

[taken from SYSTEMATIC AND POLEMIC THEOLOGY]

LECTURE XLIX.

by

Robert L. Dabney

ARMINIAN THEORY OF REDEMPTION.—Concluded.

SYLLABUS.

1. Are God's decrees of personal election conditional or unconditional?

Turretin, Loc. iv., Qu. 3, §1-7. Q11. 11. §10-24. Loc. xv., Qu. 2, 3. Hill, bk., iv, ch. 7, 10. Dick, Lect. 35. Knapp, Chr. Theol., §32. and Note. Watson's Theol. Inst., ch. 26.

2. Show the relations between the orthodox views of effectual calling and election, and the true theory of the will and free-agency. (a). That the natural will is certainly determined to carnality, and yet free-agency exists therein. (b). That the renewed will, after it is sovereignly renewed to godliness, and efficaciously preserved therein, is yet more free: And therefore, responsibility exists in both states.

See Lect. XI, above on the Will. Turretin, Loc. x, Qu. 4. Southern Presbn. Rev., Oct. 1876, July and Oct., 1877. Articles on Theory of Volition. Alexander's "Moral Science," chs. 16 to 18. Hill, bk. iv. ch. g, §3. Edwards on the Will, pt. i, ch. 3, and pt. iii. Watson's Theol. Inst., ch. 28, §3. Anselm. *Cur Deus Homo.*, pt. i, ch. 24.

THE favourite Arminian dogma, that God's will concerning the salvation of individuals is conditioned on His simple foresight of their improvement of their common grace, in genuine faith, repentance, and holy obedience, is necessary to the coherency of their system. If grace is invincible, and all true faith, &c., are its fruits, then God's purpose as to working them must be absolute in this sense. If grace is only synergistic, and the sinner's free will alone decides the question of resisting it, or co-operating with it, then, of course, the sovereignty of decision, in this matter, is in the creature, and not in God; and He must be guided in His purpose by what it is foreseen the creature will choose to do. Thus we reach, by a corollary from the Arminian doctrine of "Calling," that which in time is first, the nature of the Divine purpose about it. The student is here referred to the Lecture on the Decree. But as the subject is so illustrative of the two theories of redemption, the Arminian and the orthodox, I shall not hesitate to discuss the same thing again, and to reproduce some of the same ideas.

And let me begin by reminding you of that plain distinction, by the neglect of which, Arminians get all the plausibility of their view. It is one thing to say that, in the Divine will, the result purposed is conditioned on the presence of its means; another thing to say that, God's purpose about it is also conditioned or dependent on the presence of its means. The former is true, the latter false. And this, because the presence of the means is itself efficaciously included in this same Divine Purpose. Thus, a believer's salvation is doubtless dependent on his repentance; in the sense that, if he does not repent, he will not be saved. But God's purpose to save him is not dependent on his choosing to repent; for one of the things which God's purpose efficaciously determines is, that this believer shall have grace to repent. Remember, also, that when we say God's election is not dependent on the believer's foreseen faith, &c., we do not represent the Divine purpose as a motiveless caprice. It is a resolve founded most rationally, doubtless, on the best of reasons—only, the superior faith and penitence of that man were not, a priori among them; because had not God already determined, from some better reasons unknown to us, that man would never have had any faith or repentance to foresee. And this is a perfect demonstration, as well as a Scriptural one. The Arminian opinion makes an effect the cause of its own cause. And that our faith, &c., are effects of our calling and election, see Rom. viii: 29; Eph. i: 4, 5; 2 Thes. ii: 13; 1 Cor. iv: 7; John xv: 16.

(b). But to this I may add the same idea in substance, which I used against Common Sufficient Grace: That, in fact, differences are made in the temperaments and characters, opportunities and privileges, of individuals and nations, which practically result in the death of some in sin. Thus: what practical opportunity, humanly speaking, had the man born in Tahiti, in the 18th century, for redemption through Christ? Now the Arminian himself admits an election of races or nations

to such privilege, which is sovereign. Does not this imply a similar disposal of the fate of individuals? Can an infinite understanding fail to comprehend the individuals, in disposing of the destiny of the mass? But, under this head especially, I remark: the time of every man's death is decided by a sovereign Providence. But by determining this sovereignly, God very often practically decides the man's eternal destiny. Much more obvious is this, in the case of infants.

