

Predestination and Freewill;- “Arminian Errors”

Written by K B Napier
Thursday, 28 July 2016 14:14

(For short version see [O-401](#))

We frequently receive communications from Arminians who accuse us of biblical error. They throw out a challenge (or so they think – it is not much of a challenge at all) that if we believe in predestination, this makes us all automatons. They claim that human beings have ‘free will’ and that is why we can say that we ‘choose’ salvation. If we do not accept this, then we are saying God predetermines everything and so we have no choice at all. This ignorance is straightforward balderdash!

When dealing with this subject it is essential to define what we mean by ‘free will’ and ‘Predestination’, etc. I believe I have done so adequately in the list of articles listed at the end of this paper. However, let us look at these definitions again.

Before we do so, we will look at what Calvin *et al* thought of free will. Yet again, I must tell readers that while I might speak with approval of Calvin or his main work, this does NOT make me a Calvinist. I am a Bible-believer, and I will concur with any Christian who teaches scriptural truths. I have read enough of Calvin to call him my brother in Christ. What Arminians think of this does not bother me in the slightest.

“Calvin’s position seems to run counter to the tradition of the Western church. Even those, such as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, who laid great stress on God’s sovereignty and predestination took care to safeguard man’s freewill. Augustine, Calvin’s great mentor, at the end of his life wrote a work entitled On Grace AND Freewill in which he opposed those who ‘so defend God’s grace as to deny man’s freewill’. It would appear that Luther and Calvin, in denying freewill, were falling into just that error and were departing from the whole Augustinian tradition.” (A N S Lane, ‘Did Calvin believe in Free Will’, Vox Evangelica 12 [1981]: 72-90)

The pagan Roman Catholic ‘church’ agrees with this assumption of course, and this was put into words by Albertus Pighius. *“But the little word ‘freewill’ can have many different meanings”* (Lane, p72). As Romanism changes its colours (which it does far more frequently than its ‘never-changing’ persona admits) it has softened its idea that Calvin is totally against Augustine on this matter. The Dominican writer, C Friethoff, says there is no actual argument between, the two, because both had different definitions of the word ‘freewill’.

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An even later Romanist writer claims the reformers were reviving a CATHOLIC teaching when they rejected ‘freewill’! (In much the same way that Communist Russians claimed Shakespeare was Russian!). He said they were merely reteaching the concept of *servum arbitrium*.

Servum arbitrium is ‘unfree will’, as taught by Luther. Also: “*In the case of Luther three hypostases are identified in which arbitrium is slave (servum): an enslavement due to its impossibility of removing the aversion to God, an enslavement due to its impossibility of responding to God's grace and the last one towards the sovereignty of God's governing of the universe.*” (As in ‘And Three Meanings of the *Servum Arbitrium* at Martin Luther’, Radu Bandol, Philobiblon, 2012, Transylvanian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, Vol 17, Issue 2, p402). That is, Man CANNOT have free will in the face of his estrangement from God... there is simply no spiritual connection. Thus, it is “impossible” for a man to call out to, respond to, listen to, consider, God.

Augustine first used the term *servum arbitrium* in a treatise against Pelagianism. Luther quoted him several times in his ‘*De Servo Arbitrio*’ (1525). It has been argued that Augustine spoke of the term as a throw-away line, whereas Luther supposedly used it as a major definition by Augustine. A follower of Luther carried this assumption on in a tract, ‘That Free Will is Nothing’ (Wittenberg, 1525). Others refused to enter into what seemed to them to be undefined waters, so they did not give a literal translation of the term ‘of unfree will’. There was also an English paraphrase: ‘The Bondage of the Will’. The problem to these theologians is that the term seems ambiguous.

“For Augustine, who is defending Ambrose... free will left to itself can only be ‘servus’, unfree, since grace, far from ‘evacuating’ free will, rather permits us to ‘establish’ it.”

(cf. *De spiritu et littera* 30.52 [RT:CSEL. 60]).

Thus, the argument goes, Luther distorted what Augustine said (Dictionary of Untranslatables: a Philosophical Lexicon’, Cassin, Apter, Lezra, Wood, Princeton University Press) and made the term ‘radical’. It is further argued that man has ‘free judgment’ in ‘lower’ matters, something I agree with, but with constraint. Those who argue against Luther say that this free judgment firstly must be given permission to act by being ‘liberated by grace’. However, the term ‘*servum arbitrium*’ appears to still be left as an unopened case in theological terms. Suffice to say that

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Augustine and Luther (that is, in the eyes of later readers) do not share the same meanings.

