

The Doctrine of Volition

- I. Preliminary considerations:
- A) Definition: 1 – The act of choosing, willing, or resolving. 2 – A choice or decision made by the will of an individual.
 - B) Volition is indicated in Scripture by:
 - 1. every third class condition – cp 1Jn 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*
 - 2. every subjunctive (potential) mood – 1Cor 9:16 *“For if I proclaim the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not proclaim the gospel.”*
 - 3. every alternative – Jn 3:36 *“He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”*
 - C) Denial of volition is termed “Calvinism” (after John Calvin), and implicitly claims that God is the Author of Evil/ Sin. cp Gen 3:12-13
- II. There are three categories of volition in the universe:
- A) Divine Sovereignty – God’s sovereignty is absolute, eternal, and self-determining. Isa 46:10b *“My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure”*
 - B) Angelic Volition – Angels were created with free volition, as seen in Satan’s five “I will” statements. Isa 14:12-14
 - 1. One-third of all angels chose to revolt against God with Satan, while two-thirds elected to remain with God. Rev 12:4
 - 2. Because the angels made an informed, conscious decision concerning their attitude towards God, their volition has been established and will not change – there are no elect angels falling today, and no fallen angel will repent. cp Heb 2:16
 - C) Human Volition – Every individual has the God-given ability to make their own decisions, apart from coercion or influence from God or others. This freedom does carry with it consequences for good or bad decisions. Ac 3:23 *“And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.”*
- III. Volition is manifested at three stages of man’s life on earth:
- A) God-consciousness, when the individual becomes aware, through whatever process, that God exists. At that point they decide whether they desire a relationship with Him or not.
 - 1) if they choose a relationship, God has promised to keep them alive until the point they can hear and accept the Gospel. Ac 17:27 *“that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us”* cp also Jn 10:27-29
 - 2) if they reject a relationship with Him, they will not accept the Gospel even if they hear it (God is under no obligation to give them a gospel hearing, although in many cases He does so, to prove culpability). Rom1:18-25

- B) Gospel hearing, when an individual hears and understands the Good News of salvation by faith.
- 1) Continued negative volition to the Gospel, carried until death, is the one sin for which man is cast into the Lake of Fire. Mt 12:31 *“Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.”*
 - 2) The unbeliever superimposes his will/ volition over God’s sovereignty when he rejects the message of the gospel. 2Pet 3:9 *“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”*
 - 3) An individual may reject the Gospel on numerous occasions and finally accept it under the right circumstances. Ac 26:14b *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”*
 - 4) It is God’s desire that all men become saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth, but He will not force it upon anyone. 1Tim 2:3-4 *“This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”* (this, along with 2Pet 3:9, is the main proof-text against Calvinism)
 - 5) God is obligated to give the Gospel under whatever circumstances are necessary to ensure acceptance to those who will believe. Mt 19:24-26
- C) After salvation, mankind is constantly tested as to whether they will exercise their volition in accordance with God, or against His Plan. Gal 5:17 *“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.”*
- 1) Individuals who consistently choose for God’s Plan are called “Positive Volition”, a term not found in the Bible, but expressing the concept of continued access to His Will (cp the term “Trinity” – although the word itself is not found in Scripture, the concept is repeatedly taught).
 - a) there are varying degrees of positive volition, as seen in the Parable of the Sower. Lk 8:5-15
 - b) an individual may be positive and then turn away from the Truth, becoming negative or “lukewarm”. Rev 2:4, 3:2, 15
 - c) volition allows for the spiritual recovery of all categories of negative volition except one: a conscious rejection of the Deity of Christ. Heb 6:4-6
 - d) Positive Volition is the obligation of believers (Gal 5:25), though few will fulfill that command. Mt 7:14; Jn 6:66-68; 2Tim 3
 - 2) Individuals, believers or unbelievers, who consistently choose their own will over God’s, are oppositely termed “Negative”.
 - 3) These two categories of people are the second witness against Satan and the fallen angels, that God did not force anyone to choose for or against Him. cp Dt 19:15b *“...on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.”*
 - 4) Volition will function in Ph3, not in terms of choosing for or against God, but the making of freewill decisions:

