

DOCTRINE OF VOLITION

- I. Preliminary considerations and definition.
 - A. Volition is the power of self-will or self-determination; it is the capability of making a conscious choice.
 - B. This attribute of free will exists in every one of the moral creatures that God has created; further, God will hold each moral agent responsible for the manner in which he exercised his/her volition.
 - C. There are three categories of volition in the universe:
 - 1. God's volition. Isa. 46:8-11
 - a. The volition of God, which we refer to as His sovereignty, is observed by the fact that He makes choices and has purposes that He intends to accomplish. Isa. 46:10
 - b. His sovereignty does not conflict with any of the other attributes of His essence; like all other attributes, His sovereignty must function in concert with His righteousness.
 - c. It was God's eternal and sovereign will that included creating and providing both angels and men with volition.
 - 2. Angelic volition. Isa. 14:13-14
 - a. God created angels with the ability to make choices from the source of their free will; this allowed for the potential of using their volition to obey or disobey God. Ps. 103:20; Jude 6
 - b. One-third of the all the angels willingly chose to follow Satan in his rebellion against God. Rev. 12:4; Job 4:18
 - 3. Human volition. Jn. 3:15-16
 - a. This is the part of the soul from which each individual has the power and freedom to make his own decisions.
 - b. In that regard, part of human maturity is accepting the responsibility for your decisions instead of attempting to blame others for your condition or problems.
 - 4. It must be noted that animals, and other forms of lower creation do not possess volition; they do not have the power of self-determination that resides in rational creatures.
 - D. Ultimately, two types of volitional responses to God and His plan may be observed—positive volition and negative volition.
 - E. Positive volition is manifested in the desire to have a relationship with God and, in the absolute sense, to obtain an understanding of God and His plan in order to comply with it.
 - F. Negative volition is manifested in a lack of interest in God, His plan, understanding His plan, or in doing things God's way.
 - G. Without an understanding of this basic doctrine, which permeates the Bible, one cannot have a clear understanding of the angelic conflict, or many of the issues that face the believer in the Christian way of life.
 - H. Failure to understand and appreciate this doctrine has led to all sorts of distortions of the truth.
 - 1. Calvinism, which is the extreme that effectively denies volition, seeks to make God's sovereign volition the will that determines human and angelic destiny.
 - 2. The fundamentalist, evangelistic approaches, which effectively exalt human volition to the exclusion of God's sovereignty.
 - 3. One must understand the need to recognize all the categories of volition, how each functions, and the relationship that each has to the others.

- II. Vocabulary terms and other means by which volition is taught in the Word of God.
- A. Hebrew vocabulary.
1. אָבַח ('abhah), verb, 55X. The primary meaning of this root is the willingness to do something based on some obligation to do so, or upon some request. This word is only used twice without the negative (Job 39:9; Isa. 1:19), while the rest of the usages indicate unwillingness to do something.
 2. אָלַץ (ya'al), verb, 22X. The primary meaning of this verb is to make a volitional decision to begin a given activity. It stresses the voluntary act of the will to engage in a particular action. Ex. 2:21; Deut. 1:5
 3. נָדַח (nadhabh), verb, 17X. This verb denotes the uncompelled and free movement of the will to do something, to volunteer. It is particularly used in contexts of divine service or sacrifice. Ex. 25:2, 35:21
- B. Greek vocabulary.
1. θέλω (thelo), verb, 208X. This verb denotes the desire for something, to wish, have, desire or want something. This family focuses on the will or desire that proceeds from emotion, personal inclination or personal preference.
 2. βούλομαι (boulomai), 37X. This verb denotes the desire to have or experience something, with the implication of planning accordingly. This word focuses on decisions made upon consideration or deliberation.
 3. There have been endless arguments over the precise nuances of these two terms, but in certain contexts they may be nothing more than synonyms.
- C. The existence of volition is also expressed in the Bible by:
1. The use of the third class condition in the Greek. IJn. 1:9
 2. The use of the subjunctive mood, which is so pervasive that there are less than 15 chapters in the entire New Testament in which you do not find it used.
 3. Every alternative possibility. Jn. 3:36
 4. Constructions that express purpose, which are usually translated by the phrase **in order that..** Mk. 3:2; IICor. 13:10
- III. The origin of volition.
- A. The eternal God determined in eternity past, through the exercise of His volition or sovereignty, to reveal Himself and share His glory with other created beings.
 - B. He did not desire their unthinking, mechanical allegiance or He could have created beings that would worship and obey Him without question.
 - C. He chose to create beings that, of their own personal choice, would desire to have a relationship and fellowship with Him.
 - D. This resulted in the formation of the fabulous creatures we know as angels.
 - E. These creatures are much more like God in their being than man is, in that they have a spiritual form (likely composed of light); however, each has a different personality and each possesses volition.
 - F. Lucifer, the cherub God exalted to the highest rank among these creatures, chose to use his volition to act apart from, and with hostility toward his Creator. Isa. 14:13-14
 - G. He induced one third of all the created angels to participate in his revolution against God. Rev. 12:4
 - H. Those angels used their volition to willingly follow Satan's viewpoint.
 - I. This resulted in the angelic conflict, as angelic volition rejected divine sovereignty, choosing to act in ways that were incompatible with the essence of God.