Taking Augustine’s work as a whole, he tended to say that *“divine grace did not compromise free will but heals, frees and helps it”*

(‘Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther on Original Sin...’ Pereira, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p375). Even so, with the advent of the Pelagian issue, he attributed far more to divine grace than to free will.

One should note that while Augustine taught that man was given freewill at Creation, the onset of sin meant that the will came under servitude to sin. *“When Adam, using free will, committed sin, freedom was lost and reduced to nothing”*

(above). I hope you can see that there is room for argument against this, that man was given ‘free will’ and that he then lost it when he sinned. Augustine also said that though man lost freewill he did not lose freedom, for when a sinner sins he does so freely and not by necessity. This is a point of real contention, as I will show later. On Calvin:

“While Calvin repeatedly and violently attacked the term ‘freewill’ his opposition to it was not as unequivocal as is often supposed. On occasions he was prepared to concede that it could have a perfectly sound and acceptable meaning. His attitude to freewill was complex and needs to be examined in the context of the different phases of man’s existence.” (Lane)

Calvin properly and repeatedly distinguished man as he was created and man after the Fall. (Inst. I.xv.1, II.i.1, 1559). Indeed, this is essential, for misreading can lead to vital errors (Inst. I.xv.7, II.ii.4 [1559]).

Calvin divided up the will and the intellect. He said that the will was given its impetus by the intellect, which told it what was wrong and what was good. (Allen, p72). Note that this is a limited definition. He thought that the intellect guided and ruled the soul; thus, the intellect always governs the will. I would tend to query this, because sin affected every part of man, including his intellect. Indeed, we see this effect today in men whose intellectual prowess is beyond question, but whose use of it is gratuitously anarchic and very dubious in its logic, a negation of true intellect.

I am not sure of the divide by Calvin, for the activities of the brain are uncharted in terms of fixed

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thesis; most we can do is give hypotheses. The intellect is largely a function of intelligence, and intelligence is a given before birth. While there can be a certain movement upwards in intelligence, by way of practice and assimilation of knowledge, one's intelligence is more or less fixed. The lower the intelligence the less likely it is to guide the intellect towards a just or proper conclusion, because it cannot grasp the content or direction of knowledge.

On the other hand, most perversion of thought arises from those with higher intelligence, so there are no clear rewards in either. We may also add the influence of one's environment. For example, if a child is brought up in an undisciplined and evil home, he is likely to follow his parents and siblings into gross sin, and any intellect he uses may not help to guide along a good path, making most choices 'bad'.

But, above all this we are born with conscience, no matter how warped it will be in the unsaved, and the Lord tells us that we are ALL acquainted with God as the Creator (Romans 1), but sin is allowed greater precedence.

Calvin also said that Man could choose eternal life before he fell, by way of his reasoning power (Inst. I.xv.8 (1559) (OS 3.186). I disagree. Adam had a perfect will, one not just guided by truth and God, but one that was without flaw. He did not choose eternal life before the Fall, but was created into it by God. Thus, there was no choice towards Heaven, but an acceptance of its presence. He did not reason his way to God, but acted out God's plan for his life because it was how he was created to be.

Calvin said that *“whatever we conceive in our minds is directed to its end by the secret inspiration of God”* (Inst. I.xviii.2 (1559). This is something Arminians appear not to be familiar with. The statement can only apply to saved men and not to unbelievers, whose minds are controlled by Satan. Those who are saved unwittingly follow both conscience and scripture, and both of these are guided by the Holy Spirit to bring God's will into effect.

When we move away from this path, we sin, must repent, and must return to the true path. This is not the action of an automaton, but of a man who loves His Saviour and wishes to comply with God's will out of worship and desire. *“The hand of God rules the interior affections no less than it superintends external actions; nor would God have effected by the hand of man what he decreed, unless he worked in their hearts to make them will before they acted”*. ('Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God', tr. J. K. S. Reid. London, 1961).

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Calvin knew that while he spoke of God as the ultimate and chief cause, human beings were lesser or inferior and misguided causes, because of sin ('Predestination' 177 (OC 8.360) ('summam et praecipuam rerum omnium causam'). Cf. Inst. I.xviii.2 (1559). This means that while God's Will is perfect and without deviance, *because* He is God and sinless, Man, though created to be sinless, fell and thus allowed sin to sully his created being. That is, his once perfect will was unable to operate as sinless and perfect. God does not use us as puppets:

“If God controls the purposes of men, and turns their thoughts and exertions to whatever purpose he pleases, men do not therefore cease to form plans and to engage in this or the other undertaking. We must not suppose that there is a violent compulsion, as if God dragged them against their will; but in a wonderful and inconceivable manner he regulates all the movements of men, so that they still have the exercise of their Will.” (Commentary. Is. 10: 15.)

