Catechism Question for Week of June 12- June 18, 2016

Question 8: But are we so depraved, that we are wholly unapt to any good and prone to all evil?
Answer: Yes; unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.

EXPOSITION: The question of the freedom of the will, or the power of the human will to obey God, and to do that which is good, is intimately connected with the subject of the misery of man, and claims our attention next in order. It is also necessary to know what ability man possessed before the fall, and what he has since, that, having a correct knowledge of the effects of the first sin, we may be the more excited to humility, and to an earnest desire for divine grace and guidance; and also to true gratitude to God. For this doctrine of the liberty of the will, brings us to a consideration, not of the ability and excellence of man, but of his weakness and misery.

OF FREE WILL The principal question and object, in this discussion, is: Whether man can now, in the same way in which he separated himself from God, also return to him by his own strength—accept of the grace that is offered him by God, and recover for himself the position which has been lost by sin? And also, whether the will of man be the chief cause why some are converted, while others continue in sin; and why, both among the converted and the unconverted, some are better than others? In a word, whether the will of man be the cause why men do good or evil, whether in this, or in that manner? The Pelagians, and others of a similar character, reply to this question, That so much grace is given by God, and left by nature, to all men, that they can of themselves return to God, and obey him: neither are we to seek for any other cause than the will of man, as the reason why some receive and retain, while others Lord's Day 3 127 reject and disregard, divine aid in forsaking sin, and do, after this or that manner, resolve upon and execute their own counsels and deeds. The Holy Scriptures, however, teach a wholly different doctrine, which, as we understand it, is, that no work acceptable and pleasing to God can be undertaken, and performed by any one, without regeneration and the special grace of the Holy Spirit; neither can there be any more or less good in the counsels and actions of any man, than God of his own free grace chooses to produce in them; nor can the will of any creature be inclined in any other direction than that which seems good to the eternal and gracious counsel of God. And yet all the actions of the created will, both good and bad, are performed freely. That this may be the better understood, let us inquire: 1. What is freedom of will, or free power of choice? 2. What is the distinction which exists between the liberty which is in God, and that which is in his rational creatures, angels and men? 3. Is there any freedom of the human will? 4. What kind of freedom of will is there in man; or how many degrees of free-will are there in man, according to his fourfold state? {57} 1. WHAT IS THE

FREEDOM OF THE WILL, OR FREE POWER OF CHOICE? The term freedom, or liberty, sometimes signifies a relation, power or right, be it the ordering or disposing of a person or thing, made by the will of a certain person, or by nature, for the purpose of acting with one's own choice, or from fear according to just laws, or the order which is in harmony with the nature of man; for the purpose of enjoying those benefits which are fit and proper for us, without any prohibition and restraint; and for the purpose of being relieved from enduring the wants and burdens which are not peculiar to our nature. This may be termed a freedom from bondage and misery, and is opposed to slavery. So God is most free, because he is bound to no one: so the Jews and Romans were free, not being bound by foreign governments and burdens: so a state, or city is free from tyranny and servitude, 128 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM while in the enjoyment of civil liberty: so we, being justified by faith, are through Christ freed from the wrath of God, the curse of the law, and the ceremonies instituted by Moses. But this signification of liberty does not properly belong to this discussion of the freedom of the will; because it is evident, and admitted by all, that we are the servants of God, and that the law binds us either to obedience, or punishment. There are also many things which our will chooses freely, which it nevertheless has not the power or ability to perform. Secondly, freedom is opposed to constraint, and is a quality of the will, or a natural power of an intelligent creature, concurring with the will; that is, it is the power of choosing or refusing, of its own accord, and without any constraint, an object presented by the understanding, the nature of the will remaining the same, and being free to choose this or that, or to defer any action it may see fit, just as a man may be willing to walk, or not to walk. This is to act upon mature deliberation, which is the method of acting peculiar to the will. This freedom of will belongs to God, angels, and men; and, when considered in relation to them, is called free power of choice. For that is said to be free which is endowed with this power, or liberty of willing or not willing, while the power of choice is the will itself, as it follows or rejects the judgment of the mind in the choice which it makes; for it comprehends both faculties of the mind, viz.: the judgment and the will. Free power of choice is therefore the faculty or power of willing or not willing, of choosing or rejecting an object presented by the understanding, of its own accord, and without any constraint. This faculty is called the power of choice in respect to the mind, which presents objects to the will, to be chosen or rejected; and it is called free in respect to the will following voluntarily and of its own accord, without any constraint, the judgment of the mind. That is called free which is voluntary, and which is opposed to what is involuntary and constrained, but not to that Lord's Day 3 129 which is necessary; for that which is voluntary may agree and harmonize with what is necessary, but not with what is involuntary, as God and the holy angels are necessarily good, but not involuntarily or constrainedly; but most freely, because they have the beginning and cause of their goodness, which is free will, in themselves. That is said to be constrained which has only an external beginning and cause of its own activity, and not, at the same time, one that is also internal, by which it may move itself to act in this or in that manner. {58} There is, therefore,