According to Arminians, all that die in infancy are saved. So, then, God's purpose to end their mortal life in infancy is His purpose to save them. But this purpose cannot be formed from any foresight of their faith or repentance, because they have none to foresee, being saved without them.

(c). God's foresight of believers' faith and repentance implies the certainty, or "moral necessity" of these acts, just as much as a sovereign decree. For that which is certainly foreseen must be certain. The only evasion from this is the absurdity of Adam Clarke that God chooses not to foreknow certain things, or the impiety of the Socinians, that He cannot foreknow some things. On both, we may remark, that if this faith and repentance are not actually foreknown, they cannot be the bases of any resolve on God's part.

(d) That any purposes of God should depend on the acts of a creature having an indeterminate, contingent will, such as the Arminian describes, is incompatible with their immutability and eternity. But all His decrees are such. See Ps. xxxiii: 11; 2 Tim. ii: 1 g; Eph. i: 4; Is. xlvi: 10. In a word, this doctrine places the sovereignty in the creature, instead of God, and makes Him wait on His own servant. It is disparaging to God.

Last: This very purpose of individual election to salvation is often declared to be uncaused by any foreseen good in us. See Matt. xi: 26; Rom. ix: 11-16; xi: 5, 6, etc.

But Arminians cite many passages, in which they assert God's resolve as to what He shall do to men is conditioned on their good or bad conduct. They are such as 1 Sam. xiii: 13; Ps. lxxxi 13, 14; Luke vii: 30; Ezek. xviii: 21, etc.; Luke xix: 42. Our opponents here make an obvious confusion of things, which should be distinguished. When God preceptively reveals a connection between two alternative lines of conduct, and their respective results, as established by His law or promise, he does not at all reveal anything thereby, as to what He purposes with reference to permitting or procuring the exercise of that conduct by man. Of course, it does not imply that His purpose on this point is contingent to Him, or that the consequent results were uncertain to Him. We have seen that many of the results decreed by God were dependent on means which man employed; but that God's resolve was not dependent, because it secretly embraced their performance of those instrumental acts also. But the proof that the Arminians misconstrue those Scripture instances is this: That the Bible itself contains many instances of these conditional

threats and promises, and expressions of compassion, where yet the result of them is expressly foretold. If expressly predicted, they must have been predetermined. See, then, Is. i:19, 20, compared with vii 17-20. And, more striking yet, Acts xxvii: 23-25, with 31. Rom. ix: 11-18, is absolutely conclusive against conditional election. The only evasion by which the Arminian can escape its force is that this passage teaches only a national election of Israel and Edom, represented in their patriarchs, Jacob and Esau, to the outward privileges of the Gospel. We reply, as before, that Jacob and Esau certainly represented themselves also, so that here are two cases of unconditional predestination. But Paul's scope shows that the idea is false: for that scope is to explain how, on his doctrine of justification by grace, many members of Israel were lost, notwithstanding equal outward privileges. And in answering this question, the Apostle evidently dismisses the corporate or collective, in order to consider the individual relation to God's plan and purpose. See the verses 8, 15, 24. That the election was not merely to privilege is clearly proved by the allusion of verse 8, compared with verses 4, 21, 24.

2. I am now to show that the Calvinistic scheme is consistent, and the Arminian inconsistent, with the philosophical theory of the will and free agency. Let me here refer you to Lecture XI, where the true doctrine of the will is stated and defended, and request you, if your mastery of the views there given is not perfect, to return and make it so, before proceeding. While I shall not repeat the arguments, the definition of the true doctrine is so important (and has so often been imperfectly made by Calvinists), that I shall take the liberty to restate it.

