memory that are good choices applicable in specific situations.
 - God gives inclinations and desires necessary to accomplish His plan. He knows each of us intimately. The inclinations and desires He supplies are compatible with our nature. In this way people's choices are predestined by God, but with no interference in the natural decision-making process, no forced results.
 - Every choice is our own. Responsibility for willful actions is maintained.
 - Involuntary actions (actions not controlled by a person's conscious mind) come under God's general foreordination. Involuntary actions include personal actions and actions forced by external actions of other persons or forces of nature.
3. **The Question of Freedom:** What does it mean to "be free?" Consider God, the most-free being we can imagine. He is free to anything consistent with His nature.
 - Scripture says God cannot lie, cannot be tempted, and in general cannot do evil. Do these restrictions make God any less free?
 - As sanctification proceeds, we grow closer and closer to being sinless (being unable to do evil). In that sense, we become more like God in moral capacity. Our freedom is not reduced by being unable to do evil, it is increased.
 - The other side of that thought is permitting our sin nature to increase its control over us, the less like God we become in our moral nature, and the less freedom we have.

- ☐ Among God's moral creatures, true freedom is not the power to do as one pleases, but rather the power to do as one ought, to only do that which is consistent with God's character. Any other understanding is a misunderstanding.
 - ☐ Unregenerate people are in bondage to their sin nature.
 - ☐ God's "Common Grace" is restraining grace that keeps sinful people from being as bad as they might be.
 - ☐ All people are free in the sense they are free to live and do according to their own desires and inclinations. The inclinations and desires given as restraining grace enable people to oppose their sin nature's desires.
 - ☐ In Romans 1, Paul describes what happens when God withdraws His restraining grace. True freedom is reduced. Sin increases, and the result isn't pretty.
 - ☐ When we are glorified, we will be like Jesus, holy and righteous. We will no longer be free to sin but will be free to be like God in moral character and action. Then we will be "free indeed!" What a day of rejoicing that will be!
4. **Election and Reprobation:** Two aspects of predestination cause concern – God's election of some for salvation and His reprobation or rejection of others.
- ☐ Any specific choice made from a set of alternatives involves rejecting other alternatives.
 - ☐ If only some are chosen for salvation (2 Thess 2:13), some are not chosen.
 - ☐ If the Father gave only some to Christ (Jn 6:37), some are not given. If only some names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 21:27), some are not written.
 - ☐ The frequent response remains, "if God saves some, why not save all?" Does He lack the power to save? Of course not. Then, why not save all?
 - ☐ The Apostle Paul in 1 Tim 1:15-16 says Christ Jesus came to save sinners of whom he, Paul, is the worst. If Paul, the worst sinner, is saved, why aren't all sinners saved?
 - ☐ If some are saved, does that imply it is unjust to not save someone else? Salvation is available to all. All are law-breakers under a death-sentence. Since everyone sins, God could have justifiably saved no one.
 - ☐ None who truly desires salvation are turned away. Why are some saved and not all?
 - ☐ There seems to be no answer except to acknowledge that God who is totally good, all wise, and all powerful, chooses, for His own reasons, to save some by overriding their fallen nature and let others follow the path they choose that leads them away from Him.
5. **Election:** As quoted before, the Westminster Confession says, "*God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.*" Foreordination includes choosing those to be saved.
6. **Ephesians 1:3-6:** "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before*

him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

- ☐ In making election manifest, God takes the essential step of regenerating each person who is to be saved, giving spiritual life to ones who were spiritually dead.
- ☐ Their new spiritual life enables understanding and receiving spiritual truth.
- ☐ The next step is, having been redeemed by Jesus and being in union with Him, God declares the regenerated to be righteous (justified) based on Jesus' righteousness.
- ☐ The Holy Spirit comes to indwell the redeemed to enable the transformation (sanctification) that will make them experientially righteous like Jesus.
- ☐ These beginning acts of salvation are so dramatic that Jesus Himself refers to them as being “born again.” New attitudes and capabilities are bestowed that enable the redeemed to deal rightly in moral and spiritual issues.
- ☐ The Holy Spirit brings before the minds of those being saved proper thoughts, desires, and inclinations that their regenerated mind delights in and acts on.
- ☐ They choose Christ and His righteousness. Their choices are made in accordance with their regenerated heart's desires and inclinations. There will be opposition from the defeated, but still present sin nature, that battles the new redeemed nature.
- ☐ The Holy Spirit oversees the battle of the new nature against the old and ensures the new redeemed nature wins over the old sinful nature.