such a difference between what is necessary and constrained, as that which exists between what is general and particular. Whatever is constrained is necessary, but not every thing that is necessary is constrained. Hence there is what is called a double necessity—a necessity of immutability and of constraint. The former may exist with what is voluntary, but the latter cannot. The same distinction also exists between what is free and contingent. Every thing that is free is contingent, but not the opposite. Therefore that which is free is a species of what is contingent, as is also that which is fortuitous and casual. 2. WHAT IS THE DISTINCTION WHICH EXISTS BETWEEN THE LIBERTY WHICH IS IN GOD AND HIS CREATURES, ANGELS AND MEN? There are two things common to God and rational creatures as it respects the liberty of the will. The one is, that God and intelligent creatures act upon deliberation and counsel, that is, they choose or reject objects by the exercise of the understanding and will. The other is, that they choose or reject objects by their own proper and inward activity, without any constraint, which is the same thing as to say that the will being in its own nature capacitated to will the opposite of that which it does will, or to defer acting, inclines of its own accord to that course which it prefers. (Ps. 104:24; 115:3; Gen. 8:6; Ish. 1:19, 20; Matt. 23:37) There are three differences between the liberty which belongs to God and that which belongs to his creatures. 130 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM The first relates to the understanding. God sees and understands of himself all things in the most perfect manner, from all eternity, without the least ignorance or error of judgment. Creatures, on the other hand, know nothing of themselves, neither do they know all things, nor the same things at all times; but only so much of God, together with his works and will, as he is pleased, at particular times, to reveal unto them. Hence they are ignorant of many things, and often err. The following passages of Scripture confirm this distinction which we have made in regard to the understanding: “Of that day and hour knows no man, no not the angels of heaven; but my Father only.” “He gives wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them, that know understanding.” “Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord?” “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight.” “He enlightens every man that cometh into the world.” (Matt. 24:36; Dan. 2:21; Ish. 40:13; Heb. 4. 13; John 1:9) The second distinction holds in the will. The will of God is neither governed by, nor dependent upon, any thing beyond or out of itself. The wills of angels and men are indeed the causes of their own actions; yet they are notwithstanding influenced and controlled by the secret counsel and providence of God, in the choice or rejection of objects, whether immediately by God, or through certain instrumentalities, be they good or evil, which God sees fit to employ. It is consequently impossible for them to do any thing contrary to the eternal and immutable counsel of God. Hence the term autexousion (which means to be absolutely his own, at his own will, and in his own power), by which the Greek Theologians express {59} free power of choice, belongs more properly to God, who is perfectly and absolutely at his own control, not being bound to any one; while the term ekousion (which means voluntary or free) is more correctly used in relation to creatures, and is thus applied in the following passages of Scripture: (Phil. 5:14;