- a) acceptance of the Gospel in Ph2 guarantees the removal of the Sin Nature in the Resurrection body. 1Jn 3:2b “...*We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*”
 - b) sin will no longer be an issue, having passed away with the first creation. cp Rev 21:27
- III. Human Volition preceded the fall of Man. Gen 2:16-17
- A) Volition is the first Divine Institution, all other Divine Institutions were designed to protect it (RM-RW, parents, nations). Gen 1:26 “*Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image...’*”
 - B) Adam acted independently of God’s sovereignty. Gen 3:6-7
 - C) God sovereignly provided a second test of human volition – the cross.
 - D) All sin, known or unknown, involves an act of volition (Ignorance is no excuse – you wanted to do it and you did). Js 4:17 “*Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.*”
- IV. Jacob and Esau illustrate God’s attitude towards positive and negative volition. Rom 9:11-14
- A) The difference between Jacob and Esau was not their own good or bad deeds. vs 11
 - B) The difference was in their attitude toward God. cp Gen 25:34 “*Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew; and he ate and drank, and rose and went on his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*”
 - C) Christ died for both of them (1Jn 2:2); if He did exactly the same thing for both of them, His attitude toward them must be in their freewill adjustment (or lack thereof) to the Plan of God.
 - D) God’s sovereignty expressed itself towards Esau in judgement (hate) and towards Jacob in grace (love). vs 13
 - E) His sovereign choice was made on the basis of foreknowledge/ OmSc. Rom 8:29 “*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...*”
 - F) Therefore, the purpose of God, according to election, was realized.
- V. God used the negative volition of the Pharaoh of the Exodus to emphasize and reveal His Plan regarding volition.
- A) Pharaoh was negative at God consciousness and, therefore, gospel hearing. Ex 5:2 “*But Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the LORD that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and besides, I will not let Israel go.’*”
 - B) God revealed Himself first to Pharaoh in love (miracles in the royal palace), but he rejected Him. Ex 7:1-13
 - C) God then revealed Himself in judgement (10 plagues) and again he was negative.
 - D) This explains the phrase “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart”. Ex 9:12, 10:1, 27, 11:10, 14:4, 8
 - E) With each rejection of God’s sovereign revelation, Pharaoh’s volition was made more recalcitrant (resisting authority or control), and he hardened his heart to the truth.

- F) Since the plagues came from God, and the negative volition came from Pharaoh, the two functioned in concert with God's purpose. Rom 9:17 (quoting Ex 9:16 LXX) *"For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.'"*
 - G) Pharaoh proves that negative volition will not be changed, regardless of the circumstances or what God does in the life of the unbeliever/ negative believer (we cannot "pray someone positive").
 - H) Pharaoh's negative volition resulted in judgement against the nation of Egypt (for their continued anti-Semitism), and the evangelization of the ancient world. cp Jsh 2:10 *"For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt..."*
- VI. Pride is a hindrance to positive volition, as illustrated in the case of Nebuchadnezzar. Dan 4:13-37
- A) Nebuchadnezzar was positive at God-consciousness.
 - B) Proudful reversionism had rendered him incapable of responding to the gospel, as presented by Daniel. vs 27
 - C) Pride destroyed his objectivity. vs 30
 - D) God removed Nebuchadnezzar's pride by the infliction of a bizarre disease, Boanthropy. vs 33
 - E) Thus God kept His word and Nebuchadnezzar, no longer blinded by pride, believed in the LORD. vss 34, 37
 - F) Wealth can also be a stumbling block to positive volition, and if necessary God will remove that as well. Mt 19:24-26
- VII. We, as positive believers, must be willing to remove any and all hindrances to our continued growth in Bible Doctrine. Heb 12:1 *"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"*
- VIII. Although positive volition can endure any attack from the cosmos, it will be worn down and destroyed by continued exposure to negative volition. 1Cor 15:33 *"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"*
- IX. Those who claim to be positive can be distinguished from those who actually are by their acts of Divine Good Production (the foremost of which is consistent attendance in a properly functioning Local Church). Lk 6:43-45

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