

The Reality of Human Action and the Power of Contrary Choice

by John Murray

The sermon examines the complexities of human freedom, moral choice, and the transformative power of regeneration through God's grace.

Duration: 51:48

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Romans 1:28, Romans 4:25, 1 Corinthians 10:31, Ephesians 2:10, James 1:17, 2 Peter 1:10

Topics: "Choice"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by praising and blessing God for His greatness and the hope found in Jesus Christ. The sermon then delves into the topic of freedom and the relationship between human action and God's judgment. The speaker emphasizes that although humans have the ability to make choices, their actions are ultimately determined by their character and heart. The sermon concludes by discussing the responsibility and accountability that comes with free agency, highlighting the importance of self-determination in aligning with God's will.

Transcript

Let us pray. O Lord, we praise and bless thy great name, that thou art not as we are. For we are not demons, I would hope, to praise and bless thee for the light and immortality.

It came in Jesus that he rose from the dead, that he was delivered up for our offenses and was raised again for our justifications of life. May we all give diligence to make our calling to this light, in this hope. We may walk with confidence and with joy and thanksgiving.

In Jesus' name, amen. Now I am dealing with the generation that I was making freedom in the title. Oh, to this point I was dealing with the actions of freedom number six.

And I had almost that freedom as I have defined it. Want to hop ahead? I could even begin it here. All right then, you have the title, do you? I think the last thing then I said were his acts because they are due to his volitions.

He is responsible for his volitions because they are his own. Exercise without compulsion, express what he is in the inabendent tendency of his heart and mind. And that free agency is therefore rational spontaneity or self-determination in the sense of which self-determination is part of the discussion.

Is that the last I said? Now six, the inclusiveness of freedom, the inclusiveness. What is in view here is simply that this natural liberty is not to be restricted to the sphere of actual volition but must also be applied to that complex that in scripture is called the heart and that in present day usage might be called the dispositional complex. I say this natural liberty must be applied to the heart because God's judgment extends to the heart and mind as well as to actual volition.

Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks upon the heart. Why does this natural liberty apply to that which is most determinative in human personality? Simply for this reason that the heart or dispositional complex which characterizes a man is his own, it is his own. It defines his moral and religious identity.

Man is depraved and the individual members of the race, the individual members of the race did not become depraved by a personal act, a personal voluntary act on their part but by imputation and inheritance from Adam. But nevertheless it belongs to them, this depravity belongs to them because their heart belongs to them, their dispositional complex belongs to them and they are characterized by it. Now that we have to reckon with this principle which Charles Hodge argues and maybe even Hecks that a disposition is good and a bad disposition is bad however these dispositions may have come to be.

That is that the moral character of disposition depends upon the criteria by which God judges and not simply upon their origin. He puts it that way, not simply upon their origin. Now to give a few examples.

In creation man was endowed with a holy disposition, a good heart. He was endowed with a holy disposition. He did not himself originate that.

But nevertheless it was a good disposition and he was characterized as good accordingly. It was good and even so he did on his part originate it. He originated a good heart.

Now in the fall of man the disposition of man became depraved and that was due to a movement of defection in the heart of man. The heart and mind of man. He was the author of it.

How it became depraved, the judgment of God rested upon the depravity as a condition and not simply upon the way by which it originated. Posterity, descending from Adam, are naturally depraved and this infliction, this involvement is traced back to the relationship to Adam, to the solidarity constituted with Adam. And that's an end of it.

We may not like it, we may gnash our teeth against it, but there it is. And that's all I can say, that's enough of it. In posterity the depravity is traced back to involvement in the sin and not to voluntary decision on the part of the members, the subsequent members of the race.

But since posterity has this depraved heart, the judgment of God must be registered accordingly. And the judgment of God being registered accordingly is a judgment of God with respect to the person whose heart it is. Therefore with respect to the whole of posterity one must try to I say the judgment of God must rest upon the person whose depraved heart it has to be.

And the way it originated, for posterity I mean now, the way it originated for posterity, else not to this degree interfere with the judgment that must supervene upon it because of its nature. Now we come to regeneration, another example. In regeneration a new heart, a clean heart, a good heart, at least principally so, a new heart, a clean heart, a pure heart, a good heart is implanted simply by the grace of God.