7. **Reprobation:** If God does not predestine a person to salvation, it seems He takes no action to cause them to be condemned. He simply leaves them to the destiny determined by their own fallen nature (there is some non-saving mitigation from Common Grace).

- ☐ In other words, if God does not predestine a person to salvation, He permits them to choose what their fallen heart desires and inclines toward. He does not introduce inclinations and desires to change their behavior. They think and do as they please.
- ☐ Accountability is not lessened by being unregenerate. Human rationality and conscience are the ground for accountability. Though the unregenerate are “dead in sins,” they retain the natural abilities that accompany rationality and conscience.
- ☐ They always choose what they desire and refuse to be controlled by obedience to God. It is always their own decision that moves them.
- ☐ Unimpaired people have natural faculties to love and obey God. The unregenerate use their faculties to deny, avoid, or pretend to love and obey God to accomplish their plans.
- ☐ Everyone has intellect and affections with which they could believe, but the unregenerate choose to not believe. Nothing but fallen “self” determines their failure to truly love, believe, and obey God. That is the basis for their guilt.

- If someone is totally lacking in natural ability (no rationality, no conscience), they are not a responsible person before God.
 - Normal persons are endowed with rationality and conscience. They can distinguish right from wrong. They are able to weigh eternal issues and are responsible before God.
 - Having the necessary natural faculties for understanding and deciding, they will have to give account of themselves to God (Rm 14:12).
 - Everything we have concluded about foreordination and predestination depends on the truth of Jonathan Edwards view of how decisions are made.
 - If, as he says, the whole mind (or the whole person) reaches a conclusion based on the relative strength of supporting or opposing inclinations and desires at the instant of decision, then our conclusions follow.
 - Much like a balance scale, the mind weighs the “for” and “against” reasons. The heaviest for or against reason at the instant of decision establishes the decision.
 - After making a choice, we may soon (even immediately) wish we had not decided in that way. If time and circumstances permit, we may “change our mind” multiple times in accordance with changing inclinations and desires.
 - The point is, decision-making involves the whole person and, more than anything else, it is like weighing supporting and counter arguments to find the strongest.
8. **The Strong-Willed Child:** If we accept the Edwards’ view, is it compatible with the thinking in Dr. Dobson’s book on disciplining “strong-willed children?
- Dr. Dobson refers to characteristics of newborn children such as level of activity, responsiveness, distractibility, and moodiness.
 - He completes that discussion by referring to another characteristic of newborn children, something which can be called “strength of will.”
 - Other terms he uses to describe “strength of will” are “assertive” and “self-propelled.”
 - *“Most parents have at least one such youngster who seems born with a clear idea of how he wants the world to be operated and intolerance with those who disagree.”*
 - Such a child has a strength of understanding and self-control that produces a persistent defiant attitude toward anyone who disagrees with his intentions.
 - We might refer to this as an attitude of “my mind is made up, don’t bother me with facts.” Such an attitude produces strong inclinations and desires in support of their idea of how the world should operate whenever a choice must be made.
 - Strong inclinations and desires produce “strong choices” that resist efforts to change.
 - When a child’s choices oppose a parent’s intentions and every attempt to change the child’s behavior is responded to with a stubborn refusal to change, that is called “strong-willed” behavior. The result is a confrontation with strong emotions.

- Dr. Dobson's book concerns discipline as it relates to a child who intends to force their view of on everything and everyone all of the time. We are familiar with what is meant by having a "strong will." The question becomes, is that the best terminology?
- Changing a child's attitude requires change, not in the act of choosing (as if the will is an independent chooser), but in inclinations and desires that produce that kind of decision.
- Inclinations and desires can be argued with, perhaps changed. A "fiat" act of will cannot.
- Changing inclinations and desires is a matter of training, not of dictate.
- The notion of "strong will" is indeed compatible with Edward's concept that the will weighs inclinations and desires and chooses the strongest at the instant of decision.
- If you have a "strong-willed" child, work on changing their desires and inclinations, not on reducing the strength of their will. The will is not an independent decision-maker.