

A SOUTHERN EXPOSURE: THE THEOLOGY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS  
IN THE WRITINGS OF JESSE MERCER

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But an Editor's influence and responsibility are much more momentous, because his paper shapes the sentiments, affects the hearts and forms the character of hundreds of ministers and the congregations to which they publish the glad tidings.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the position of influence in which Jesse Mercer found himself in the 1820s and 30s as a contributor to and the editor of Georgia's *Christian Index*.<sup>2</sup> That his influence was profound can be seen in the praises that followed immediately upon the news of his death in September, 1841. Announcing Mercer's death, his former associate editor, W. H. Stokes, stopped the presses to "inform" his readers that "our dear old Father MERCER is no more."<sup>3</sup> One of the churches which Mercer had pastored, the church at Philip's Mills, spoke lovingly of his "pious example" and mourned that "the Baptist denomination has lost one of its brightest ornaments."<sup>4</sup> As these brief comments suggest, Mercer used his pen as a sword, exerting great theological force, informing and shaping the theology of a generation of Baptists in the South. Mercer's biographer, C. D. Mallary, remarked:

It may be said of him, that, in a peculiar sense, he was set for the defence of the gospel. Its great leading truths he studied intensely and profoundly; and if in the clear, well-defined, original, and masterly exhibition of these truths from the pulpit [and in the press], he has had superiors, or even equals, amongst the Baptists of our country, they certainly have been rare.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly Mercer and his contemporaries understood the import and the impact of his influence in antebellum Baptist life. Moreover, they believed that when Mercer spoke, he spoke for Baptists of his time.<sup>6</sup> Writing in 1836, Mercer commented to a correspondent, "I have undergone no

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<sup>1</sup>A. Sherwood, "Life and Times of Jesse Mercer, Chapter VI," in *Christian Index*, August 28, 1863.

<sup>2</sup>For the sake of consistency and clarity, the present essay will refer to both the *Christian Index* and its predecessor, *The Columbian Star*, as the *Christian Index*. For example, the "Letters on the Atonement" appeared on the pages of *The Columbian Star* in 1830, but even then the transition was underway whereby the two papers were merged and eventually came to be known solely as the *Christian Index*.

<sup>3</sup>W. H. Stokes, "Announcement," in *Christian Index*, September 10, 1841.

<sup>4</sup>"The Late Rev. Mr. Mercer," in *Christian Index*, October 1, 1841.

<sup>5</sup>Charles D. Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer* (New York: John Gray, 1844), 61.

<sup>6</sup>Writing more than twenty years after Mercer's death, Judge G. E. Thomas opined that the "Rev. Jesse Mercer was one of the great champions of the Baptist church." See G. E. Thomas, "Rev. Jesse Mercer and His Ecclesiastical Court," in *Christian Index*, July 13, 1863.

fundamental change in faith from my forefathers. I believe now, and always preach in perfect accordance with the faith adopted by the Georgia Association, and from her (so far as I am informed) the other associations in the state.”<sup>7</sup> He believed and defended the “acknowledged Faith of the denomination.”<sup>8</sup> This faith, the theology which Mercer had inherited from his forefathers was evangelical Calvinism.<sup>9</sup> He once remarked, “We have from our youth up, been taught the predestination, free grace plan of doctrine, and the independent plan of church government, as the characteristic doctrine and discipline of the Baptists; and these we now most freely and fully believe and advocate.”<sup>10</sup> The Calvinism that he espoused, and, if his estimation was correct, that of Baptists in the first decades of the nineteenth century, was the Calvinism of John Owen, Benjamin Keach, Augustus Toplady, and Jonathan Edwards.

As one reads the remnants of Mercer’s theology in the *Christian Index*, his letters, and his *Cluster*,<sup>11</sup> it becomes clear that he, like the English Baptist Andrew Fuller, found “great instruction” in the writings of Jonathan Edwards.<sup>12</sup> The impact of Edwards’ colossal legacy can be felt both immediately and mediately in Mercer’s work. For example, in 1837, Mercer published a lengthy extract from Edwards’ *Religious Affections* for the readers of the *Christian Index*.<sup>13</sup> Later during his tenure as editor, Mercer ran a thirteen-week series of proposed Sunday

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<sup>7</sup>Found in Mallery, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, 201.

<sup>8</sup>Jesse Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement, Letter I,” in *Christian Index*, August 28, 1830.

<sup>9</sup>Mercer supported the Charleston confession as an adequate expression of Baptist beliefs. In 1808, Mercer proposed the adoption of the confession as the official faith statement of the Georgia Baptist Association. At their annual meeting, he moved “that this Association examine the confession of Faith adopted by the Charleston Association, with a summary of discipline annexed, with a view to its adoption.” Curiously, one year later, Mercer, a member of the committee appointed to examine the Charleston confession, reported that they were of the opinion that “it is unnecessary to make or adopt” any confession at that time. See Jesse Mercer, *History of the Georgia Baptist Association* (Washington, GA: Georgia Baptist Association, 1838), 47, 49.

<sup>10</sup>Gregory A. Wills, “Foreword,” *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, iii.

<sup>11</sup>In a song Mercer wrote, “The Experience of Jesse Mercer,” he lamented, “I sought him by pray’r, and desir’d to know, His favour to Christians most free; But still I inclined to sin as I grew, And wish’d him conformed to me.” See Jesse Mercer, “Hymn no. 233,” *The Cluster of Jesse Mercer*, ed. by C. Ray Brewster (Macon, GA: Renaissance Press, 1983), 87.

