

Freedom of the Will

Jonathan Edwards

Part III

**WHEREIN IT IS CONSIDERED WHETHER THERE IS OR CAN BE ANY SORT OF
FREEDOM OF WILL,
AS THAT WHEREIN ARMINIANS PLACE THE ESSENCE OF THE LIBERTY OF ALL
MORAL AGENTS;
AND WHETHER ANY SUCH THING EVER WAS OR**

Section 5.

**That Sincerity of Desires and Endeavours, which, is supposed
to excuse in the non-performance of things in themselves
good, particularly considered.**

It is much insisted on by many, that some men, though they are not able to perform spiritual duties, such as repentance of sin, love to God, a cordial acceptance of Christ as exhibited and offered in the gospel, &c. yet may sincerely desire and endeavor after these things; and therefore must be excused; it being unreasonable to blame them for the omission of those things, which they sincerely desire and endeavour to do, but cannot. Concerning this matter, the following things may be observed.

1. What is here supposed, is a great mistake, and gross absurdity; even that men may sincerely choose and desire those spiritual duties of love, acceptance, choice, rejection, &c. consisting in the exercise of the Will itself, or in the disposition and inclination of the heart; and yet not able to perform or exert them. This is absurd, because it is absurd to suppose that a man should directly, properly, and sincerely incline to have an inclination, which at the same time is contrary to his inclination: for that is to suppose him not to be inclined to that which he is inclined to. If a man, in the state and acts of his will and inclination, properly and directly falls in with those duties, he therein performs them: for the duties themselves consist in that very thing; they consist in the state and acts of the Will being so formed and directed. If the soul properly and sincerely falls in with a certain proposed act of Will or choice, the soul therein makes that choice its own. Even as when a moving body falls in with a proposed direction of its motion, that is the same thing as to move in that direction.

2. That which is called a Desire and Willingness for those inward duties, in such as do not perform them, has respect to these duties only indirectly and remotely, and is improperly so called; not only because (as was observed before) it respects those good volitions only in a distant view, and with respect to future time; but also because

evermore, not these things themselves, but something else that is foreign, is the object that terminates these volitions and Desires.

A drunkard, who continues in his drunkenness, being under the power of a violent appetite to strong drink, and without any love to virtue; but being also extremely covetous and close, and very much exercised and grieved at the diminution of his estate, and prospect of poverty, may in a sort desire the virtue of temperance; and though his present Will is to gratify his extravagant appetite, yet he may wish he had a heart to forbear future acts of intemperance, and forsake his excesses, through an unwillingness to part with his money: but still he goes on with his drunkenness; his wishes and endeavours are insufficient and ineffectual: such a man has no proper, direct, sincere Willingness to forsake this vice, and the vicious deeds which belong to it; for he acts voluntarily in continuing to drink to excess: his Desire is very improperly called a willingness to be temperate; it is no true Desire of that virtue; for it is not that virtue, that terminates his wishes; nor have they any direct respect at all to it. It is only the saving of his money, or the avoiding of poverty, that terminates and exhausts the whole strength of his Desire. The virtue of temperance is regarded only very indirectly and improperly, even as a necessary means of gratifying the vice of covetousness.

So, a man of an exceedingly corrupt and wicked heart, who has no love to God and Jesus Christ, but, on the contrary, being very profanely and carnally inclined, has the greatest distaste of the things of religion, and enmity against them; yet being of a family, that, from one generation to another, have most of them died, in youth, of an hereditary consumption; and so having little hope of living long; and having been instructed in the necessity of a supreme love to Christ, and latitude for his death and sufferings, in order to his salvation from eternal misery; if under these circumstances he should, through fear of eternal torments, wish he had such a disposition; but his profane and carnal heart remaining, he continues still in his habitual distaste of; and enmity to God and religion, and wholly without any exercise of that love and gratitude, (as doubtless the very devils themselves, notwithstanding all the devilishness of their temper, would wish for a holy heart, if by that means they could get out of hell:) in this case, there is no sincere Willingness to love Christ and choose him as his chief good: these holy dispositions and exercises are not at all the direct object of the Will: they truly share no part of the inclination or desire of the soul; but all is terminated on deliverance from torment: and these graces and pious volitions, notwithstanding this forced consent, are looked upon as in themselves undesirable; as when a sick man desires a dose he greatly abhors, in order to save his life. From these things it appears:

3. That this indirect Willingness is not that exercise of the Will which the command requires; but is entirely a different one; being a volition of a different nature, and terminated altogether on different objects; wholly falling short of that virtue of Will, to which the command has respect,

4. This other volition, which has only some indirect concern with the duty required, cannot excuse for the want of that good will itself, which is commanded; being not the

thing which answers and fulfils the command, and being wholly destitute of the virtue which the command seeks.