Likewise, Satan's will DOES pull men towards evil, but their already unsaved souls *wish* to be pulled. Therefore, they do what Satan requires of them by choice, but a choice perversely imprisoned by Satan and in a state of evil. This, then, is not true choice, but a decision made within the boundary determined by Satan, and not by the sinner's created will. Thus, in ordinary terms, he has no option but to do what is evil and against God's will. So, he has no actual choice.

Did Calvin teach that Man cannot make choices, making Calvin a 'determinist' (because he taught providence)? Though this is argued by Arminians, it is a useless argument unless the word 'determinism' is defined.

“Clearly Calvin's doctrine of providence implies that man's choices are in some sense 'determined' by God. This 'determinism' is not confined to the realm of sin and grace but extends to the whole of life.²⁷ Calvin reprimanded those who concede to man a free choice (libera electio) in morally indifferent areas, thinking of the Augsburg Confession and Melancthon's other works.” (Inst. II. iv.6)

Calvin taught that God determines the course of history (and everything else). Why Arminians do not understand this concept is baffling. In the civil realm lawmakers create laws and all citizens must obey them. But, obviously, some do not, so their infractions are illegal, against the will of the lawmakers. For this they are punished. How is this any different to God and His

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provision of providence? Do human lawmakers cause humans to be automatons? Of course not! So why insist that God’s laws and predestination makes us puppets?

“... while Calvin taught the primary absolute causality of God he also taught the real secondary causality of man.” (Lane, p4)

“Calvin’s ‘determinism’ is marked by the fact that he preserved the human will and made man the real agent in all that he does. Providence covers all events, all of man’s choices, but Calvin did not argue from this to deny the reality of human choice. Thus any ‘necessity’ flowing from providence will be of a different order to that flowing from the bondage of the fallen will or the sovereign action of grace, where Calvin clearly did teach a curtailment of man’s freedom.” (JBohatec, Bude and Calvin, Graz 1950, p359).

Thus, attacks on the view that Man has no freewill but a lesser form of will cannot be substantiated. Only God can have final, absolute Will. And only saved men can have the lesser but appropriate will designed for him by God, to reflect His own absolute Will. The refusal to accept this is, of course, sin, and that same sin prevents Arminians from understanding this most basic of premises.

It is obvious that, as a creature, man cannot be the same as the uncreated Creator, Whose Will must, by reason of His deity, be superior and beyond Man’s will. Man’s will is determined and given by the Creator and must obey the Creator’s desires, not Man’s. Though a lesser will, Man’s will should reflect God’s Will in everything. Unsaved man cannot do anything but sin, while saved man is expected to reflect the absolute Will of God. Unsaved man’s will and choices are reflections of Satan’s corrupt will, so there is no real comparison. Arminians argue from this latter will, while saved men argue from the point of God’s Will.

The summary is thus: unsaved men must obey their father, the devil (John 8:44). Arminians are cultic and so cannot understand (Luke 8:12). Calvin agreed with Luther on certain aspects of this matter, believing that God’s Will is ‘the chief and principal cause of all things’ and ‘the necessity of things’ (Predestination 177f. [OC 8.360]).

Calvin said, correctly, that Adam *“had a free choice of good and evil (libera electio boni et mali); and not only so, but in the mind and will there was the highest rectitude, and all the organic*

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parts were duly framed to obedience.”
arb. (OC 6.402f.); Comm. Mt. 4:1).

(Inst. II.iii.13; Def. serv.

That is, though Adam was designed to be a free agent with the ability to choose, he was also designed to obey God; he was a free agent under God, which is the same as ‘freedom in Christ’. This is found in God’s command not to eat of a certain tree, which implies that Adam had a choice NOT to sin (*posse non peccare*). “*We believe that man was created pure and complete and that it was his own fault that he fell from the grace that he had received*” . (Confessio ecclesiae Parisiensis (OC 9.716).).

We can see, then, that Adam’s state was similar (but not identical) to the renewed state of modern men who are saved. We do NOT see the same aptitude in unsaved men, whose will is bound to/by Satan. The saved man has genuine choice, yet constrained, but unsaved men do not. In other words, they can only do what their ‘father’ tells them to do, and this precludes them choosing salvation, because it offends their ‘father’ the devil.