- J. Satan, along with those angels that participated with him, was condemned to the Lake of Fire in prehistory. Matt. 25:41
- K. Satan appealed the decision by attacking the character of the Judge, suggesting that some, or all, of the Divine essence was suspect; further, this would indicate that he had not been dealt with fairly.
- L. The Hebrew and Greek terms applied to him reveal this aspect of his character.
 1. שָׂטָן (Hebrew, satan), accuser, adversary, attorney.
 2. διαβολός (Greek, diabolos), slanderer, devil.
- M. This resulted in God forming another category of volition, human volition, in order to legally resolve the conflict.
- N. The Judge could not recuse Himself in this case, but He could provide proof of His character by this means, refuting Satan's suggestion that he did not receive a fair trial.

IV. The angelic conflict and human volition.

- A. Like the angels before them, mankind was created with free will by the sovereign will of God. Gen. 1:26-27, 2:16-17
- B. Man was formed and placed on planet earth in perfect environment in order to resolve the appeal of Satan, and demonstrate the truth of God's judgment against him.
- C. Like the angels before him, man began his existence in a state of moral perfection and innocence in a perfect environment. Gen. 1:31-2:3
- D. Man was provided with a single test of his volitional willingness to obey God; only one tree was forbidden to Adam, and the only way Adam could reject God's sovereignty was to eat from that tree. Gen. 2:16-17
- E. Like Satan before him, man chose to exalt his volition over the sovereignty of God by disobeying God and eating from the tree; this action resulted in divine judgment. Gen. 3:6,16-19
- F. When the woman succumbed to the plausible rationale of Satan, and the man listened to his wife, both disobeyed the prohibition of God and manifested it by eating from the tree.
- G. With the fall of mankind, Satan became the default ruler over the world. Jn. 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; IICor. 4:4
 1. Note that Jesus did not dispute Satan's claim to the planet at the First Advent. Lk. 4:5-8
 2. However, He will exert His sovereignty, will reclaim the planet, and will establish the Millennial kingdom. Rev. 5
- H. As with the angels, it quickly became apparent that there were two categories of volitional responses in the human race. IIThess. 1:5-10; 1John 3:12
- I. Although Adam and Eve failed the first test of their volition, God provided another tree to test the volition of the human race. Gen. 3:15; ICor. 1:18
- J. This has formed the basis for much idle and fruitless speculation about why God did not, and will not, provide another chance for the angels. Heb. 2:16
- K. In some sense, the sin of angels must have been one that the essence of God could not overcome in righteousness, since the attribute of love extends equally to all creatures.
- L. When a member of the human race expresses positive volition and passes the test related to the second tree, the elect angels rejoice, recognizing that this is refuting Satan's appeal about volition. Lk. 15:7-10
- M. At the cross, the free will of man meets the sovereignty of God. IIPet. 3:9
 1. The negative unbeliever exalts his volition over God's sovereignty; God does not desire for any to perish. Ezek. 18:23; ITim. 2:4
 2. On the other hand, those that are positive receive the gospel, humble themselves, and believe in Christ and are guaranteed eternal life. Jn. 6:40