The Arminian says that free-agency consists in the self determining power of the will, as a distinct faculty in the soul. The Calvinist says it consists in the self-determining power of the soul. An Arminian says an agent is only free, when he has power to choose as the will may determine itself either way, irrespective of the stronger motive. The Calvinist says that an agent is free, when he has power to act as his own will chooses. The Arminian says that in order to be free, the agent must be exempt from the efficient influence of his own motives; the Calvinist, that he must be exempt from co-action, or external constraint; The Arminian says that in order to be free, the agent must always be capable of having a volition uncaused. The Calvinist says that if an agent has a volition uncaused, he cannot possibly be free therein, because that volition would be wholly irrational; the agent would therein be simply a brute. Every free, rational, responsible volition is such, precisely because it is caused i.e. by the agent's own motives; the rational agent is morally judged for his volitions according to their motives, or causes.

But when we ask: What is the motive of a rational volition, we must make that distinction which all Arminians, and many Calvinists, heedlessly overlook between motive and inducement. The object offered to the soul as an inducement to choose is not the cause, the motive of the choice; but only the occasion. The true efficient cause is something of the soul's own, something subjective; namely, the soul's own appetency according to his prevalent, subjective disposition.

The volition is not efficaciously caused by the inducement or object which appeals, but by the disposition which is appealed to. Thus, the causative spring of a free agent's action is within, not without him; according to the testimony of our consciousness. (The theory which makes the objective inducement the true cause of volition is from that old, mischievous, sensualistic psychology, which has always been such a curse to theology). But then, this inward or subjective spring of action is not lawless; it is not indeterminate; if it were, the agent would have neither rationality nor character; and its action would be absolutely blind and brutish. This subjective spring has a law of its own activity—that is to say, its self-action is of a determinate character (of one sort or another). And that character is what is meant by the radical *habitus*, or natural disposition of the agent. And this subjective disposition is what gives uniform quality to that series of acts, by which common sense estimates the character of an agent. (And this, as we saw, was a sufficient proof of our doctrine; that otherwise, the exhibition of determinate character by a free agent would be impossible). God is an excellent Agent, because He has holy original disposition. Satan is a wicked agent, because he has an unholy disposition, etc.

Now, this *habitus* or disposition of soul is not by any means always absolutely simple; it is a complex of certain active principles, with mental habitudes proceeding therefrom, and modified by outward circumstances. With reference to some sorts of outward inducements, these active principles may act with less uniformity and determinateness; with reference to others, with more. Here, modifying outward influences may change the direction of the principles. The avaricious man is sometimes prompted to generous volitions, for instance. But our common sense recognizes this truth: that the more original and primary of those active principles, constituting a being's disposition or *habitus*, are perfectly determinate and uniform in their action. For instance: no being, when happiness and suffering are the alternatives, is ever prompted by his own disposition, to choose the suffering for its own sake; no being is ever prompted, applause or reproach being equally in its reach, to prefer the reproach to the applause for its own sake. And last: this disposition, while never the effect of specific acts of volition (being always a priori thereto, and cause of them) is spontaneous; that is, in exercising the disposition, both in consideration and choice, the being is self-prompted. When arguing against the Pelagian sophism, that man could not be responsible for his disposition, because it is "involuntary," I showed you the ambiguity wrapped up in that word. Of course, anything which, like disposition, precedes volition, cannot be voluntary in the sense of proceeding out of a volition; what goes before of course does not follow after the same thing. But the question is, "whether disposition is self-prompted." There is a true sense in which we intuitively know that a man ought not to be made responsible for what is "involuntary," viz.: for what happens against his will. But does any man's own disposition subsist against his will? If it did it would not be his own. There is here a fact of common sense, which is very strangely overlooked; that a man may most freely prefer what is natural to him, and in that sense is prior to his volition choosing it. Let a simple instance serve. Here is a young gentleman to whom nature has given beautiful and silky black hair. He, himself,