Further to illustrate this matter: If a child has a most excellent father that has ever treated him with fatherly kindness and tenderness, and has every way, in the highest degree, merited his love and dutiful regard, and is withal very wealthy; but the son is of so vile a disposition, that he inveterately hates his father; and yet, apprehending that his hatred of him is like to prove his ruin, by bringing him finally to those abject circumstances, which are exceedingly adverse to his avarice and ambition; he, therefore, wishes it were otherwise: but yet remaining under the invincible power of his vile and malignant disposition, he continues still in his settled hatred of his father. Now, if such a son's indirect willingness to love and honour his father, at all acquits or excuses before God, for his failing of actually exercising these dispositions towards him, which God requires, it must be on one of these accounts. (1.) Either, That it answers and fulfils the command. But this it does not by the supposition; because the thing commanded is love and honour to his worthy parent. If the command be proper and just, as is supposed, then it obliges to the thing commanded; and so nothing else but that can answer the obligation. Or, (2.) It must be at least, because there is that virtue or goodness in his indirect willingness, that is equivalent to the virtue required; and so balances or countervails it, and makes up for the want of it. But that also is contrary to the supposition. The willingness the son has merely from a regard to money and honour, has no goodness in it, to countervail the want of the pious filial respect required.

Sincerity and reality, in that indirect Willingness, which has been spoken of, does not make it the better. That which is real and hearty is often called sincere; whether it be in virtue or vice. Some persons are sincerely bad; others are sincerely good; and others may be sincere and hearty in things, which are in their own nature indifferent; as a man may be sincerely desirous of eating when he is hungry. But being sincere, hearty, and in good earnest, is no virtue, unless it be in a thing that is virtuous. A man may be sincere and hearty in joining a crew of pirates, or a gang of robbers. When the devils cried out, and besought Christ not to torment them, it was no mere pretense; they were very hearty in their desires not to be tormented: but this did not make their Will or Desire virtuous. And if men have sincere Desires, which are in their kind and nature no better, it can be no excuse for the want of any required virtue.

And as a man's Sincerity in such an indirect Desire or willingness to do his duty, as has been mentioned, cannot excuse for the want of performance; so it is with Endeavours arising from such a Willingness. The Endeavours can have no more goodness in them, than the Will of which they are the effect and expression. And, therefore, however sincere and real, and however great a person's Endeavours are; yea, though they should be to the utmost of his ability; unless the Will from which they proceed be truly good and virtuous, they can be of no avail or weight whatsoever in a moral respect. That which is not truly virtuous is, in God's sight, good for nothing; and so can be of no value, or influence, in his account, to make up for any moral defect. For nothing can counterbalance evil, but good. If evil be in one scale, and we put a great deal into the other of sincere and earnest Desires, and many and great endeavours; yet, if there be

no real goodness in all, there is no weight in it; and so it does nothing towards balancing the real weight, which is in the opposite scale. It is only like subtracting a thousand noughts from before a real number, which leaves the sum just as it was.

Indeed such Endeavours may have a negatively good influence. Those things, which have no positive virtue, have no positive moral influence; yet they may be an occasion of persons avoiding some positive evils. As if a man were in the water with a neighbor to whom he had ill will, and who could not swim, holding him by his hand; this neighbor was much in debt to him,— the man is tempted to let him sink and drown — but refuses to comply with the temptation; not from love to his neighbor, but from the love of money, and because by his drowning he should lose his debt; that which he does in preserving his neighbor from drowning, is nothing good in the sight of God: yet hereby he avoids the greater guilt that would have been contracted, if he had designedly let his neighbor sink and perish. But when Arminians, in their disputes with Calvinists, insist so much on sincere Desires and Endeavours, as what must excuse men, must be accepted of God, &c. it is manifest they have respect to some positive moral weight or influence of those Desires and Endeavours. Accepting, justifying, or excusing on the account of sincere Endeavours, (as they are called,) and men doing what they can, &c. has relation to some moral value, something that is accepted as good, and as such, countervailing some defect.

But there is a great and unknown deceit, arising from the ambiguity of the phrase, sincere Endeavours. Indeed there is a vast indistinctness and unfixedness in most, or at least very many of the terms used to express things pertaining to moral and spiritual matters. whence arise innumerable mistakes, strong prejudices, inextricable confusion, and endless controversy.— The word sincere is most commonly used to signify something that is good: men are habituated to understand by it the same as honest and upright; which terms excite an idea of something good in the strictest and highest sense; good in the sight of him, who sees not only the outward appearance, but the heart. And, therefore, men think that if a person be sincere, he will certainly be accepted. If it be said that any one is sincere in his endeavours, this suggests, that his heart is good, that there is no defect of duty, as to virtuous inclination; he honestly and uprightly desires and endeavours to do as he is required; and this leads them to suppose, that it would be very hard and unreasonable to punish him, only because he is unsuccessful in his endeavours, the thing endeavored after being beyond his power.— Whereas it ought to be observed, that the word sincere has these different significations.