<sup>12</sup>Andrew Fuller, “Letters to Dr. Ryland, Letter VI,” vol. 2 of *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller [Works]*, 3 volumes (republished Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 715. Fuller, whose *A Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* was dependent upon Edwards and proved to be vitally influential to William Carey and the founding of the Modern Missionary Movement, further remarked that in Edwards he had found the “greatest instruction.” See *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Mercer, “Of the Holy Spirit,” in *Christian Index*, January 26, 1837. Mercer’s predecessor, W. T. Brantley, and his successor, W. H. Stokes, both printed lengthy extracts of Edwards’ work in the paper as well. Interestingly, this extract on “holiness” does not match comparable sections of *Religious Affections* in any of the major editions available today. While it is clear that the Mercer version has removed many of the biblical citations, still other textual changes exist. The source of this extract can be found in the Yale edition of *Religious Affections*. See Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards [Works]*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 257–66. For edition reprinted in the two volume edition of Edwards’ works, see Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 279–81. For the 1787 edition of *Religious Affections* see Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, (Elizabeth-town, NY: Shepard Kollock, 1787), 284–94. Mercer’s version does not match the wording in any of these editions. Though it

School lessons drawn from Edwards' *A History of the Work of Redemption*. More significantly, however, the mediated echoes of Edwards' work on the will can still be heard in Mercer's writings. In his defenses of gospel and missionary societies and his battle over the atonement, Jesse Mercer brought to bear the full weight of Edwards' theology, defeating his opponents and exposing a generation of southern Baptists to the evangelical Calvinism of a New Englander.

Interestingly, little study has been devoted thus far to the influence of Edwards on Baptists in the South. Tom Nettles has written a very helpful introduction to this neglected area of study, "Edwards and His Impact on Baptists," that surveys Edwards's influence on men like John Ryland, Jr., Andrew Fuller, W. B. Johnson, and John L. Dagg.<sup>14</sup> While this article provides helpful insight and resources for further study, Nettles was unable to address the thought of Jesse Mercer. Even Anthony Chute's fine study on the life and theology of Jesse Mercer, *A Piety above the Common Standard*, mentions Edwards only in passing and always as means of defining the broader evangelical Calvinism that Mercer sought to preserve.<sup>15</sup> His work does not address the immediate influence of Edwards on Mercer himself. Among recent historical studies, E. Brooks Holifield makes the connection between Edwards and Baptists in New England and the South clear. Even Holifield, however, gives the place of pride in the South and Mercer to Fuller, not Edwards.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while scholars recognize the stamp of Edwardsean theology on Jesse Mercer, very little has been produced thus far to explore the limits of this dependence on Jonathan Edwards.

Given the importance of Jesse Mercer's contributions to the rise of Baptists in the South and his dependence upon Edwards for the defense of the gospel, this paper will consider Mercer's writings concerning the nature of the human will in an attempt to begin to correct this shortcoming in Baptist studies. Three closely related discussions arise out of these writings: a definition of what truly constitutes a free will, natural ability, and moral inability. These topics will be considered as they appear in Mercer's work and reflect Edwards' own understanding of the will.

#### "THE KNOTTY QUESTION"

The knotty question—How predestination in God can consist with free agency in man? is

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remains unclear what version of the text he might have been using, the reader should note that the changes present do not alter the meaning of the original.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas J. Nettles, "Edwards and His Impact on Baptists," *The Founders Journal* 53 (summer 2003), 1–18. Various references to Edwards's influence can be found throughout Nettles' various biographical sketches of early Baptists in *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986; reprint, Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002) and his three-volume work, *The Baptists: Key People in Forming a Baptist Identity* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005–2007), as well as in Michael Haykin, ed. *The British Particular Baptists, 1638–1910* [3 vols.] (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998–2003).

<sup>15</sup>Anthony L. Chute, *A Piety above the Common Standard: Jesse Mercer and Evangelistic Calvinism* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup>E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 284.

more puzzling than edifying. We may affirm the fact, though we cannot explain the manner; for the scriptures plainly teach us both, and “they cannot be broken.”<sup>17</sup>

Mercer’s so-called “knotty question” was not new. Like his Baptist predecessors in England fifty years earlier, circumstances compelled Mercer to address the issue. The raging revivals of the Second Great Awakening and Cyrus White’s attempts to redefine the extent of the atonement brought the question into the homes and pulpits of Georgia Baptists. Similar to the “Modern Question” which sought to determine whether or not the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation undermined the duty of all men to accept the gospel, Mercer was confronted by some who maintained that God’s sovereignty rendered the gospel call unnecessary. Moreover, Mercer grappled with White’s departure from “the characteristic doctrine of the denomination” when he declared man’s absolute freedom from sin’s influences.<sup>18</sup> Like Robert Hall, Sr. and Fuller before him, Mercer turned to Jonathan Edwards to defend evangelical Calvinism, for he was convinced that “the doctrine of Election is practical in its tendency, and that it is consistent with personal accountability.”<sup>19</sup>

In his disputations with various challengers, Mercer echoed the arguments found in Jonathan Edwards’ *Freedom of the Will*. Mercer sought to define carefully the true nature of freedom in relation to the will. Building upon that foundational definition, he maintained that fallen man retained his natural ability to respond to God and was thus responsible for his obedience or lack thereof. The problem, he wrote, lies not in man’s natural ability but in his moral inability, his inclination to obey the rebellious dictates of his fallen and depraved mind rather than the righteous commands of God. In so doing, Mercer successfully defended evangelical Calvinism, encouraged biblical evangelism, and maintained the boundaries of orthodoxy among Georgia Baptists.

## DEFINING FREE WILL

In matters of theological debate, the actors must exercise great caution to ensure that they carefully define not only the parameters of the discussion, but also the terms in question. Both Jesse Mercer and Jonathan Edwards adhered to this principle. Properly understanding their use of theological concepts holds the key to grasping the breadth and depth of their argument.