thinks it very pretty and altogether prefers it. Does he not thereby give us as clear, and as free an expression of his taste in hair, as though he had selected a black wig? So, were he to purchase hair dye to change his comely locks to a "carrot red" we should regard him as evincing very bad taste. But I ask, if we saw another whom nature had endowed with "carrot red hair," glorying in it with pride and preference, we should doubtless esteem him guilty of precisely the same bad taste, and precisely as free therein as the other. But the colour of his hair was determined by nature, not by his original selection. Now, my question is must we not judge the moral preference just as free in the parallel case, as the aesthetic? I presume that every reflecting mind will give an affirmative answer. If, for instance, a wicked man made you the victim of his extortion, or his malice, you would not think it any palliation to be told by him that he was naturally covetous or malignant, nor would you be satisfied by the plea that this evil disposition was not at first introduced into his soul by his personal act of soul; while yet he confessed that he was entirely content with it and cherished it with a thorough preference. In fine: whether the moral agent is free in entertaining his connate disposition, may be determined by a very plain test. Does any other agent compel him to feel it, or does he feel it of himself? The obvious answer discloses this fact; that disposition is the most intimate function of our self-hood, and this, whether connate or self-induced.

Is not this now the psychology of common sense and consciousness? Its mere statement is sufficiently evincive of its truth. But you have seen a number of arguments by which it is demonstrated, and the rival theory reduced to absurdity. Now, our assertion is, that the Calvinistic doctrine of effectual calling is agreeable to these facts of our free-agency, and the Arminian inconsistent with them.

(a.) First, the equilibrium of will, to which Arminians suppose the gospel restores all sinners, through common sufficient grace, would be an unnatural and absurd state of soul, if it existed. You will remember that the Wesleyans (the Arminian school which we meet) admit that man lost equilibrium of will in the fall; but say that it is restored through Christ; and that this state is necessary to make man truly free and responsible in choosing the Saviour. But we have shown that such a state is impossible for an active agent, and irrational. So far as it existed, it would only show the creature's action irrational, like that of the beasts. Hence, the evangelical choice arising in such a state would be as motiveless, as reasonless, and therefore, as devoid of right moral character, as the act of a man walking in his sleep. And, to retort the Arminian's favourite conclusion, all the so-called gracious states of penitence, &c., growing out of that choice, must be devoid of right moral quality, how can those exercises of soul have that quality? Only as they are voluntary, and prompted by right moral motives. But as we have seen, motive is subjective; so that the action of soul cannot acquire right moral quality until it is prompted by right moral disposition. Hence, if that common sufficient grace were anything at all, it would be the grace of moral renovation; all who had it would be regenerate.

(b.) Second: We have seen that the notion of a moral agent without determinate, subjective moral character, of some sort, is absurd. The radical, ruling *habit* has some decisive bent of its own, some way or other. Is not this simply to say that disposition is disposed? The question of fact then arises, which is the bent or determinate direction, which man's natural disposition has, touching spiritual things? Is it for, or against? Or, as a question of fact, is the disposition of mankind naturally and uniformly either way? Or, are some men one way disposed by nature, and some the other, as to this object? The answer is that they are all naturally disposed, in the main, the same way, and that, against the spiritual claims of Christ and God. What are these claims? That the sinner shall choose the holy will of God over his own, and His favour over sensual, earthly, and sinful joys in all their forms. Nothing less than this is evangelical repentance and obedience. Now note, we do not say that no men ever choose any formal act of obedience by nature. Nor, that no man ever desires (what he conceives to be) future blessedness by nature. Nor, that every natural man is as much bent on all forms of rebellion, as every other. But we assert, as a matter of fact, that all naturally prefer self-will to God's holy will, and earthly, sensual, and sinful joys (in some forms) to God's favour and communion; that this is the original, fundamental, spontaneous disposition of all; and that in all essential alternatives between self and God, the disposition is, in the natural man, absolutely determinate and certain. If this is true, then the unconverted man without sovereign grace is equally certain to choose carnally, and equally a free agent in choosing so.