Simply by the grace of God and divine monergism Divine monergism is just as conspicuous in this case as in the original creation. As conspicuous in this case as in the original creation when God created man good. Now He recreates a man good.

And goodness in the human heart now originates that way. But the judgment of God, the judgment of God that is registered with reference to that heart is a judgment that applies to the person. No such thing as a heart in abstraction.

And there is no such thing as moral predication of a heart disposition apart from the predication that belongs to the person. And why does it belong? Why is that same judgment predicated of the person? Just because the heart is his own, the divine, moral and religious identity. Now, that is the difference.

This natural difference is implanted in the sense that it extends to the very heart of man. The heart of man is man's own. He is responsible for it.

Because it is his. And he comes under condemnation for it in the case of a corrupt heart because it violates the criteria of holiness and justice which God must apply. It is a crude heart by God's regenerating grace.

Of course, the divine authority of the criteria is the heart of man. Now, that is all there is. Now, seventh.

This is not the last. There is an eighth. Not finished today, gentlemen.

Well, now, the seventh proposition is that the power of contrary choice is not of the essence of creation. The power of contrary choice, Mr. Tudor, is not of the essence of creation. Seventh proposition.

Now, I have to analyze this more fully than any other one proposition. Sorry, it has to be that way, but it is necessary to be that way because of the confusion that often arises and that has a lesson to learn on that issue. You see, we are here with the great cleavage that there has been in anthropology between Eastern orthodox, between Greek orthodoxy on the one hand and Catholic orthodoxy on the other, and also the cleavage that there is within even Western Catholic theology on this particular question.

You see, there is scarcely any proposition that has more repercussions than this particular one. The power of contrary choice is not of the essence of creation. Now, before we proceed to deal with this just an introductory statement by way of distinction, it is necessary to distinguish between contrary choice and alternative choice.

Contrary and alternative. This distinction has not always been observed in the discussion of this question, and consequently there has always been a feeling of unnecessary confusion. We believe that the Latin phrase possibilities utilized with partisan is not sufficiently respectable.

You must distinguish between contrary and alternative. Contrary to the power or ability to choose between alternatives that are morally and spiritually antithetical, morally and religiously antithetical, between good and evil, what is right, whereas alternative choice refers to the choice between alternatives, the same moral quality. Is that clear? Within the realm of the good, there are alternatives, but they are not the good.

Within the realm of the evil, there have been alternatives, but they are all evil, but they are still alternatives. They are not alternatives. Contrary.

Now, the proposition concerns simple incidents which confront the power of contrary. No, that's just to clarify terminology. Now, particularly under that negative what the proposition does not mean.

It does not mean that there are no situations in which man has the power of contrary choice. Contrary choice. Adam has the power of contrary choice.

Deny that proposition, and then you make sin a necessity. Say, deny the fact that Adam has the power of contrary choice, and you make sin a necessity, or you deny sin altogether. Adam was able to sin because he did sin.

Furthermore, man in his regenerate state has the power of contrary. The power of good, that is ability to do good, the power of good arising from regeneration and sanctification. And ability to do evil, that is the power of evil, arising from regeneration and sanctification.

And ability to do evil, that is the power of evil, because of remaining indwelling sin. Romans 7.25 is perhaps the most explicit statement of that, of that duality which exists. With the mind, I myself, with the flesh, that he does two kinds of things.

He follows two. He tells us the fourth, Louis, with the mind, flesh, so you see, there were two types of action characterizing the apostate. There are two types of action characterizing you.

Both two types of action characterizing me. Well, you must have the power for both, you must have the agency for both, so you have, in the case of the regenerate man, two-fold ability. You have duality, and that means the power of contrary choice in terms of our present.

That's the first thing. Second, the proposition does not mean that depraved men, depraved men, are deprived of the power of alternative. A depraved man is under an unholy necessity of sinning.