1. Sincerity, as the word is sometimes used, signifies no more than reality of will and Endeavour, with respect to any thing that is professed or pretended; without any consideration of the nature of the principle or aim, whence this real Will and true endeavour arises. If a man has some real Desire either direct or indirect to obtain a thing, or does really endeavour after it, he is said sincerely to desire or endeavour, without any consideration of the goodness of the principle from which he acts, or any excellency or worthiness of the end for which he acts. Thus a man who is kind to his neighbour's wife, who is sick and languishing, and very helpful in her case, makes a

show of desiring and endeavouring her restoration to health and vigor; and not only makes such a show, but there is a reality in his pretense, he does heartily and earnestly desire to have her health restored, and uses his true and utmost Endeavours for it: he is said sincerely to desire and endeavour after it, because he does so truly or really; though perhaps the principle he acts from, is no other than a vile and scandalous passion; having lived in adultery with her, he earnestly desires to have her health and vigor restored, that he may return to his criminal pleasures. Or,

2. By Sincerity is meant, not merely a reality of will and Endeavour of some sort, and from some consideration or other, but a virtuous Sincerity. That is, that in the performance of those particular acts, that are the matter of virtue or duty, there be not only the matter, but the form and essence of virtue, consisting in the aim that governs the act, and the principle exercised in it. There is not only the reality of the act, that is as it were the body of the duty; but also the soul, which should properly belong to such a body. In this sense, a man is said to be sincere, when he acts with a pure intention; not from sinister views: he not only in reality desires and seeks the thing to be done, or qualification to be obtained, for some end or other; but he wills the thing directly and properly, as neither forced nor bribed; the virtue of the thing is properly the object of the Will.

In the former sense, a man is said to be sincere, in opposition to a mere pretense, and show of the particular thing to be done or exhibited, without any real Desire or Endeavour at all. In the latter sense, a man is said to be sincere, in opposition to that show of virtue there is in merely doing the matter of duty, without the reality of the virtue itself in the soul. A man may be sincere in the former sense, and yet in the latter be in the sight of God, who searches the heart, a vile hypocrite.

In the latter kind of sincerity, only, is there any thing truly valuable or acceptable in the sight of God. And this is what in Scripture is called Sincerity, uprightness, integrity, "truth in the inward parts," and "heirs of a perfect heart." And if there be such a Sincerity, and such a degree of it as there ought to be, and there be any thing further that the man is not able to perform, or which does not prove to be connected with his sincere Desires and Endeavours, the man is wholly excused and acquitted in the sight of God; his Will shall surely be accepted for his deed: and such a sincere Will and Endeavour is all that in strictness is required of him, by any command of God, but as to the other kind of Sincerity of Desires and Endeavours, having no virtue in it, (as was observed before,) it can be of no avail before God, in any case, to recommend, satisfy, or excuse, and has no positive moral weight or influence whatsoever.

Corol. 1. Hence it may be inferred, that nothing in the reason and nature of things appears from the consideration of any moral weight in the former kind of Sincerity, leading us to suppose, that God has made any positive promises of salvation, or grace, or any saving assistance, or any spiritual benefit whatsoever, to any Desires, prayers, Endeavours, striving, or obedience of those, who hitherto have no true virtue or holiness in their hearts; though we should suppose all the Sincerity, and the utmost degree of Endeavour, that is possible to be in person without holiness.

Some object against God requiring, as the condition of salvation, those holy exercises, which are the result of a supernatural renovation; such as a supreme respect to Christ, love to God, loving holiness for its own sake, &c. that these inward dispositions and exercises are above men's power, as they are by nature; and therefore that we may conclude, that when men are brought to be sincere in their Endeavours, and do as well as they can, they are accepted; and that this must be all that God requires, in order to their being received as the objects of his favour, and must be what God has appointed as the condition of salvation. Concerning this, I would observe, that in such manner of speaking as "men being accepted because they are sincere, and do as well as they can," there is evidently a supposition of some virtue, some degree of that which is truly good; though it does not go so far as were to be wished. For if men do what they can, unless their so doing be from some good principle, disposition, or exercise of heart, some virtuous inclination or act of the will; their so doing what they can, is in some respect not a whit better than if they did nothing at all. In such a case, there is no more positive moral goodness in a man doing what he can, than in a windmill doing what it can; because the action does no more proceed from virtue: and there is nothing in such Sincerity of Endeavour, or doing what we can, that should render it any more a fit recommendation to positive favour and acceptance, or the condition of any reward or actual benefit, than doing nothing; for both the one and the other are alike nothing, as to any true moral weight or value.

Corol. 2. Hence also it follows, there is nothing that appears in the reason and nature of things, which can justly lead us to determine, that God will certainly give the necessary means of salvation, or some way or other bestow true holiness and eternal life on those heathens, who are sincere (in the sense above explained) in their Endeavours to find out the Will of the Deity, and to please him, according to their light, that they may escape his future displeasure and wrath, and obtain happiness in the future state, through his favour.

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