“Calvin insisted that the Fall happened through man’s own fault. But there is more to it than that. Adam fell because God decreed it, his awesome decree (decretum horribile)(Inst. III.xxiii.7). It is illegitimate to say that God willed merely to permit the Fall. What God wills is necessary and must happen. ‘The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should: why he deemed it meet, we know not’.”
(Inst. III.xxiii.8, in Lane).

It is not possible to suggest that (a) God created sin and (b) that God did not will the Fall (for whatever reason). It is impossible because it would negate the divinity of God and His absolute Will in all things. That Arminians howl that such is ‘unfair’ is irrelevant; we need not answer because we have no answer except God’s nature in scripture. At no time is God unjust. The same divinity also leads us to say that salvation cannot, by any means, be achieved by human lesser will, which is always bound to Satan, who refuses to hand over his prize to God. This is why Jesus Christ died, to take us out of the clutches of the wicked one. It is why only divine Will could save ANY man and had to be absolute and from God alone. If unsaved man is chained to Satan, then there is no way he can choose salvation! It is logic!

Free Will

Freewill ONLY exists in God, because only He is omnipotent. Yet, He actually limits His freewill actions purposely. Mankind does not have freewill, and never has had it. Rather, Adam’s will

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was rooted in God’s plan and conformed to it, until he sinned (see above). Thus, his will was not ‘free’ but was expected to comply with God’s requirements.

From the time of the first human sin (Lucifer sinned before man did), no man or woman has had a will that is ‘free’ in any sense whatever. Indeed, all unsaved people’s wills are under the direct control of Satan. They cannot do what is good in God’s eyes and cannot choose to do what is right of their own volition, even when other unsaved people view what they do or say as ‘good’... to God it is all as ‘filthy rags’, worthless.

Arminians hate the idea of having no say in their salvation, because sinners love to think they choose their paths in life, so they make clever plans:

“A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9)

Thus, feeble men devise their paths in life, but it is God Who leads them. Some hate this, and argue quoting Joshua 24:15,

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

This text has been used to argue that we may choose our own salvation. It is nothing of the sort, and merely highlights the fact that few Christians are careful readers of God’s word. Saved Man certainly has the choice to do good or bad, and the same can be said of the ancient Hebrews. But, in the matter of salvation there can be no choice, for it is God’s Will and gift, and His alone.

The text is about a nation ALREADY belonging to God. They were asked if they would continue to serve Him, or to rebel and worship pagan gods, those “on the other side of the Flood” (indicating that the situation before the Flood was dire enough to bring God’s wrath upon the people). The same gods were later found amongst the Amorites and other cultic tribes. Joshua, however, *already* godly and of the people of God, chose to serve God.

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To repeat my earlier words, as believers we can choose between good and bad, the former being what we are designed to do, the latter occurs when we decide to sin. BUT, SALVATION DOES NOT INCUR A CHOICE.

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
(Mark 16:16)

Until we are born again we cannot believe (so are damned). When we are born again we are led inevitably to repentance and faith and salvation, as a gift. Being born again is itself a gift, because no unsaved man can call upon God – rather, he rejects God and does not even think of salvation in biblical terms. This is because he is totally incapable of doing so; his sin prevents him.

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Psalm 51:5)

“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” (Psalm 10:4)

“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

(Romans 3:20)

“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” (Psalm 58:3)

A ‘Timeline’ of the Will

We are all conceived and born in sin. From the very beginning of our existence in the womb we

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are destined to hell for our Sin: this ‘Sin’ is the core of our being, which leads us to commit ‘daily’ sins. As an unsaved person I was unable to do what was acceptable to God. I could only do what my ‘father’ Satan demanded of me. Therefore, I had no freewill. Indeed, I had no will of my own, because I did not have a choice as a person bound by the devil. I was unacceptable to God, Who did not even look upon me until the Holy Spirit brought me to spiritual life.

When born-again, a person is acted upon by the Holy Spirit so that he begins to seek God. Before this amazing point no man seeks after God (because his ‘father’ is Satan, who hates God, and because he is a sinner from conception). From that moment, the person begins to bend his own will towards godly intervention, but he is still not capable of having a ‘freewill’. Mostly, this bending is done without his knowledge, as his new spiritual life begins to flourish, acting like a flower that bends naturally towards the sun.