He's under an unholy necessity of sinning because he is in a state of confirmed unholiness. So he cannot choose what is good or well-pleasing to God in any ultimate within this realm, yet also in turn he is able to choose all sorts of things. But furthermore, in the case of the regenerate man, the regenerate man, the regenerate man has the power of alternative choice within both realms.

Good. Alternative. Good is because of regenerating.

Alternative is within the realm of evil. It's within a lefty and an absolutely now free. The proposition, the proposition is not concerned with the determinism proceeding from foreordinary determinism or deterministic confusion.

Frequently it is thought that that is what the proposition is dealing with. Since all acts are foreordained by God, man does not have any alternative choice. Due to confusion of thinking.

It is true that all our acts are foreordained and only what God foreordains is what God has foreordained. And if we are shut up, let us say, to two alternatives. The future, as it were, is shut up in a particular instance to two alternatives.

God has only foreordained one. And it is certain from the standpoint of his foreordination what that one will be. But if that were the intent of the proposition, if that were the intent of the proposition, then the power of contrary choice and the power of alternative choice will rule out entirely from the realm of human existence.

Rules out entirely from the realm of human existence. It would apply to Adam. It has been foreordained of God that Adam would eat the forbidden fruit.

It has been foreordained of God that he would eat the forbidden fruit. That is what certainly would come to pass. Not simply from the Augustinian point of view or the Calvinistic point of view, but from the Arminian point of view.

That is the Arminian faith of God. But does that fact that the fall of man was certain according to his foreordination and according to his foreknowledge rule out the power of contrary choice which belonged to Adam and Eden? Does it? Does it rule out the power of contrary choice in those situations in which it actually exists among men today in the case of the regeneration? Does it? Does it rule out the power of alternative choice in the numberless situations in which men are placed? Of course not because when we are dealing with this proposition we are dealing simply and solely with people. We are dealing simply and solely with the truth that in a state of concerned holiness or unholiness the absence of power of the morally opposite, the absence of the power of the morally opposite, the morally antithetical, the absence of the power of the morally opposite does not interfere with the reality of free ages.

It does not interfere with the order of the proposition that in history of the Western church our birth was born in a state of unholy holiness or Even in his foreign state, he is not able to do that which is well. Don't take notes for a minute, please, let me make a parenthetical remark. There are all sorts of degrees of displeasingness, but don't let that consideration perplex your thinking of this.

There are endless disdegrees, there are endless inhibitions which prevent men from the most aggravated forms of displeasement. And there are those judgments of God upon untruthful men which entail their depravity, their displeasingness. God visits men with judgment, he gives them over to a reckoning.

He hardens and calls for inhibitions in the direction of preventing more accurate investigations. But don't allow all the variety that enters in in connection with that. Beyond the fundamental purpose of this depraved man is naughtiness.

He may do many things that are formerly in accordance with good use to himself to himself undoubtedly. Under the operations of common grace, he may be incited to do a great many things that are of good use to himself. The point is that if he is still a man with generalism, he can't do anything in God's good.

Well, please, say that all in the flesh. Come on, please God, that's what I'm saying. Say nothing else.

No. Man in his depraved state, you can start taking notes now if you want. Man in his depraved state is God's creation, because that which he does, he does in that he acts.

He, to deprave nature is his own, and defying his morals and religious identity. In fact, it is only within the realm of free agency, natural liberty, that equality can be found. Only within that realm is it as well.

And so, what we mean by free agency is called natural liberty. It is presupposed in all matters. Take the saints in glory.

They are now under the authority. By the conferment of great authority and the power of the opposite system. Free agency is now exercised for the first time.

Oh Lord, it is integral. It is now their will yet. It is then in glory their will yet.

The glory of natural liberty. Also confirmed in holiness. Otherwise it wouldn't be confirmed.

See it altogether. Opposition is altogether confirmed. With the necessities inherent.

In a confirmed badness or confirmed goodness. And not at all with the kind of mischief that arises from God's care. Opposition is confirmed with necessities inherent in a condition of confirmed badness or confirmed goodness.

And not with the kind of mischief that arises from God's poor ordination and poor knowledge. Simply in fact, that the poor ordination of God and the providence of God do not go apart. Deprive man of his agency and of his rational free agency.

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