*Mercer.* In his debate with Cyrus White, the meaning of free will, or “free agency” as Mercer often called it, lay at the root of the problem. White, the pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in the Ocmulgee Association in Georgia and the leading proponent of Arminian theology among Georgia Baptists in the 1830s, maintained that for man’s will to be truly free to accept the gospel he must be freed from the constraints of his sinful nature. He argued for this theological position in his tract, *A Scriptural View of the Atonement*.<sup>20</sup> There White argued, much to the

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<sup>17</sup>Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, 314.

<sup>18</sup>Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement, Letter I,” in *Christian Index*, August 28, 1830.

<sup>19</sup>Mercer and W. H. Stokes, “Circular Letter,” in *Christian Index*, November 17, 1835.

<sup>20</sup>Cyrus White, *A Scriptural View of the Atonement* (Milledgeville, GA: n.p., 1830). Due to the limited availability of White’s tract, further references to his theological premises will be drawn from Mercer’s interpretation of that work.

Calvinists' consternation, that the atonement must be applied universally, before regeneration. Such "a general provision" would grant man "free-will ability."<sup>21</sup> By the application of the atonement in such a way, White contended, fallen man would be rendered completely free to choose as he will, even contrary to his nature, if necessary. Otherwise, there could be no eternal responsibility for one's unbelief. Mercer summarized White's position in this way:

From all of which, it is evident you believe, that sin has destroyed in man the principle of responsibility; else he could not be free from obligation to obey God in any case; for the want of natural ability alone, destroys moral obligation.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, Mercer saw the flaw in White's premise and challenged him to consider the ramifications of such a position.

If so, then sin has rendered disobedience no crime. But is this true? If there be no obligation on man, as a sinner, then there is no duty; and where there is no duty, there is no law; and where there is no law, there is no transgression; and where there is no transgression, there is no blame; and consequently impenitance and unbelief are harmless things.<sup>23</sup>

In White's unofficially declared definition of freedom of the will, one finds no need for the atonement, Mercer argued. Apart from the atonement, man is guilty of nothing and free to act and believe as he sees fit. Arguing for some sort of prevenient grace that would free man's will, White neutered his own argument for the necessity of such a liberation altogether.

However, by "freedom" Mercer meant something vastly different from Cyrus White. In the *Christian Index*, he ran an article from an earlier edition of the *Philedelphian*. His use of that article without refutation strongly suggests that Mercer supported the author's conclusions. That article, "Predestination," argued "It is certain, that all the actions of man are free; not resulting from any compulsion, force, or necessity. Of acting freely we are all conscious, and we all judge that our thoughts, feelings, purposes and exertions proceed out of our own souls. Man is an automatic, spontaneous free agent, in every one of his exercises of soul."<sup>24</sup> Mercer explained his position earlier in the year this way:

It is owned that, in actions that are morally good or evil, men must be free from force, or compulsion and necessity. But it does not follow that they must be free from strong

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<sup>21</sup>Mercer, "Letters on the Atonement, Letter I," in *Christian Index*, August 28, 1830.

<sup>22</sup>Mercer, "Letters on the Atonement, Letter VII," in *Christian Index*, November 6, 1830.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>"Predestination," in *Christian Index*, September 2, 1834. Moreover, Mercer would have been in complete agreement with the Second London Confession's first article on the will: "God hath indued the Will of Man, with that natural liberty, and power of acting upon choice; that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil." See "Second London Confession," in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 2nd edition, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969), 263.

depravity. In order to render men's bad actions blamable, it is not needful that their bad inclinations or dispositions be weak and inconsiderable.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, unlike White, Mercer did not believe that moral freedom must of necessity exclude the influences of sin.

For Mercer, the key to understanding freedom and responsibility is not to be found in some unobtainable absence of sin, but in the created order of things. The nature of humanity itself is, according to Mercer, the source of man's freedom. "God does not operate on men as matter, but as rational creatures, and his influences are designed to bring them to act according to their abilities which he gave them freely."<sup>26</sup> These abilities enable man "to yield obedience to the laws of their Maker, while at the same time they were left free, or liable to 'turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.'" Of free agency he contended:

The word *agent* in this connexion, simply describes man as capable of action, and *free* is used to show that that action was the result of no compulsory coercion, but produced wholly by the volition of its agents, or that men act according to the most prevailing disposition of their hearts. This *free agency* is that whereby men are the proper subjects of moral law; bound to obey the voice of their Creator, because he gave them in their creation, the ability to do so, and therefore requires them to *love him* with all their heart, soul, mind and strength; but never coerces them to this obedience—for this would be to render their service a matter of necessity and not of choice, void of virtue and incapable of giving him honor. In order that men's obedience might be voluntary, virtuous and honoring to their Creator, they must be *free* to disobey if they choose to do so. 'Tis this that renders them responsible for their actions—the subjects of blame or praise. Without this they could not be blessed in their obedience, nor condemned for their sin (emphasis his).<sup>27</sup>

Contra White, Mercer's understanding of freedom does not arise distinct from one's nature, but out of it. Man does not lack freedom, needing to be freed from the influences of sin; he is free to act morally or immorally already. In this manner, Mercer preserved the Calvinistic limits to the atonement and ensured the theological freedom of the will.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Mercer, "An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, section III," in *Christian Index*, April 4, 1834.

<sup>26</sup>Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, 276. According to Edwards, this is the very nature of the *imago dei*: Men are in the 'image of their Creator in that respect, that they have understanding and are voluntary agents, and can produce works of their own will, design and contrivance, as God does.'" See Edwards, "Miscellany" 894, in *The "Miscellanies," Entry Nos. 833–1152*, in *Works* vol. 20, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 96.

<sup>27</sup>Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, 311.

<sup>28</sup>The reader would be wise to note the foreshadowing in this definition of the constituent parts of Mercer's—and Edwards'—further explanations of freedom of the will.