Heb. 10:26; 1 Pet. 5:2) The various arguments and testimonies from the word of God, by which this Lord's Day 3 131 distinction is established, will be presented at large when we come to the consideration of the doctrine of the providence of God. That God, however, is indeed the first cause of his counsels, these and similar declarations of his word plainly affirm: "He has done whatsoever he has pleased." "Who doeth according to his own will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." (Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:35) That the will and counsels of creatures depend upon the permission and will of God, may be proven by the following and similar passages of holy writ: "The Lord shall send his angel before you," etc. "Go and gather the children of Israel together," etc. "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." "But God has fulfilled those things," etc. "Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever your hand and your counsel determined before to be done." "I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walks to direct his steps." "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord." (Gen. 24:7; Ex. 3:16; Acts 2:23; 3:17; 4:27; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 2l:1) The will, therefore, of angels and men, and all other second causes, are in like manner governed by God, as they are from him, as their first and chief cause. But the will of God is ruled by none of his creatures, because as he has no efficient cause out of himself, so he has no moving or inclining cause; otherwise he would not be God, the first and great cause of all his works, and creatures would be substituted in the place of God. God does not constrain and force, but moves and directs the will of his creatures; in other words, he effectually inclines the will by presenting objects to the mind, to choose that which the understanding at the time judges to be good, and to reject what it conceives to be evil. The third distinction holds in the understanding and will at the same time. God, as he knows all things unchangeably, so he has 132 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM also decreed them from everlasting, and wills unchangeably all things which are done in as far as they are good, and permits them in as far as they are sins. But as the notions and judgment which creatures form of things are changeable, so their wills are also changeable. They will that which before they would not, and refuse to choose that which they formerly delighted in. And still further, as all the counsels of God are most good, just and wise, he never disapproves of them; neither does he correct or change them, as men often do, when they perceive that they have unwisely decided upon any thing. These declarations of Scripture are here in point: "God is not a man, that he should He; neither the Son of man, that he should repent." "I am the Lord, I change not." "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much," etc. (Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; Rom. 9:22) {60} Objection 1: He who cannot change his counsel has no free will. God cannot change his counsel. Therefore his will is not free. Answer: We reply to the first proposition of this syllogism by making a distinction: it is not he who cannot change his purpose that has no liberty of will, but he who cannot change his counsel, being hindered by some external cause, although he might wish to change it. But God does not change his

counsel, neither can he change it; not, however, on account of any hindrance arising from some external cause, nor on account of any imperfection of nature or ability, but because he does not will, neither can he will a change of his counsel, on account of the immutable rectitude of his will, in which no error nor any cause of change can possibly exist. Objection 2. That which is governed and ruled by the unchangeable will of God does not act freely. The will of angels and men acts freely. Therefore it is not ruled, nor bound in the choice which it makes, by the unchangeable will of God. Answer: It is necessary here again, in answering the above objection, to make the following distinction with reference to the major proposi- Lord's Day 3 133 tion: He who is so ruled and controlled by the will of God as to act without any deliberation and choice of his own, does not act freely; but it is not in this way that God influences the will of angels and men. he presents objects to the understanding, and through these effectually moves and inclines the will, so that although they choose that which God wills, they nevertheless do it from their own deliberation and choice, and therefore act freely. Hence creatures may be said to act freely, not when they disregard every form of government and restraint, but when they act with deliberation, and when the will chooses or rejects objects by its own free exercise, even though it may be excited and controlled by some one else. Objection 3: If the will, when God changes it, and directed it upon other objects, cannot resist, it is wholly passive. But this involves us in error. Therefore the will cannot be thus influenced and controlled. Answer: The conclusion here drawn is incorrect, in as much as there is not a sufficiently full and distinct enumeration in the major proposition of those exercises and actions of which the will is capable; for it may not only resist the influence which God brings to bear upon it, but it has the ability also, by its own proper determination, to obey God, and to assent to the suggestions and influences of his spirit. In doing this, however, it is not only passive, but also active, and performs its own actions, although the power of assenting and obeying is not from itself, but from the grace of the Holy Spirit. Objection 4: That which resists the will of God is not governed by it. The will of man opposes and resists God in many things. Therefore it is not governed by him. Answer: There are here four terms. The major proposition is true, if it be understood as including both the secret and revealed will of God; the minor, however, merely expresses the will of God as expressed or revealed, for the secret decrees of God's will are always ratified and performed in all, even in those who most violently resist the commandments of God. 134 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM Objection 5: If all the determinations, including even those of the wicked, are excited and ruled by the will of God, and if many of these are sinful, then God seems to be the author of sin. Answer: There is here a fallacy of {61} accident in the minor proposition, for the determinations of the wicked are sins, not in as far as they are ordained and proceed from the will of God (for so far they are good, and agree with the divine law), but in as far as they are from devils and men, who in acting either do not know the will of God, or do not perform it with the design that they may thus obey and glorify God. 3. IS THERE ANY FREEDOM OF THE HUMAN WILL? That there is in man a certain freedom of will, is proven: 1. From the fact that man was

