

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL 2011, Part 2: Luke 2 & Volition: Libertarianism versus Compatibilism

In the last article I touched on Luke 2:1-6 as it relates to God's perfect timing and Caesar's "decree." I would now like to turn our attention to the issue of volition that runs through the entire narrative. Both the issue of God's perfect timing and man's personal volition are more relevant to our lives than anything else going on during this "Christ-mas" season.

In Luke 2:7-38 there is the display of both negative and positive volition (I will go into more detail in our Wednesday and Sunday Bible classes). I would like to start by outlining some basic concepts on volition or the will in mankind. There are two views on volition. First, there is what is known as libertarian view of freewill. This view teaches that a human's will is totally free and unaffected by any antecedents. Although this might seem attractive at first, in its purest sense it raises many problems. According to this view a volition is free to choose or act in any way regardless of the character of the person. In other words, at any given moment a Charles Manson could choose to love God, and a lover of God could automatically choose to hate God without any rhyme or reason. According to libertarianism no antecedent influences make any difference on how one will choose. A husband could spontaneously hate and murder his wife and children just as easy as love them. In strict libertarianism the will is *absolutely* autonomous from any forces or influences (like old sin nature or the indwelling Holy Spirit).

A second major view of human volition is called compatibilism. According to this view volition operates compatibly with antecedent causes. The person still has freewill, but that freewill is still very much influenced by antecedent causes. There are different degrees of compatibilism, from the very hard (which is more deterministic) to the softer compatibilist who recognizes antecedent *influences*, but still gives the will enough power to overcome them. A hard compatibilist, like a behaviorist, would tend to think, for example, that a child who was raised in horrendous family will end up with horrible characteristics—he is doomed to be a mess. A soft compatibilist would see the child not culpable as a child, but after he grows up he has the mind and will to look at his family, recognize that it was not the way families should be, and have the *power* to reject it and not make the same errors. Although he may have negative influences, God has given him the power to recognize those evil influences and turn from them. Thus, after the person reaches this "age of reason," he is able to override evil influences. Negative volition will repeat the errors and blame family, positive volition will turn from it. Even though the soft compatibilist recognizes that a person does have the power to override antecedent influences, he also recognizes that the more bad choices a person makes the less power and freedom he has to turn things around. By making good choices and developing virtue a person has more capacity and therefore freedom to move toward the Good. The more bad choices a person makes the more they are handed over by God to their evil natures and this means less power to turn things around (cf. Romans 1:26). The world is filled with people who God is handing over to their evil natures in one way or another—only because of negative volition. We have the same situation in Luke 2.

In Luke 2 there is a grand display of positive and negative volition. Those operating in positive volition include Joseph, Mary, the angelic army (host), the shepherds, Simeon, and Anna. They were, for the most part, outcasts of society. But they loved the Lord, and God was working mighty in their lives. We see the powers of the world in negative volition: Caesar Augustus, the rich, the powerful, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the sophisticated. God did not reveal the Grand Incarnation to the man on the throne or the High Priest of Israel. He came to positive volition—a young man and woman, a few shepherds, a couple of “nobodies” named Simeon and Anna. They were all Truth seekers. The rest were blind to it all. The rest were in darkness hustling and bustling all the while the light pierced the darkness in the fields with countless angels praising God for this glorious event. If Satan has a jaw, you can bet it dropped. “What!” He could hardly believe his “eyes.” “God becoming man?” Satan, like fallen man on earth, is always aspiring to move up the ladder. God did just the opposite in moving down because of His great love for lost man (Philip. 2). Satan said “I will be like the Most High” with an attitude of competition. The second member of the Trinity said, ‘I will become man’ for the redemption of man.

Although many Protestants are prone to bash Mary in reaction to how Catholics make her God above Jesus, let us not forget the fantastic human being she was. Let us never lose sight of her positive volition. Her “greatness,” like any and all human nobility, is reflected in the fact that she *treasured* the things of God, *pondering* them in her heart (Luke 2:19). She was a very positive young lady. There is nothing like positive volition. The entire Christmas narrative in Luke 2 revolves around volition—most missed the whole thing of God coming to earth, only a handful lived in the reality of the true Christmas. Most are not really interested in Truth—and many times this is totally unbeknownst to them (Pharisees and Sadducees undoubtedly thought they were positive to Truth). Sin and Evil have an *unbelievable* ability to deceive a person, even the Christian! Only by putting the Lord and His Word first and foremost is there any hope of breaking this deception. We are blessed at Faith Bible Church to have men and women who really are interested in Truth instead of making excuses and involved in sophistry. As a pastor I am blessed to have so many who truly are interested advancing in the journey of Truth—instead of playing church or playing “Christmas.”

On the Glory Road,

Pastor Don