*Edwards.* Edwards, too, recognized the necessity for clearly defined terms in his polemics. This is particularly true of *Freedom of the Will*. There Edwards devoted over thirty pages to defining the terms of the debate.<sup>29</sup>

More was at stake in this issue, Edwards felt, than a mere theological victory of Calvinism over Arminianism. The nature of true religion hung in the balance.

As religion is the great business, for which we are created, and on which our happiness depends; and as religion consists in an intercourse between ourselves and our Maker; and so has its foundation in God's nature and ours, and in the relation that God and we stand in to each other; therefore a true knowledge of both must be needful in order to true religion. But the knowledge of ourselves consists chiefly in right apprehensions concerning those two chief faculties of our nature, the understanding and the will. Both are very important: yet the science of the latter must be confessed to be of greatest moment; inasmuch as all virtue and religion have their seat more immediately in the will, consisting more especially in right acts and habits of this faculty. And the grand question about the freedom of the will, is the main point that belongs to the science of the will.<sup>30</sup>

The will, Edwards wrote, is universally understood to be “that by which the mind chooses anything ... that by which the soul either chooses or refuses.”<sup>31</sup> However, his understanding of freedom differed greatly from that of his opponents as well. The Arminians with which Edwards grappled defined freedom, or liberty, as the ability of the will to determine itself, apart from any coercive force external to itself as an independent entity. Such freedom, as they conceived it, consisted of three things: the will's sovereignty over itself, indifference, and contingency. The former depended upon the latter two for its foundation. Freedom, they argued, requires that the will be free to decide as it will, apart from any influence and, if need be, contrary to the ruling nature of the individual himself. Each act of volition, to be considered free, must occur in a metaphysical vacuum, untouched by precedent or emotion, contingent upon nothing other than the will's own ability to determine its course.<sup>32</sup>

Such a position, Edwards objected, is logically untenable. Every act of choosing or refusing, Edwards proposed, depends upon “some preponderation [*sic*] of the mind or inclination.”<sup>33</sup> Otherwise, “there is no volition.”<sup>34</sup> Such preponderances and inclinations inform

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<sup>29</sup>As found in the Yale edition of Edwards' works. See Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, in *Works* vol. 1, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 137–67.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>32</sup>This view of liberty, Edwards remarked, taken to its logical conclusions would not only free the will from its own inclinations, it would free the mind from the burden of evidence and understanding. Rational thought and true virtue would be endangered. See *Ibid.*, 223–24.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 140. Fuller, too, recognized this. He argued, “If freedom from the influence of motives, or power to change one's inclination, be essential to free agency, the Divine Being himself is not free.” See Fuller, “Dialogues and Letters,” in *Works* 2:657.

<sup>34</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, *Works* 1:140.

the mind, determining its course of action. That which appears to be good attracts; that which is perceived to be bad repels. Thus, Edwards surmised, “the will is as the greatest apparent good is.”<sup>35</sup> That is, man always freely chooses that which he finds most appealing, for he cannot do otherwise. He never chooses that which he ultimately does not desire. Volition is not forced from without but determined from within.

Moreover, for Edwards, like Mercer, this ability to choose freely according to one’s nature depends on one’s nature. God, Edwards wrote, possesses “the essential qualities of a moral agent . . . in the greatest possible perfection.” These qualities include the ability “to perceive the difference between moral good and evil; a capacity of discerning that moral worthiness of blame and punishment; and also a capacity of choice, and choice guided by understanding, and a power of acting according to his choice or pleasure, and being capable of doing those things which are in the highest sense praiseworthy.”<sup>36</sup> These qualities, though to a lesser extent, have been extended to man.

And herein does very much consist that image of God wherein he made man, by which God distinguished man from the beasts, viz. in those faculties and principles of nature, whereby he is capable of moral agency. Herein very much consist the natural image of God; as his spiritual and moral image, wherein man was made at first, consisted in that moral excellency, that he was endowed with.<sup>37</sup>

According to Jonathan Edwards, the freedom of the will consists in the ability to choose and to do so according to one’s nature and the desires that arise from it, not to the dictates of other men or contrary inclinations.

*Conclusion.* While there exists no clear evidence that Mercer drew his definition of freedom directly from Edwards, it is clear that a common stream of thought flows from both of their pens. This stream reflects the distinct confessional heritage of both men, whether it would be that of the Second London Confession via the Charleston Association or the Westminster Confession of Faith. These confessions, like these men, drew from the same fountain—the Reformed doctrine of man.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 166.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid. In *Religious Affections*, Edwards noted that the spiritual image of God in man, his holiness, was lost in the fall. With this loss, according to Edwards’ anthropological scheme, man lost his inclination toward righteousness. However, the moral image of God, the capability of reason and understanding, survived. This distinction plays a crucial role in Edwards’ conception of the freedom of the will.

<sup>38</sup>The Baptist confession, based upon the Westminster Confession, echoes its predecessor, almost word-for-word with the exception of one small, but not insignificant addition. The Westminster Confession states, “God hath endued the will of man with that natural ability, that is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.” See “Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 57. The Second London Confession reads, “God hath indued the Will of Man, with that natural liberty, and power of acting upon choice; that it is neither forced, nor by any necessity of nature determined to do good or evil.” See “Second London Confession,” 263.



ABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Clearly both Jesse Mercer and Jonathan Edwards built their theological systems on the Reformed tradition. According to the confessions accepted by both theologians, they believed man to be endowed with a God-given ability to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil. This resident, natural ability points back to the *imago dei* and forward to the reckoning day when God will hold these free agents accountable for their willful obedience or disobedience.