created in the image of God, of which free will constituted a part: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” “God made man in the beginning, and left him in the hand of his counsel.” (Gen. 1:26; Eccl. 15:14) 2. From the definition of the freedom which belongs to man; for man acts upon deliberation, freely knowing, and desiring or rejecting this or that object. If this definition, now, correspond with the nature of man, the thing which is expressed and defined by it must also belong to him. Objection 1: If man be in the possession of freedom of will, the doctrine of original sin is overthrown; for it is a contradiction to say that man is not able to obey God, and to affirm, at the same time, that he has liberty of will. Answer: There is no real opposition in what is here affirmed, because since the fall man has liberty of will only in part, and not such as he had before the fall, nor to the same degree. Objection 2: He who has not a will to choose in like manner the good and the evil, does not possess free-will. But man, since the fall, has not a will to choose equally the good and the evil. Therefore he does not possess freedom of will. Answer: We reject the major proposition, because it contains an incorrect Lord’s Day 3 135 definition of liberty; for, according to it, God himself does not possess any liberty of will. Objection 3: That which is dependent upon another is not free. Our will is dependent upon another. Therefore it is not free. Answer: We reply to the major proposition, by making the following distinction: That which is dependent upon and ruled by another, and not by itself also, is not free. The will of man, however, is ruled not only by another, but also by itself; for God influences men in such a manner, that they are not constrained and carried along involuntarily, but most freely; so that it may be said that they move themselves. The being or will which is moved only by itself, belongs to God alone, of whom infinite liberty may more correctly be predicated, than of creatures. In the mean while, however, it may be sufficient, as far as it respects the liberty which belongs to man, to affirm, that whatever he wills, he wills freely, and by his own proper determination. Objection 4: That which is enslaved is not free. Our power of choice is enslaved since the fail. Therefore it is not free. Answer: The whole argument is conceded, if by free we understand that which has the power of choosing that which is good and pleasing to God: for thus far the will is held in bondage, and can only will and choose that which is evil. “I am carnal, sold under sin,” etc. (Rom. 7:14) But if by free we understand voluntary, or deliberative, then the major proposition is false; for it is not the subjection, but the constraint of the will, that takes away its liberty. {62} 4. WHAT KIND OF LIBERTY OF WILL HAS MAN; OR HOW MANY DEGREES OF FREE-WILL ARE THERE, ACCORDING TO MAN’S FOUR-FOLD STATE? It is still further to be inquired, in the discussion of this subject, (and this is also necessary, in order that we may arrive at a proper knowledge of ourselves) What, and how great, was the liberty of will which man possessed before the fall? Whether there be any, or none at all, since the fall? And if any, what is it? 136 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM Whether it be restored in us; in what manner, and how far? Wherefore it is evident that the degrees of free-will may be considered, and distinguished most correctly, according to the fourfold state of man, viz.: as not yet fallen into sin—as fallen—as

regenerated—and as glorified; that is, what kind, and how great, was the freedom of the human will before the fall? What is this freedom since the fall, and before regeneration? What is it in those who are regenerated? And what will it be in the life to come, in a state of glorification? The first degree of liberty is that which belonged to man before the fall. This consisted in a mind enlightened with the perfect knowledge of God, and a will yielding entire obedience to God by its own voluntary act and inclination; and yet not so confirmed in this knowledge and obedience, but that it might fall by its own free exercise, if the appearance of any good were presented for the purpose of deceiving, and effecting a fall;—that is, the will of man was free to choose good and evil, or it might freely choose the good, but in such a manner that it might also choose the evil: it might continue to stand in the good, being preserved by God, and it might also incline and fall over to the evil, if forsaken of God. The former is confirmed by a consideration of the perfection of the image of God in which man was created. The latter is evident from the event itself, and from the following testimonies of Scripture: "God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions." "God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." (Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 11:32) In the last passage just quoted, Paul testifies that God, with profound wisdom, did not place the first man beyond the reach of a fall; nor did he give him such a measure of grace, that he might not be seduced by the temptation of the devil, and be persuaded to sin; but He permitted him to be seduced, and to fall into sin and death, that all those who would be saved from this general ruin might be saved by his mercy alone. It is also proven by this plain argument: that if nothing Lord's Day 3 137 can be done without the eternal and most wise counsel of God, then surely the fall of our first parents, least of all, could be excluded therefrom, inasmuch as God had fully determined, from the very beginning, what he would have done, as regards the human race—the most important part of the work of creation. Those things which the wisdom of man is accustomed to bring forward against what has here been advanced, may be found in Ursinus vol. I. p. 242, etc. The second degree of free power of choice is that which belongs to man as a fallen being, born of corrupt parents, and unregenerated. In this state the will does indeed act freely, but it is disposed and inclined only to that which is evil, and can do nothing but sin. And the reason is, because the fall was followed by a privation of the knowledge of God, and of all inclinations to obedience; and because this has been succeeded by an ignorance of, and an aversion to God, from which man cannot be delivered {63} unless he be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. In short, there is in man, since the fall, in his unregenerate state, a proneness to choose only that which is evil. In view of this ignorance and corruption of human nature since the fall, it is said: "Every thought of man's heart is evil continually." "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, and the leopard his spots," etc. "Every man from his youth is given to evil, and their stony hearts cannot become flesh." "We were dead in trespasses and in sins; and were by nature the children of wrath." "A corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit." "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves." (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 13:23; Syr. 17:13; Eph. 2:1, 3; Matt. 7:18; 2 Cor. 3:6) With these explicit testimonies, gathered from the