- V. The Divine institutions as they relate to Divine institution #1, volition.
- A. Volition is the first and most important of the Divine institutions; all other Divine institutions are designed to protect it.
 - B. In fact, Divine institution #1 is so important that any man that violates the free will of another, by taking away his volitional choices, forfeits his right to continue to operate under his volition. Gen. 9:5-6
 - C. Although God is omnipotent, He chooses not to violate or coerce volition in any way. Rev. 22:11,17
 - D. Nevertheless, God has provided every inducement for the thinking (intellectually honest) person to accept His plan as revealed in Christ; this is observed by the following:
 1. His goodness and benevolence. Jere. 5:24; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:4
 2. His love. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:4
 3. His faithfulness. Gen. 32:10; Deut. 7:9; ICor. 10:13; IITim. 2:13
 4. The promise of eternal life with Him. Matt. 19:29; Jn. 3:15, 5:24
 5. His coming wrath. Ps. 2:11-12; Rev. 6:16-17
 6. His temporal judgments. Gen. 6; Ex. 7-12; Rom. 1:27, 2:2
 7. The threat of eternal judgment. Matt. 11:21-24, 13:40-42
 - E. In spite of God's obvious willingness to establish a relationship with each member of the human race and the obvious inducements to respond, the majority uses their free will to reject God's overtures. Matt. 7:13-14
 - F. Nevertheless, God has provided other Divine institutions to protect and nurture volition in the Devil's world.
 - G. Divine institution #2, marriage, is designed to protect the volition of the weaker vessel in the angelic conflict.
 - H. Divine institution #3, the family, is designed to nurture and protect the volition of the child until such a time as they are able to function on their own in the angelic conflict.
 - I. Nationalism, Divine institution #4, is designed to protect the volition of families and nations against the Satanic plan of international control of the world. *See doctrine of Nationalism*
 - J. Therefore, it is important for everyone to recognize that God, in His sovereign wisdom and goodness, has provided the authorities we need in the Devil's world in order to prosper spiritually. *See Doctrine of Authority.*
 - K. Rejection of any of these bona fide authorities constitutes a rejection of the wisdom and authority of God. Lk. 10:16
- VI. The existence of volition explains the origin of sin in the universe and the resulting judgment of God.
- A. Apart from volition, sin would not exist.
 - B. God has expressly declared that He is not the originator of sin, and has nothing to do with sin, inducements to sin, etc. IJn. 1:5; James 1:13
 - C. All sin, known or unknown, involves an act of the will on the part of the one that commits it. Isa. 14:13ff
 - D. Ignorance of God's laws is no excuse for sinning, since God has established these laws and expects man to learn and apply them. IIKings 10:31
 - E. In the physical world, the establishment chain of command is not responsible for making sure you know the laws and abide by them; this is your personal responsibility.
 - F. Since God is in no way responsible for violations of His righteousness, He is completely justified in executing the appropriate judgment on the person that violated His law. Ps. 7:11, 119:75; Rev. 16:7
 - G. The attributes of righteousness and justice demand that all sins and all sinful conditions be judged at some point in the angelic conflict; everyone is responsible for his own actions and will answer accordingly. Ezek. 18:30; Rom. 14:10