*Mercer.* To Cyrus White, Mercer wrote, “It would be well to observe that there is a natural [ability].”<sup>39</sup> This inherent ability “constitutes us accountable beings.”<sup>40</sup> The loss of that ability because of original sin, as White believed, would destroy obligation, rendering sin harmless and the gospel call impotent. Thus, White was forced to contend for a universal view of the atonement that would restore this “free-will ability.” Mercer found such a conclusion to be unacceptable and evidence of White’s departure from the “acknowledged faith” and “characteristic doctrine of the denomination.”<sup>41</sup>

The “characteristic doctrine of the denomination,” according to Mercer, was that “the capacity the soul has of knowing, seeing, loving and enjoying [God], is undeniably its chief capacity,” the very “end [or purpose] of its being.”<sup>42</sup> Or, as Mercer stated elsewhere, the ability to love God is man’s “chief end and highest perfection.”<sup>43</sup> Man was created for no higher purpose and has been suitably prepared in his constitution to accomplish that task. Even while dead in sin, God operates in the lives of men, calling upon them to choose the good, for that is what they are able and required to do. Citing Fuller, Mercer wrote to White, “The law of God requires no creature to love him, or obey him, beyond his strength, or with more than all the powers which he possesses.”<sup>44</sup> For man, fallen or otherwise, to “resist such obligations, to love and obey the God of nature” is rebellion of the vilest sort, “highly inexcusable and punishable.”<sup>45</sup> To possess the natural ability to choose is to be human. To be human is to be responsible for the manner in which one uses those gifts with which he has been endowed.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement, Letter VII,” in *Christian Index*, November 6, 1830.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement, Letter I,” in *Christian Index*, August 28, 1830.

<sup>42</sup>Mercer, “An Essay on Prejudices Against the Gospel, concluded,” in *Christian Index*, November 12, 1833.

<sup>43</sup>Mercer, “An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, Section IV,” in *Christian Index*, April 29, 1834.

<sup>44</sup>Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement, Letter VII,” in *Christian Index*, November 6, 1830. See Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* for complete text in Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, in *Works* 2:376–77.

<sup>45</sup>Mercer, “An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, Section IV,” in *Christian Index*, May 6, 1834.

<sup>46</sup>Mercer reprinted a lengthy article from the Religious Narrator entitled, “Lectures on Life and Doctrine.” This article echoed Mercer’s sentiments as stated above. “Were there in man no facilities and adaptations for the comprehension and belief of the divine word, then that word could with no propriety be addressed to [man]; neither could guilt attach to him for the violation of its requirements.” See Mercer, “Lectures on Life and Doctrine,” in *Christian Index*, November 12, 1833. The same thought can be found in Fuller’s *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*: “we must possess the powers of men in order to perform the duties of good men.” See Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All*

Therefore, Mercer concluded, if God has created man for the purpose of loving his creator and given him the native ability to choose to do so, it is incumbent upon preachers to call upon sinners, enslaved in sin, to fulfill their God-given and God-demanded duty.

It is evident from scripture, that the operations of grace are suited to the frame of our natures, & to these laws of nature, which relate to the fittest means of producing the best effects on the minds and hearts of reasonable creatures. The proper means or causes of producing belief or persuasion with suitable affections, are such things as these; light or evidence; arguments and motives; serious proposal of them; mature consideration; earnest exhortation; and entreaty; warnings of danger and the like.<sup>47</sup>

The application of such means is consistent with man's fallen conditions and God's decrees. Together, they offer "a new and striking light, a glorious door of hope."<sup>48</sup> The free offer of grace opens this "door" to men who are naturally able to enter.

It is right then that men should be taught their obligations to God, and exhorted, and urged, and even expostulated with, that they turn from the evil of their ways, & seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near; lest they sink from the dark mountains of their error, and perish forever.<sup>49</sup>

*Edwards.* "God has made us reasonable creatures, and capable of rationally determining for ourselves," Edwards declared, "capable of making a wise choice for ourselves."<sup>50</sup> As such, man was created for a higher purpose: loving and obeying God.

As mankind are made capable of knowing his Creator, so he is capable of an high esteem of his perfections, his power and wisdom and goodness, and capable of loving him and entertaining great respect to him, for those perfections. He is capable of a proper esteem of God for his wise and excellent and wonderful works, which he beholds, and that admirable contrivance of [them], which appears in so excellently ordering all things; and of gratitude to him, for all the goodness that he himself is the subject of.<sup>51</sup>

However, freedom necessitates that he could choose otherwise.

Or, on the contrary, of slighting and despising him, and hating him, and finding fault with

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*Acceptation*, in *Works* 2:379.

<sup>47</sup>Mercer, "An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, Section IV," in *Christian Index*, May 6, 1834.

<sup>48</sup>Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, 90.

<sup>49</sup>Mercer, "Social Effort," in *Christian Index*, August 30, 1838.

<sup>50</sup>Edwards, "The Unreasonableness of Indetermination in Religion," in *Sermons and Discourses: 1734–1738*, ed. M. X. Lesser, in *Works*, vol. 19 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 98.

<sup>51</sup>Edwards, "Providence," in *Works* 20:100.

his works, reproaching him for them, slighting all his goodness they receive from him; yea, hating him for ordering things in his providence to them as he has done, and cursing and blaming him for it ... And therefore, he is capable of either complying with the will of his Creator or opposing it.<sup>52</sup>

Edwards understood that natural ability, along with the incumbent risk, is necessary, if man is to be held accountable for his choices and acts.

God expects man to choose wisely, to choose good, to choose righteousness for that is his duty. The sum of this duty “is to love God” with his entire being, in both volition and act.<sup>53</sup> To that end God has provided man with the ability to do all that is required of him. “’Tis very true,” he wrote, “that God requires nothing of us as a condition of eternal life but what is in our own power.”<sup>54</sup> In a sermon, “Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation,” Edwards further explained this concept.