word of God, every man's experience fully harmonizes: as may also be said to be true of the sense of conscience, which declares that we have no liberty and inclination of will to do that which is good; but in the place of this, a great proneness to do that which is evil, so long as we are not regenerated; as it is said: "Turn me, and I shall be turned." (Jer. 31:18) It is, therefore, 138 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM clearly evident that the love of God is in no one by nature; and hence no one, in this state, has a propensity or inclination to serve God. Objection 1: There is nothing easier (said Erasmus to Luther) than to restrain the hand from theft. And still further: Socrates, Aristides, and many others, performed many excellent things, and were adorned with many virtues; therefore there was in them, before regeneration, a power of choice that was free to do that which was good. Answer: This is an imperfect definition of free power of choice, and of what constitutes a good work; or of liberty to do that which is good, which is the power of rendering such obedience as is acceptable to God. This the unregenerate have not. And although they may refrain from theft, as far as the external act is concerned, yet they are guilty of it as it respects the desires and tendencies of the heart. And not only so, but this external propriety itself, of which so much account is made, is to be attributed to God, who by his providence controls the hearts even of the wicked, and restrains them from those outbreaks of sin to which they are naturally inclined. Yet it would be wrong to conclude from this that it is easy for them to commence that true internal obedience which is pleasing to God. Such obedience can only be rendered by those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Objection 2: The works which are prescribed and enjoined by the law are good. The heathen perform many of these works. Therefore, their works are good, although they have not been regenerated; and, as a matter of consequence, they must possess liberty to choose the good. Answer: We reply to this objection by making the following distinction: the works prescribed and enjoined by the law are good, considered in themselves; but they become evil, by an accident, when they are done by those who are not regenerated; because they are not done in the manner, nor with the design which God requires. Lord's Day 3 139 Objection 3: What God desires us to do, we have the power of doing. God desires us to do that which contributes to our wellbeing. Therefore, we have the ability, of ourselves, to do that which is good, and consequently do not need the grace and influence of the Holy Spirit. Answer: There is in this syllogism, an incorrect chain of reasoning, arising from the ambiguity {64} of the word desire. In the major, it is used in its ordinary and proper sense. But in the minor, it is used improperly; for God is here said to desire, through a figure of speech, by which he is represented as being affected after the manner of men. Hence, there is a different kind of affirmation in the major from what there is in the minor. God desires in two respects. First, in respect to his commandments and invitations. Secondly, in respect to the love which he cherishes towards his creatures, and the torments of those that perish, but not in respect to the execution of his justice. Reply. He who invites others to do that which is good, and rejoice in their well-doing, declares that it is in their power to do this, and not in the power of him who invites. But God invites us to do that which is good, and