- VII. Volition is the factor that explains how God “responds” to mankind.
- A. God has demonstrated that he desires to bestow positive blessings on mankind. Gen. 1-2
 - B. He does not desire for anyone to perish and takes no pleasure in judging those that are maladjusted. Ezek. 18:23; IIPet. 3:9
 - C. Although God demonstrates an attitude of grace toward all men, He cannot maintain His attribute of justice and overlook violations of His righteousness by those that are negative. Rom. 2:5,8-9
 - D. God expresses Himself in blessing toward those that manifest positive volition. Deut. 28:1-14; Eccles. 2:26
 - E. However, in spite of His grace, God manifests His displeasure toward those that are negative in terms of judgment and cursing. Deut. 28:15-68
 - F. The fact that volition is the issue is demonstrated by the case history of Esau and Jacob. Rom. 9:11-14
 1. God reveals that He made a distinction between the twins before they were born and had done anything good or bad. Vs. 11
 2. Via omniscience (specifically foreknowledge), God was aware of the differing volitional response from each boy. IPet. 1:2
 3. God recognized that Jacob was ultimately positive and that Esau was ultimately negative and made His choices accordingly. Vs. 11
 4. Since Christ did the same thing for each of them, taking their sins on Himself and suffering on their behalf, the difference must be in their volitional response to that fact.
 5. God’s sovereignty, since He was aware of their response long before they actually expressed it, expressed itself towards Esau in judgment (hate) and toward Jacob in grace (love).
 6. This explains the phrase **Jacob I have loved, but Esau I hated**, which is found in verse 13.
 7. God’s foreknowledge anticipated their respective volitional responses and His free will expressed itself accordingly.
 - G. While positive volition advances the plan and purposes of God, it is quite important to recognize that negative volition does nothing to thwart the eternal purpose of God. Rom. 3:3-4, 9:17-18,22
 1. In fact, negative volition serves to make manifest those that are actually positive. ICor. 11:19
 2. This is clearly illustrated in the life of the Pharaoh of the Exodus; Koncharis I, the last ruler of Dynasty XIII in Egypt.
 - a. Although Christ died for him, as he did for all men, he manifested negative volition and refused to believe. ITim. 2:5-6; Ex. 5:2
 - b. God read his negative volition before the fact and knew that he would reject every proof of God’s existence. Ex. 7:4,13,14,22, 8:11,32
 - c. God revealed Himself in judgment (the ten plagues); however, in spite of all the proof, Koncharis continued to reject the plan of God.
 - d. Although each plague only served to harden his heart to the truth, which is always the consequence of negative volition, his actions served to evangelize that entire generation. Rom. 9:17; Josh. 2:8-11
- VIII. The volitional makeup of the human race.
- A. The vast majority of humanity is negative and will not accept God on His terms. Matt. 7:13-14
 - B. A very small percentage of the human race is positive and chooses to exercise faith in Christ for eternal salvation.
 - C. This is taught in the ritual of the sin offering and the fact that the vast majority of the blood is poured out on the ground; thus, apparently wasting it. Lev. 4:5-7
 - D. Nevertheless, God knows who will believe (something He knew in eternity past IPet. 1:1-2) and makes certain that they receive the gospel in time. Jn. 6:37; Rom. 8:30

- E. On a percentage basis, very little positive volition is found among those that are blessed with wealth, human intelligence, or occupy positions of royalty. ICor. 1:26-29; Mk. 10:23-27
- F. Among those that are positive and eventually believe, a small percentage continues to manifest positive volition toward Bible doctrine. IICor. 2:17; Rev. 3:4
- G. This is illustrated by the Exodus generation. Num. 14:5-10

IX. Volition and stumbling blocks.

- A. Negative volition has but one block over which they stumble--the person and work of Christ. Rom. 9:32-33; ICor. 1:23
- B. Since they fail to manifest sufficient positive volition and believe, they stumble over Him into Hell. IPet. 2:8
- C. However, among those that possess positive volition toward God and His plan, there are those people that have things in their life that prove to be a stumbling block to them, which hinder them from exercising faith in Christ.
- D. God, who knows their ultimate spiritual disposition, is free in grace to engineer the circumstances so that their positive volition can manifest itself.
- E. This is demonstrated in the life of Nebuchadnezzar, an unbeliever that was ultimately positive to the gospel. Dan. 4
 - 1. Nebuchadnezzar was positive at God consciousness but had not believed the gospel.
 - 2. The mental attitude sin of pride, something that plagued him due to his position and accomplishments, was a hindrance to faith in Christ. Dan. 4:30
 - 3. God intervened and removed the basis for his pride by inflicting a terrible disease on him. Dan. 4:33
 - 4. After sufficient time had passed for Nebuchadnezzar to come to his senses, he regained his sanity and believed the gospel. Dan. 4:34-35
- F. God can do the same thing for the seeker that desires to matriculate, yet who has an obstacle that hinders him from making his greatest amount of spiritual advance. Job 3:25; IICor. 12:7
- G. Both these examples demonstrate that if the believer will not deal with his own stumbling blocks, God may deal with them in a way that is not pleasant.
- H. On the other hand, positive believers are exhorted to face their own obstacles and remove them—even at extreme cost. Matt. 5:29-30
- I. The parable of the soils would suggest that if one is not ultimately positive God will not intervene, but will allow that believer to stumble and he will fail to make the full adjustments. Mk. 4:15-19
- J. This serves to demonstrate that there is both a human and a Divine aspect to the matter of volition; one cannot focus on one to the exclusion of the other.