God never requires anything of man but what is commensurate to the faculties that he has given him. He never commands him to do anything above the capacity of their human nature. God don’t require man to do those things that he cannot do unless he should have the strength and capacity of an angel but in everything accommodates his commands to the capacity of the creature commanded ... God gives man such faculties as he has on purpose, that he might exercise them in those things his faculty of wisdom has given, chiefly that he might know God and faculty of will, chiefly that he might love God. And that we must suppose his faculties are fitted to that end. Those things are no more above the capacity of the human nature than any action that a man performs.<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately, humanity falls desperately short of this ideal, using their freedom, instead, to rebel, finding themselves blameworthy, accountable before God. Where obedience is expected, ability exists, and punishment will be exacted for disobedience.

For that reason, Edwards exhorted his hearers, “There is a door of mercy always standing open for sinners.”<sup>56</sup> Ever the evangelist, he longed to shepherd his hearers through this door and see them embrace their savior. In sermon after sermon, Edwards threw the “door of mercy wide open” and cried out for sinners to enter in. He exhorted them to press into the kingdom, for this is the “work or business which must be undertaken and accomplished by men, if they would be saved.”<sup>57</sup> In this labor, the sinner must “be thorough, violent, [and] perpetual,” if he hoped to

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 100–01.

<sup>53</sup>Edwards, *Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook, in *Works*, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 140.

<sup>54</sup>Edwards, “Miscellany” 291, in *The “Miscellanies,” Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer, *Works*, vol. 13 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 238.

<sup>55</sup>Edwards, “Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation [1733],” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

<sup>56</sup>Edwards, “Pressing into the Kingdom of God,” *Works* 19:291.

<sup>57</sup>Edwards, “The Manner in Which the Salvation of the Soul is to be Sought,” in *Seeking God: Jonathan*

succeed.<sup>58</sup> “Consider,” Edwards wrote, “what you will lose if you don’t find God.”<sup>59</sup> “You lose yourself.”<sup>60</sup>

Edwards never tired of calling sinners to consider the hardness of their heart.

Labor that you may be convinced of the sinfulness and wickedness of your heart, that you may see what a fount of abominable filthiness it is, and labor to be convinced of the sin of your life. Labor that you may see your way in the valley and know what you have done, that you may see your sin in its heinous, dangerous, and dreadful nature.<sup>61</sup>

Or, the beauty of the Savior.

Let the consideration of this wonderful meeting of diverse excellencies in Christ induce you to accept of him, and close with him as your Savior. As all manner of excellencies meet in him, so there are concurring in him all manner of arguments and motives, to move you to choose him for your Savior, and everything that tends to encourage poor sinners to come and put their trust in him: his fullness and all-sufficiency as a Savior, gloriously appear in that variety of excellencies that has been spoken of.<sup>62</sup>

In Edwards’ hands, the evangelistic sermon was a tool, the means by which God touches and changes lives.

*Conclusion.* While Mercer does not cite Edwards directly in his argument, the parallels between the thought of Mercer and Edwards are quite clear. Mercer echoed Edwards’ conviction that man has been supernaturally endowed with the ability to choose between good and evil. Plus, for both men, God ordained the use of means to call sinners to the obedience which was expected of them.

## INABILITY AND INCLINATION

Thus far, Mercer and Edwards have argued that humans are endowed with a freedom that is a direct correlative of their being created in the image of God. They have the ability to choose between good and evil. However, experience shows that left to his own devices, man does not make those decisions that please God. Rather, he uses his freedom to further his own ends

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*Edwards’ Evangelism Contrasted with Modern Methodologies*, ed. William C. Nichols (Ames, IA: International Outreach, 2001), 221.

<sup>58</sup>Edwards, “Ruth’s Resolution,” in *Works* 19:320.

<sup>59</sup>Edwards, from a sermon fragment “On Seeking,” in *Sermons and Discourses: 1720–1723*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach, in *Works*, vol. 10 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 384.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 385.

<sup>61</sup>Edwards, “Persons Ought to Endeavor to Be Convinced of Sin,” in *Seeking God*, 303.

<sup>62</sup>Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in *Works* 19:583.

instead of God's glory. The problem lies not in some defect of the natural ability to choose, but in a moral defect that determines that which is chosen. "The thing wanting is not a being able, but a being willing" to do what is right.<sup>63</sup> Sinful inclinations, evil dispositions, they argued, constrain man's freedom.

*Mercer.* The influence of sinful inclinations, Mercer wrote, does not stand in contradiction to the reality of one's freedom. To his readers in Georgia, he explained, "Man's will may be said to be free in very different meanings. It is owned that, in actions that are morally good or evil, men must be free from force, or compulsion and necessity. But it does not follow that they must be free from strong depravity."<sup>64</sup> Just one week later, he completed that thought: "Though a sinner be a free agent, there is no proof that he is free from powerful depravity in the rooted dispositions of his heart or will itself."<sup>65</sup> In that, he would have been in full agreement with Fuller when he said, "Moral slavery has nothing to do with free agency."<sup>66</sup> Depravity, arising from the controlling influence of original sin, does not remove the freedom of the will to choose as it will, but binds it in slavery to those factors that it, in its present condition, finds most agreeable. Sin becomes the ruling principle in their lives, that which motivates all decisions, leading the will to choose the one and not the other. These principles manifest themselves as the "prevalent affections," inclinations which motivate men to improper decisions, "when instead of loving God above all things, they give preference to infinitely inferior objects."<sup>67</sup> It is these ever-present evil inclinations that handicap man, rendering him morally unable to choose good.