But that such is the determinate disposition of every natural man is obvious both from experience and from Scripture. Every renewed man, in reviewing his own purposes, is conscious that, before regeneration, self-will was, as against God, absolutely dominant in all his feelings and purposes; of which no stronger test can be imagined than this conscious fact; that the very best religious impulses to which his soul could be spurred by remorse or alarm, were but modifications of self-will, (self-righteousness.) Every true Christian looks back to the time when he was absolutely incompetent to find, or even to imagine, any spontaneous good or joy in anything except carnality; and the only apprehension it was possible for him to have of God's service, in looking forward to the time when, he supposed, the fear of hell would compel him, to undertake it, was of a constraint and a sacrifice. So, when we look without, while we see a good many in the state of nature, partially practising many secular virtues, and even rendering to God some self-righteous regards, we see none preferring God's will and favour to self-will and earth. All regard such a choice as an evil *per se*; all shrink from it obstinately; all do so under inducements to embrace it, which reasonably ought to be immense and overwhelming. The experimental evidence, that this carnality is the original and determinate law of their disposition, is as complete as that which shows the desire of happiness is a law of their disposition. And all this remains true of sinners under the gospel, of sinners enlightened, of sinners convicted and awakened by the Holy Ghost in His common operations; which is a complete, practical proof

that there is not any such sufficient grace, common to all, as brings their wills into equilibrium about evangelical good. For those are just the elements which the Arminians name as making up that grace, and we see that where they are, still there is no equilibrium, but the old, spontaneous, native bent, obstinately dominant still.

The decisiveness of that disposition is also asserted in Scripture in the strongest possible terms. All men are the "servants of sin," John viii: 34; Rom. vi: 20; 2 Pet. ii: 19. They are "sold under sin." Rom. vii: 14. They are "in the bond of iniquity." Acts viii 23. They are "dead in sins." Eph. ii: i. They are "blind;" yea, "blindness" itself. Eph. iv: 18. Their "hearts are stony." Ezek. xxxvi: 26. They are "impotent" for evangelical good. 2 Cor. iii: 5; John xv: 5; Rom. v: 6; Matt. vii: 18; xii: 34; John vi: 44. "The carnal mind is enmity, and cannot be subject to the law of God." Rom. viii. 7. Surely these, with the multitude of similar testimonies, are enough to prove against all ingenious glosses that our view of man's disposition is true. But if man's free-agency is misdirected by such active principles as these, original, uniform, absolutely decisive, it is folly to suppose that the mighty revolution to holiness can originate in that free-agency; it must originate without, in almighty grace.

Nor is it hard for the mind, which has comprehended this philosophy of common sense and experience, to solve the current Arminian objection, that the man in such a state of will cannot be responsible or blameworthy for his continued impenitency. This "inability of will" does not supersede either free-agency or responsibility.

There is here an obvious distinction from that external coercion, which the reason and conscience of every man recognizes as a different state, which would supersede responsibility. The Calvinists of the school of Jonathan Edwards make frequent use of the terms, "moral inability," "natural inability," to express that plain, old distinction. Turretin teaches us that they are not new. In his *Locus*, x, que. 4, §39, 40, you will find some very sensible remarks, which show that this pair of terms is utterly ambiguous and inappropriate, however good the meaning of the Calvinists who used them. I never employ them. That state which they attempt to describe as "moral inability," our Confession more accurately calls, loss of all "ability of will." (Ch. ix. §3). It should be remarked here, that in this phrase, and in many similar ones of our Confession, the word "will" is used in a sense more comprehensive than the specific faculty of choosing. It means the "conative powers," (so called by Hamilton,) including with that specific function, the whole active power of soul. The "inability," then, which we impute to the natural man, and which does not supersede responsibility, while it does make his voluntary continuance in impenitence absolutely certain, and his turning of himself to true holiness impossible, is a very distinct thing from that physical coercion, and that natural lack of essential faculties, either of which would be inconsistent with moral obligation. It is thus defined in Hodge's outlines: "Ability consists in the power of the agent to change his own subjective state, to make himself prefer what he does not prefer, and to act in a given case in opposition to the co-existent desires