approves of our conduct when we thus act. Therefore, it is in our power to do the good. Answer: We deny the minor proposition; because it is not sufficient for God to invite. It is also necessary that our wills consent to do the good, which they will not do unless God incline them. Objection 4: If we can do nothing but sin before our regeneration, God seems to punish us unjustly. Answer: He who sins of necessity is punished unjustly, unless he has brought this necessity of sinning upon himself. We are, therefore, justly punished, because we have brought this necessity of sinning upon ourselves, in our first parents, and follow their example by doing the same things. Other objections, which are ordinarily brought forward by the advocates of free-will, may be seen in Ursinus vol. I. page 245. 140 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM The third degree of free power of choice is that which belongs to a man as regenerated, but not as yet perfected and glorified. In this state the will uses its liberty, not only for doing that which is evil, as is true of man before his regeneration, but here the will does both the good and the evil in part. It does that which is good, because the Holy Spirit, by his special grace, has renovated the nature of man through the Word of God—has kindled new light and knowledge in the understanding, and has awakened in the heart and will such new desires and inclinations, as are in harmony with the divine law; and because the holy Spirit effectually inclines the will to do those things which are in accordance with this knowledge, and with these desires and inclinations. It is in this way that the will recovers both the power of willing that which is acceptable to God, and the use of this power, so that it commences to obey God according to these declarations of his word: "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart." "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." (Deut. 30:6; Ex. 36:26; 2 Cor. 3:17; 1 John 3:9) The reasons, on account of which the will in this third degree chooses and does in part both the good and the evil, are the following: 1. Because the mind and will of those who are regenerated, are not fully and perfectly renewed in this life. There are many remains of depravity which cleave to the best of men, as long as they continue in the flesh, so that the works which they perform are imperfect, and defiled with sin. "I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh) dwells no good thing." (Rom. 7:18) 2. Because those who are regenerated are not always governed by the Holy Spirit; but are sometimes forsaken of God for a season, that he may thus either try, or {65} humble them. Yet although they are thus left to themselves for a time, they do not finally perish, for God, in his own time and way, calls them to repentance. "Take not your Holy Spirit from me." "O Lord, why have Lord's Day 3 141 you made us to err from your ways, and hardened our heart from your fear. Return, for your servant's sake." (Ps. 51:13; Ish. 63:17) In short, after regeneration is begun in man, there is a proneness to choose partly the good, and partly the evil. There is a proneness to the good, because the mind and will being illuminated and changed, begin, in some measure, to be turned to the good, and to commence new obedience. There is a proneness to the evil, because the saints are only imperfectly renewed in this life—retain many infirmities and evil desires, on

account of original sin, which still cleaves to them. Hence the good works which they perform are not perfectly good. Those things which the Anabaptists, and others of a similar character, are accustomed to bring forward against what is here said of the imperfection of the holiness and good works of the righteous, may be seen on the 256th page of the same volume of Ursinus to which we have before referred, and also in the exposition of the 114th Question of the Catechism. The fourth degree of free power of choice, is that which belongs to man after this life, in a state of glorification; or as perfectly regenerated. In this state, the will of man will be free to choose only the good, and not the evil. This will be the highest degree, or the perfect liberty of the human will, when we shall obey God fully and forever. In this state we shall not only not sin, but we will abhor it above every thing else; yea, we shall then no longer be able to sin. In proof of this we may adduce the following reasons: First, the perfect knowledge of God will then shine in the mind, while there will be the strongest and most ardent desire of the will and heart to obey God; so that there will be no room left for ignorance or doubt, or the least contempt of God. Secondly, in the life to come, the saints will never be forsaken, but will be constantly and forever ruled by the Holy Spirit, so that it will not be possible for them to deviate in the smallest respect from that which is right. Hence it is said: "They are as the angels of God in 142 COMMENTARY ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHSIM heaven." "We shall be like him." (Matt. 22:30; 1 John 3:3) The good angels are inclined only to that which is good, because they are good; just as the bad angels, on the other hand, are inclined only to that which is evil, because they are evil. But we shall be like the good angels. Our condition will, therefore, be one of far greater excellence than that of Adam before the fall. Adam was, indeed, perfectly conformed to God; but he had the power to will both the good and the evil; and therefore, with all his gifts, he had a certain infirmity, viz.: the possibility to fall from God, and to lose his gifts. He was changeably good. But we shall not be able to will any thing but the good. Just as the wicked are inclined and led to do evil only, because they are wicked; so we shall be inclined to that which is good, and love and choose it alone, because we shall be unchangeably good. We shall then be so fully established in righteousness and conformity to God, that it will not be possible for us to fall from him; yea, it will then be impossible for us to will any thing that is evil, because we shall be preserved by divine grace in that state of perfect liberty in which the will will choose the good only. From these things which we have now said in relation to human freedom, it is manifestly a foul slander to say that we take away the liberty of {66} the will. And although those who are renewed and glorified will not be able to will any thing but the good, after their glorification; yet their power of choice will then be free to a much greater extent than it now is; for God, also, cannot will any thing but the good, and yet he possesses perfect freedom of will. So on the other hand, we do not take away the power of choice from the ungodly, or such as are unregenerated, when we affirm that they are not able to will any thing but that which is evil; for they will and choose the evil freely—yea, most freely. Their will is inclined and carried with the greatest impetuosity, to evil only; because they continually retain in their hearts, hatred to God. Hence, all the works which they

perform of an external moral character, are evil in the sight of God, as we Lord's Day 3 143 have already shown in our remarks upon the doctrine of sin. So much concerning the free power of choice which belongs to man