

**The Theology of the Westminster Standards**  
**WCF 9.1 – Of Free Will**

*“I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.” – W.E. Henley, “Invictus”*  
*“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked ...” – Ephesians 2:1–2*

**I. Review: Redemption Accomplished vs. Redemption Applied**

- A. Redemption ACCOMPLISHED = the once-for-all activity of Christ to secure salvation for all who would ever believe on him.
1. WCF 8.5 – *The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.*
- B. Redemption APPLIED = the ongoing application of salvation by Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to people in every age.
1. WCF 8.8 – *To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, he doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same ...*
- C. Complicating the issue ...
1. WCF 3.1 – *God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.*

**II. The Nature of Human Freedom**

*God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil. (WCF 9.1)*

- A. What does it mean that man’s “*natural liberty*” is not “*forced ... to good, or evil*”? Is this always the case?
1. **Matt 17:12** – *“But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased.”*
  2. **Deut 30:19** – *“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live ...”*
  3. **James 1:14** – *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.”*

- B. What does it mean that our “*natural liberty*” is not “*determined to good, or evil*” by “*any absolute necessity of nature*”?

*“The contemporary scientific image of human behavior is one of neurons firing, causing other neurons to fire, causing our thoughts and deeds, in an unbroken chain that stretches back to our birth and beyond. In principle, we are therefore completely predictable.”*

*“It seems that when people stop believing they are free agents, they stop seeing themselves as blameworthy for their actions. Consequently, they act less responsibly and give in to their baser instincts . . . In every regard, it seems, when we embrace determinism, we indulge our dark side.”*

- Stephen Cave, “There’s No Such Thing as Free Will: But We’re Better Off Believing in it Anyway,” *The Atlantic*, June 2016.

- C. What can you anticipate might be some of the challenges of maintaining the Confession’s position in light of (a) God’s sovereignty, (b) Adam’s fall into sin in Eden, (b) the work of the Holy Spirit in someone’s heart?

“When grace is defended, we are thought to destroy free-will, and when a free-will is acknowledged (although in some sense only) we are thought to deny free grace.” – Augustine of Hippo

*“For in creation God confers on the world a being of its own, which, though not independent, is distinct from his. In the preservation and government of all things, God maintains this distinct existence of his creatures, causes all of them to function in accordance with their own nature, and guarantees to human beings their own personality, rationality, and freedom. God never coerces anyone ... In regeneration and conversion he does not suppress and destroy the powers and gifts of human persons but restores and strengthens them by cleansing them from sin.” – Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:432)*