Given that Fuller was self-confessedly dependent upon Edwards, it is important to note Mercer's use of his work here. In his dialogue with White, Mercer frequently quoted Fuller at length in an effort to correct White's misinterpretations. In fact, the bulk of "Letter VII" consists of such citations. Of inclinations, Fuller wrote, "It is equally impossible, no doubt, for any person to do that which he has no mind to do, as to perform that which surpasses his natural powers."<sup>68</sup> Therein lies the nature of true freedom: the "power of following the inclination."<sup>69</sup> When the inclinations are evil, as in the life of an unrepentant sinner, the inclinations themselves become worthy of blame. They create an "evil temper of the mind" that "can take no delight in God or in any thing that bears his holy likeness."<sup>70</sup>

Thus, in Mercer's theology, and that of Fuller, the choice of inferior objects of devotion based on inferior inclinations is that which makes men sinners and liable before God.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, in *Works* 1:162.

<sup>64</sup>Mercer, "An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, section III," in *Christian Index*, April 4, 1834.

<sup>65</sup>Mercer, "An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, section III," in *Christian Index*, April 15, 1834.

<sup>66</sup>Fuller, "Dialogues and Letters," in *Works* 2:656.

<sup>67</sup>Mercer, "An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, Section IV," in *Christian Index*, April 29, 1834.

<sup>68</sup>Mercer, "Letters on the Atonement, Letter VII," in *Christian Index*, November 6, 1830.

<sup>69</sup>Fuller, "Dialogues and Letters," in *Works* 2:656.

<sup>70</sup>Fuller, "Reply to Philanthropos," in *Works* 2:474.

<sup>71</sup>In fact, Mercer would define sin as the misuse of natural abilities for ill. As part of the series articles quoted

The fact that men have sinned, has no tendency to alter, or change, or abate the claims of their Creator on them, or their obligations of obedience to him, in the least. He has created them the subjects of moral government, and commands them accordingly; and it is their duty to obey; but their foolish heart being fully bent in them to do evil, they will not. They choose their own evil ways and doings, and refuse to return. Therefore they are without excuse, and justly condemned, and would all perish in their own corruption, if God was not better to them than they are to themselves.<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, in the seventh of ten letters to Cyrus White, Mercer wrote, “the loss of moral ability [moral inability] makes us sinners and subjects to guilt and condemnation.”<sup>73</sup>

Apart from the goodness of God sinful men would never choose that which tends to the eternal benefit of their souls. “A sinner cannot have due prevalent love to God and hatred of sin,” Mercer argued, “without prevalent desire of obtaining deliverance from sin, and the enjoyment of God.”<sup>74</sup> The sin-bound heart, trapped in a cycle of self-satisfying inclinations, must be changed, freed from sin’s dominion to choose God. God, Mercer believed, had in his grace provided for such relief.

But God, in the infinite provisions of his mercy, has purposed in Christ to employ such divine operations and influences as shall, in perfect accordance with the free agency of men, make his people willing in the day of his power. It is believed that all the saving operations of God in men, are to bring them to this willingness, and so to be saved. That God in these operations, never does any violence to the will of men, but always seems to change it from its evil inclinations, and so to turn them to himself. The evidences of God’s favor towards any are, therefore, not to be sought in forcible restraints, but in the drawings and sweet inclinings of their hearts to seek the Lord, and to obtain his favor. Nor are we to think these sweet drawings are the less certain, because they do not rise to coercion. The Lord who formed the heart, knows best how to govern it, and form it anew to love and serve him with true delight.<sup>75</sup>

Thus freed from the controlling influence of sin by God’s goodness, the will is now truly free to choose that which is the best, according to the new prevailing inclinations of the heart.

*Edwards.* In his essay on the mind, Edwards declared the will to be “no otherwise different from the inclination.”<sup>76</sup> That is, he understood the will to be the outworking of

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above, written in the spring and summer of 1834, Mercer noted, “As all evil is, one way or other, the abuse of good, and all moral evil consists in the abuse of some good natural powers.” See Mercer, “An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, Section VI,” in *Christian Index*, July 15, 1834.

<sup>72</sup>Mallory, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, 311–12.

<sup>73</sup>Mercer, “Letters on the Atonement, Letter VII,” in *Christian Index*, November 6, 1830.

<sup>74</sup>Mercer, “An Essay on the Scripture Doctrine of Divine Grace, Section V,” in *Christian Index*, June 3, 1834.

<sup>75</sup>Mallory, *Memoirs of Elder Jesse Mercer*, 312.

<sup>76</sup>Edwards, “The Mind,” in *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, in *Works*, vol. 6

inclinations, informed by the response of the heart and mind to external input, which direct the actions of the seeker by leading him to choose one way or another.

In *Freedom of the Will* Edwards explained the manner in which the will operates. There Edwards stated that the will is inclined to choose the “greatest apparent good,” that is, the thing that “appears most agreeable” to its present state.<sup>77</sup> “To a sinner (who by definition possesses ‘sinful dispositions’),” Allen Guelzo writes, “sinful motives always have the strongest appeal.”<sup>78</sup> Those motives that are the strongest and appeal most to man determine his will.

Mankind, after the fall, finds himself held captive by his depraved nature. The fall has not altered that which he can and cannot do but that which he will and will not do. There still resides in fallen humanity the natural ability to fulfill the demands of the gospel. “A man may be said properly,” Edwards noted, “to have it in his power to do that which he surely will not.”<sup>79</sup> As Murray correctly observes, “Man’s utter incapacity to do spiritual good does not arise out of a physical lack of faculties, but altogether out of the wrong moral disposition of those faculties.”<sup>80</sup> He is able but no longer willing.

Moral inability consists ... in the want of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the act of the will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary ... it may be said in one word, that moral inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination.<sup>81</sup>

Man is unable and unwilling to choose contrary to that which “appears most agreeable.” This truth applies to saints and sinners alike.

Moreover, man’s sinful nature, which streams from him like bitter water from a poisonous spring in the form of sinful acts and thoughts, leaves him unable to choose that which is right.

[A] great degree of habitual wickedness may lay a man under an inability to love and choose holiness; and render him utterly unable to love an infinitely holy Being, or to choose and cleave to him as his chief good.<sup>82</sup>

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(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 376.