Salvation - Unique

Then comes the momentous heavenly act of salvation. That is, we ‘see the light’, repent, and are saved. The act of salvation is instant, with no time lapse between being unsaved and saved. It is an act of God, Who predestinated us. This means that He alone causes us to be saved; we have no choice because it is a decision made in eternity. Hence, ‘freewill’ has no part in it, nor does a limited human form of the will. Which is why it is called a ‘gift’ not based on anything we do. And, as many others have argued, how can a dead spirit suddenly come alive? It cannot of its own volition; it can only come alive because God commanded it, and the command is rooted in His choice of who is saved in eternity.

In the matter of salvation, then, we have no choice but to accept what has been given. It is a gift that is never taken back, and it does not rely in any sense on our willpower, choice or even acceptance. This is hated by Arminians, who prefer to say they had a hand in their new eternal status. But, this is not what scripture tells us.

After salvation, we then have genuine choice – to do good or to do evil. Only a saved person can have this choice. Even then, it is not ‘freewill’, for, in essence, we return to a position almost like that of Adam before he fell. (Almost, but not the same). For the first time in our lives we can choose, and so have a limited form of human will.

God predestinates everything, but, as saved people, we can go astray and sin (as we saw in the work of Calvin), thus betraying God’s Will for our lives. We are designed to obey every part of God’s Will, in everything. But, after salvation, we have a choice. When we move away from

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God’s Will we sin, and our human will is weakened. The closer we are to God, the more we want to obey His will in everything, by our own choice, so sin features less. But, at no time do we have perfect will, and especially not ‘freewill’. If we had perfect freewill we would ourselves be gods – but we are not.

As created beings we do not have self-determination, we are not self-sufficient, nor may we use our own volition as we wish, unless such volition is towards holiness and God. We are either enslaved to Satan, or we are the servants of Almighty God... and any true servant always does what his master demands, not what he himself wishes. This is why Joshua recognised this failing in humanity. Beside all else, we do not have the capacity or the knowledge to have freewill!

So, in answer to the Arminian jibe – nobody has freewill and saved people have limited will, able to make choices after salvation. However, in the matter of salvation, he has no will at all, for God has chosen him in eternity, and what God chooses in eternity cannot be undone or amended. It is galling temerity to think we can choose to be saved, against all scriptural proof. It is also intellectual weakness to think we can have freewill.

What of our acceptance of the gift of salvation? Surely that is of our own will? Yes it is – but only because it is part of the free gift of salvation, an acceptance by us brought about by sheer joy. The Arminian jibes, then, are without substance.

Dead Bodies Do Not Choose to Live Again!

Ask yourself how a man whose spirit is dead can possibly, of its own deadness, choose to be alive? Does a dead body choose to come back to life? No. Another person who is still alive can wish the dead one to come alive, but the dead body can do nothing and, despite the fervent wish of the onlooker, the body will remain dead. Likewise a dead spirit remains dead until a miracle occurs – the decision of the Holy Spirit to begin the short process leading from being born again to salvation. If this is not so, tell me how a dead spirit can suddenly become alive, when the spirit belongs to an unsaved man who either hates, or does not care, about the Lord!

Meat comes from a dead animal. It quickly becomes putrid and gathers maggots as it is completely ruined by necrosis. The same happens to the human spirit before salvation. It is dead, useless, worthless, unable to come to life. How any person cannot grasp this self-evident fact I cannot tell, except to say that those who are unsaved are also blind to truth.

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Also see: A-094, A-156, A-157, A-448, [O-161](#) , A-150, A-188, A-204, A-220, A-305, A-548, O-401

Additional Material

“Most of us are certain that we have free will, though what exactly this amounts to is much less certain. According to David Hume, the question of the nature of free will is “the most contentious question of metaphysics.” If this is correct, then figuring out what free will is will be no small task indeed.”

(Encyclopaedia of Philosophy [iep.utm.edu])

While Arminians throw the term ‘freewill’ around with abandon, almost none of them understands what they are talking about. Hume acknowledged just how hard it is to define ‘freewill’.

In usual philosophy freewill means the ability to choose one’s own actions. I have shown that scripture says an unsaved man has no such capacity or ability, because his spirit is dead, stone cold dead. He can choose nothing, but is driven or led by Satan, whose every thought and action is an effect of deadness. For similar reasons (but not godly) some secular philosophers think there is no such thing as ‘freewill’.

This ought not surprise us, for no man has ever charted the will, or has any idea where it is, or what prompts it, or what causes it to act. In many ways the mind is a closed system unknown and unknowable, except in minor ways.

Thus, there are many hypotheses about the will and determinism, and whether both can happily exist together. I have given the biblical perspective above.

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