and preferences of the agent's own heart."I will close with a statement of the distinction, which I uttered under very responsible circumstances. "All intelligent Calvinists understand very well, that "inability" consists not in the extinction of any of the powers which constituted man the creature he was before Adam's fall, and which made his essence as a religious being; but in the thorough moral perversion of them all. The soul's essence is not destroyed by the fall; if it were, in any part, man's responsibility would be to that extent modified. But all his faculties and susceptibilities now have a decisive and uniform, a native and universal, a perpetual and total moral perversion, by reason of the utter revolt of his will from God and holiness, to self-will and sin; such that it is impossible for him, in his own free will, to choose spiritual good for its own sake."

(c) Regeneration, correspondingly, does not constrain a man to will against his dispositions; but it renews the dispositions themselves. It reverses the morbid and perverse bias of the will. It rectifies the action of all faculties and affections, previously perverted by that bias. God's people are "willing in the day of His power." Ps. cx: 3. "He worketh in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Phil. ii:13. In that believers now form holy volitions at the prompting of their own subjective principles, unconstrained by force, they are precisely as free as when, before, they spontaneously formed sinful volitions at the prompting of their opposite evil principles. But in that the action of intellect and desire and conscience is now rectified, purified, ennobled, by the divine renovation, the believer is more free than he was before. "He cannot sin, because the living and incorruptible seed" of which he is born again "liveth and abideth in him." Thus, regeneration, though almighty, does not infringe free-agency, but perfects it.

The standing Arminian objection is that man cannot be praise- or blame-worthy for what does not proceed from his own free-will. Hence, if he does not primarily choose a new heart, but it is wrought in him by another, he has no more moral credit, either for the change or its consequences, than for the native colour of his hair. This objection is, as you have seen, of a Pelagian source. By the same argument Adam could have had no concreated righteousness; but we saw that the denial of it to him was absurd. By the same reasoning God Himself could have no moral credit for His holy volitions; for He never chose a righteousness, having been eternally and necessarily righteous. We might reply, also, that the new and holy state is chosen by the regenerate man, for his will is as free and self-moved, when renovated, in preferring his own renovation, as it ever was in sinners.

To sum up, then: The quickening touch of the Holy Ghost operates, not to contravene any of the free actions of the will; but to mould dispositions which lie back of it. Second: all the subsequent right volitions of the regenerate soul are in view of inducements rationally presented to it. The Spirit acts, not across man's nature, but according to its better law. Third: the propensities by which the renewed volitions are determined are now noble, not ignoble, harmonious, not

confused and hostile; and rational, not unreasonable. Man is most truly free when he has his soul most freely subjected to God's holy will. See those illustrious passages in John viii. 36; 2 Cor. iii: 17; Rom. viii: 21. Since this blessed work is like the free-agency which it reinstates, one wholly unique among the actions of God, and essentially different from all physical effects, it cannot receive any adequate illustration. Any parallel attempted, from either material or animal causes, would be incomplete. If, for instance, I were to say that the carnal man "in the bonds of iniquity," is like a wretch, who is hindered from walking in the paths of his duty and safety by some *incubus* that crushes his strength, I should use a false analogy: for the *incubus* is external: carnality is internal: an evil state qualifying the will itself. But this erroneous parallel may serve us so far; the fortunate subject of effectual calling has no more occasion to complain of violence done to his free agency, than that wretch would, when a deliverer came and rolled the abhorred load off his body, restoring his limbs to the blessed freedom of motion, which might carry him away from the death that threatened him. You must learn to think of the almighty grace put forth in effectual calling, as reparative only; not violative. Augustine calls it a *Delectatio victrix*. It is a secret, omnipotent, silent, beneficent work of God, as gentle, yet powerful, as that which restored the vital spark to the corpse of Lazarus. Such are all God's beneficent actions, from the launching of the worlds in their orbits, to the germination of the seed in the soil.