

The Bondage of the Will

By [Martin Luther](#)

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.

Section X.

Sect. X. — I COULD wish, indeed, that we were furnished with some better term for this discussion, than this commonly used term, necessity, which cannot rightly be used, either with reference to the human will, or the divine. It is of a signification too harsh and ill-suited for this subject, forcing upon the mind an idea of compulsion, and that which is altogether contrary to will; whereas, the subject which we are discussing, does not require such an idea: for Will, whether divine or human, does what it does, be it good or evil, not by any compulsion but by mere willingness or desire, as it were, totally free. The will of God, nevertheless, which rules over our mutable will, is immutable and infallible; as Boëtius sings, “Immovable Thyself, Thou movement giv’st to all.” And our own will, especially our corrupt will, cannot of itself do good; therefore, where the term fails to express the idea required, the understanding of the reader must make up the deficiency, knowing what is wished to be expressed — the immutable will of God, and the impotency of our depraved will; or, as some have expressed it, the necessity of immutability, though neither is that sufficiently grammatical, or sufficiently theological.

Upon this point, the Sophists have now laboured hard for many years, and being at last conquered, have been compelled to retreat. All things take place from the necessity of the consequence, (say they) but not from the necessity of the thing consequent. What nothingness this amounts to, I will not take the trouble to show. By the necessity of the consequence, (to give a general idea of it) they mean this — If God wills any thing, that same thing must, of necessity be done; but it is not necessary that the thing done should be necessary: for God alone is necessary; all other things cannot be so, if it is God that wills. Therefore, (say they) the action of God is necessary, where He wills, but the act itself is not necessary; that is, (they mean) it has not essential necessity. But what do they effect by this playing upon words? Only this, that the act itself is not necessary, that is, it has not essential necessity. This is no more than saying, the act is not God Himself. This, nevertheless, remains certain, that if the action of God is necessary, or if there is a necessity of the consequence, every thing takes place of necessity, how much soever the act be not necessary; that is, be not God Himself, or have not essential necessity. For, if I be not made of necessity, it is of little moment with me, whether my existence and being be mutable or not, if, nevertheless, I, that contingent and mutable being, who am not the necessary God, am made.

Wherefore, their ridiculous play upon words, that all things take place from the necessity of the consequence, but not from the necessity of the thing consequent, amounts to nothing more than this — all things take place of necessity, but all the things that do take place are not God Himself. But what need was there to tell us this? As though there were any fear of our asserting, that the things done were God Himself, or possessed divine or necessary nature. This asserted truth, therefore, stands and remains invincible — that all things take place according to the immutable will of God! which they call the necessity of the consequence. Nor is there here any obscurity or ambiguity. In Isaiah he saith, “My counsel shall stand, and My will shall be done.” (Isa. xlvi. 10.) And what schoolboy does not understand the meaning of these expressions, “Counsel,” “will,” “shall be done,” “shall stand?”

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