<sup>77</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, in *Works* 1:217.

<sup>78</sup>Allen C. Guelzo, “The Return of the Will: Jonathan Edwards and the Possibilities of Free Will,” in *Edwards in Our Time*, eds. Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 92. See also Guelzo’s other related works, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 54–86, and “Freedom of the Will,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. by Sang H. Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 115–29.

<sup>79</sup>Edwards, “Miscellany” 573, in *Works* 18:112.

<sup>80</sup>Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 425.

<sup>81</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, in *Works* 1:159.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 160.

As Edwards wrote to John Erskine, “The very notion of hardness of heart [which would be evidenced by ongoing sin] implies moral inability.”<sup>83</sup>

Yet, “there is a possibility of salvation,” Edwards observed.<sup>84</sup> This possibility, he added, is available to those who reform their lives, who earnestly seek and submit themselves to God. Given the inclinations of his sinful nature, fallen man will never will to do such things because they are contrary to his present desires. His will must be first altered and his inclinations bent toward God.

In efficacious grace we are not merely passive, nor yet does God do some, and we do the rest. But God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. For that is what he produces, *viz.* our acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active.<sup>85</sup>

This alteration is both the province of God and man.

The manner in which God moves the will of men is the impartation of that “divine and supernatural light” of his Holy Spirit. Man’s fallen status necessitates God’s sovereign initiation of this light: “[sinners] are not willing to come to Christ, and can’t make [themselves] willing.”<sup>86</sup> God gives this light immediately, apart from the operation of any external means, as a gift of his great mercy. God-given means, such as the Bible and the preaching of it, are used by this light to impart saving knowledge, but in and of themselves they are powerless to provide that light.<sup>87</sup> This light directly influences the inclinations of the will. “This light is such as effectually influences the inclination,” Edwards preached, “and changes the nature of the soul.”<sup>88</sup> However, this change occurs only as the Spirit alters those faculties still resident within the individual.

’Tis not intended that the natural faculties are not made use of in it. The natural faculties are the subject of this light: and they are the subject in such a manner, that they are not merely passive, but active in it; the acts and exercises of man’s understanding are

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 468.

<sup>84</sup>Edwards, “A Possibility of Being Saved Is Better Than a Certainty of Perishing,” in *Seeking God*, 249.

<sup>85</sup>Edwards, “Remarks on Important Theological Controversies,” *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, 557.

<sup>86</sup>Edwards, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners,” in *Works* 19:365.

<sup>87</sup>In “Christians a Chosen Generation,” Edwards said, “The outward call of the gospel will do nothing of itself.” See Edwards, “Christians a Chosen Generation,” in *Works* 17:325. He echoed this sentiment in “That if we would be in the way of God’s grace and blessing we must wait upon him in his own way and in the use of his appointed means.” Yet, it must be noted that Edwards believed that these appointed means were used by God to impart his grace. See Edwards, “That If We Would Be in the Way of God’s Grace and Blessing We Must Wait upon Him in His Own Way and in the Use of His Appointed Means [n.d.],” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

<sup>88</sup>Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul By the Spirit of God, Shown to Be Both a Scriptural, and Rational Doctrine,” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, ed. by Wilson H. Kinnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 139.



concerned and made use of in it.<sup>89</sup>

Notice the shift in Edwards argument. In this sermon, in which Edwards argued for the sovereign grace of God in salvation, he observed the active role that man plays in his own salvation. Those revived human faculties, though still damaged by the fall, figure prominently in the salvation drama. Thus enlightened, the transfigured will of man sees the wisdom of the gospel and the beauty of God's sovereignty. These things draw the individual to things of religion.

The proof of the Spirit's operation on the will lies in the will's working. "The will," Edwards said, "always necessarily approves of, and rests in its own acts."<sup>90</sup> That is, the actions of the person reveal the character of their will. As one will only choose that to which they are predisposed, a person in whom sin is the predominant motivator chooses to do only those actions that fulfill his sinful appetite. They are self-centered and sin-motivated. On the other hand, the person whose will has been altered will be henceforth inclined to do those things which are God-honoring and God-seeking. With his will now truly free, he seeks those means appointed by God to affect his salvation.<sup>91</sup>

*Conclusion.* Nowhere does Mercer more closely follow Edwards' theology of the will than in his discussion of moral inability. Again, though he never cites Edwards directly, Mercer's dependence on Fuller in the debate with White and his use of the category itself reveals the profound influence Edwards exerted.

## CONCLUSION

Living in the period just preceding the division of the nation, Jesse Mercer sought to keep his founding denomination intact. Against hyper-Calvinists and full-blown Arminians, he endeavored to explain the gospel and defend its efficacy. Using the power of the press to its full advantage, he explained evangelical Calvinism using the terms and categories of Jonathan Edwards. While it is unfortunate from a historical standpoint that Mercer nowhere quotes Edwards directly, he used a second generation Edwards disciple, Andrew Fuller, to simplify the terms and clarify their meanings quite unabashedly. Thus, it becomes clear that as Mercer shaped the theology of a generation of southern Baptists in the midst of the Second Great Awakening, his theology was forged in the fires that shaped the first, the warmhearted Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards.

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>90</sup>Edwards, "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners," *Works* 19:365.

<sup>91</sup>Edwards mentioned many things in various sermons to which the true seeker should attend. In one unpublished sermon, Edwards recited a list of six things in which the true seeker should immerse himself, including prayer, meditation, and Scripture reading. See Edwards, "That If We Would Be in the Way of God's Grace and Blessing." In another unpublished sermon, he listed ten such things, adding to the above list, moral behavior toward one's neighbor and the seeking of further enlightenment from God. See Edwards, "Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation."

*The Journal of Baptist Studies* 1 (2007): 20–37.

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