

Important Lessons about God and Humanity from the Church's History 2: Jonathan Edwards, "Free Will," and the Modern Missions Movement

Introduction

"We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours" (John of Salisbury, 12th century)

William Carey (1793) and start of the "Modern Missions Movement"

Biblical Texts to Consider

Matt 11:25-30; John 3:16-18; Acts 13:48; 14:19-22; Rom 9:6-24; 10:9-17

Three Positions

1. Arminianism

Arminian logic: Accountability necessitates "free will" if God is to remain good

"Libertarian free will is the concept that men and angels have the ability to make real choices that have not been pre-determined by God. Arminians believe in free will, while Calvinists generally do not.

"The Arminian belief in free will is rooted in our understanding of the goodness of God. We believe in free will not because we are interested in usurping God's authority, but instead because we want to protect God's character."

2. Hyper-Calvinism

"An unbiblical extension of five-point Calvinism. It teaches God's eternal justification of the elect, antinomianism (that is, the non-obligation of Christians to obey God's law), and that the gospel should not be preached indiscriminately to all sinners, but only to those who are "sensible" of their spiritual need. Evangelical Christians should avoid this view because of its refusal to preach the gospel to all sinners and its teaching that God does not have real love for all persons."

According to Andrew Fuller, hyper-Calvinists believed "It is absurd and cruel to require of any man what is beyond his power to perform; and as the Scriptures declare that 'No man *can* come to Christ, except the Father draw him,' and that 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither *can* he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,' it is concluded that these are things to which the sinner, while unregenerate, is under no obligation.

"It is a kind of maxim with such persons that 'none can be obliged to act spiritually, but spiritual men.'"

"warrant of faith"

3. Evangelical Calvinism

Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, which is supposed to be essential to Moral Agency, Vertue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* (1754)

Basic points

Prior to will, by which the mind voluntarily chooses either one thing or another, there is a more fundamental cause identified as motive

“Freedom of the will” is a fact, but the willing itself is determined by the prior motive or propensity of the heart

1. Definitions

Will

That by which the mind chooses one thing over another because it prefers it

It is always determined by a *cause*, the most powerful motive in the mind at the time

Moral Necessity

The necessity of connection and consequence, which arises from moral causes

I.e., habits and dispositions of the heart

Natural Necessity

The necessity persons are under through force of natural causes

E.g., feel pain when wounded

Must note that moral necessity may be as powerful a force as natural necessity

Natural Inability

What are unable to do, even if want to do it, because nature won't allow it

Moral Inability

The opposition or want of inclination to do something

Have faculties of *mind* and *nature* to do something, but not of *will* to do it

Liberty

A person has *liberty* as long as he has power of volition (choosing, willing), to do what he wants to do

Liberty does not have to do with the range of choices the person can make, but with the fact that no one (but himself) determines what choices he'll make

Arminians, though, redefine liberty, saying liberty, by definition, must consist in three things

- 1) *self-determination*: the will determines its own volitions, and is not determined by any causes or anything prior to itself
- 2) *indifference*: liberty must include indifference, so that the mind must be in a state of equilibrium when the choice is made
- 3) *contingency*: liberty includes contingency: it is opposed to all necessity, meaning that it is unpredictable and happens by chance

2. Is Anything Like the Arminian Notion of Freedom of the Will is Possible or Conceivable?

They say the will is its own entity

Instead, it is merely a “capacity for choice”

Every effect has a cause

One’s soul chooses what is most agreeable to it, what is the strongest motive of its heart at that moment

Since God foreknows man’s “free acts,” they are not contingent, but necessary

3. The Arminian Notion of Liberty is Not Essential to Moral Agency

Arminian argument: if actions are necessary, they are neither blameworthy nor praiseworthy

Jonathan Edwards: But God’s actions are necessarily holy and they are certainly praiseworthy

Arminians: moral actions must be indifferent

Bible: a virtuous heart is one that *favors* or *loves* virtue

Can we preach and exhort and warn?

The Modern Missions Movement

Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) vs. the “nonapplication, noninvitation” scheme of hyper-Calvinism

The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, or The Duty of Sinners to Believe in Jesus Christ (1785)

Thesis of the book: “faith in Christ is the duty of all men who hear, or have the opportunity to hear, the gospel”

Six main points:

1. Unconverted sinners are commanded, exhorted and invited to believe in Christ for salvation

“The New Testament is still more explicit than the Old. Faith in Jesus Christ, even that which is accompanied with salvation, is there constantly held up as the duty of all to whom the gospel is preached.”

“It is a grievous misapplication of such language to consider it as expressive of a mere attendance upon the means of grace, without any spiritual desire after God; and to allow that unregenerate sinners comply with it. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The Scriptures abound in promises of spiritual and eternal blessings to those who thus *hearken, hear, and seek after* God; such exercises, therefore, must of necessity be spiritual, and require to be understood as including faith in Christ.”

2. Every man is bound cordially to receive and approve whatever God reveals
3. Obedience and such an obedience as includes saving grace
4. The lack of faith in Christ is ascribed in Scripture to men’s depravity and is itself represented as a heinous sin

“It is taken for granted that whatever is not a sinner’s duty, the omission of it cannot be charged on him as a sin, nor imputed to any depravity in him. If faith were no more a duty than election or redemption, which are acts peculiar to God, the want of the one would be no more ascribed to the evil dispositions of the heart than that of the other. Or, if the inability of sinners to believe in Christ were of the same nature as that of a dead body in a grave to rise up and walk, it were absurd to suppose that they would on this account fall under the divine censure. No man is reprov’d for not doing that which is naturally impossible; but sinners are reprov’d for not believing, and given to understand that it is solely owing to their *criminal ignorance, pride, dishonesty of heart, and aversion from God.*”

5. God has threatened and inflicted the most awful punishments on sinners for their not believing on the Lord Jesus Christ
6. Other spiritual exercises which sustain an inseparable connexion with faith in Christ are represented as the duty of men in general

Fuller’s 1791 sermon, ““The Danger of Delay”

“We wait for we know not what. . . . We pray for the conversion and salvation of the world, and yet neglect the ordinary means by which these ends have been used to be accomplished. It pleased God, heretofore, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believed. . . . And how shall they preach except they be sent? Ought we not, then, at least try, by some means, to convey more of the good news of salvation to the world around us, than has hitherto been conveyed?”

1792: helped to found the Particular Baptist Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Heathen

William Carey (1761-1834)

1792: Carey published his *Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*