



ZWTF

SATURDAY, JANUARY 12, 2013 Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

The Fly in the Jar and other sad attempts to deny God's sovereignty



NEWSBREAK: The spirit and the flesh of humanity regularly oppose one another. Big surprise? According to Jesus, the spirit is the thing that is willing, but the flesh is weak. In other words, your spirit tells you that you ought to be nice to the guy who just cut you off on the highway, but your flesh tells you to flip him the bird.

This conflict really messes with people when they consider the doctrine of human free will versus the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Most people, I think, have some modicum of spirit somewhere deep inside that believes God *must* control everything. This is known as believing in the sovereignty of God. Very good. But then this same human flesh wants “a piece of the pie,” that is, it wants some freedom from God. Let’s just stick with Christians here. When asked if God is sovereign, the average Christian will answer, “yes.” That’s the spirit talking. But when asked if humans have free wills, that same average Christian will also answer “yes.” That’s the flesh.

Thus, the average Christian suffers from a conflict of interests. His spirit is interested in God directing all life’s affairs—this certainly *sounds* good to him. But his flesh wants some credit and control. Just a little bit of these would be fine, thank you, as long as there is something. So while many Christians talk a good game of sovereignty, their flesh refuses to play it.

To be consistent and intelligent, one who claims to believe in free will would have to admit, “God does not control everything.” Right? A controlled will is not free, and a free will is not controlled. But how many bow to such honesty? How many can bring themselves to say, “God is not quite sov-



ereign,” or, “God does not control everything,” or “God does not operate everything in accord with the counsel of His will” (a denial of Ephesians 1:11). Such sayings, however consistent with the free will belief, are too honest for most to utter. They offend the spiritual ear. They contradict Scripture, to be sure.

It took lots of theologians with lots of degrees a long time to come up with a ridiculous, unscriptural example of how God could be sovereign, *and* every human being on the planet could be free—all at the same time. The very concept is impossible, of course, and so is the illustration. But the theologians felt much better having invented it. Because, as you know, theologians do so dearly love impossible concepts

“It’s kind of like a fly in a jar,” they say.

“A fly in a jar?” I ask.

“Sure,” they say. “A fly in a jar. We are the fly. God’s control is the jar—the edge of the jar. We can’t go outside God’s control, that is, outside the edge of the jar. But inside the jar, we can go wherever we want. We’re free from His control—inside the jar. Outside the jar, we would *really* be free from His control, so He patrols the edge of the jar to make sure that never happens. The edge of the jar represents God’s border patrol, His last shot, if you will, at controlling our uncontrollability before we would become truly uncontrollable, which could never happen.”

“How long did it take you to come up with this illustration?” I ask.

“Months. We put all our people on it, then took a vote. Harry’s idea won.”

“Harry?”

“Dr. Harry Dilks, First Free Will Baptist Holy Trinity Church of Eternal Flames. He has more degrees than Nebuchadnezzar’s oven. He also owns the pet store downtown, as a side gig. He used to capture flies in old mayonnaise jars when he was a kid.”

“That’s very interesting. But tell me, did you happen to hear yourself earlier, when you said, ‘we can’t go outside God’s

control?”

“Yes.”

“Then did you hear yourself say, ‘we’re free from His control?’”

“Yes. I believe I did hear that.”

“I was just checking. May I ask you a question?”

“If you must.”

“Since ‘control’ is ‘exercising restriction,’ and ‘freedom’ is ‘exemption from restriction,’ can you explain how God exercises restriction over those exempt from restriction?”

“Well, I am sorry to have to say this, but if you force me to think, I’m afraid I will have to kill you.”

“May we talk about your concept?”

“Go ahead.”

“If the fly is free from God’s control inside the jar, how could he be ‘really’ free from it *outside* the jar? Freedom is freedom. If he’s free from God’s control inside, what’s the difference if he’s outside? Either way, God doesn’t control him. It seems to me like maybe you’re putting the fly inside the jar for cosmetic purposes—don’t get upset, now—in order to make it *look* like God controls everything. But your so-called ‘border’ straddles two realms of identical freedom. It looks to me like the glass is a cosmetic addition, designed to trick people into thinking you believe God controls



Harry Dilks as a child.

everything, when really you don’t believe this at all because, according to your concept—or ‘illustration,’ if you like—God controls me in the same way I control a fly in a jar. That’s the analogy, isn’t it?”

“Yes, sir. Precisely. You have stated it well.”

“All right. I *can’t* control a fly in a jar—not at all. Can I? This must mean God can’t control *me*—not at all. Does that sound Scriptural to you? Does it agree with Ephesians 1:11, that God is operating all in accord with the counsel of His own will?”

“I never told you we’ve worked all the bugs out of this analogy—no humor intended there; I try not to be funny, ever. Maybe I should have said that the fly has a *certain* amount of freedom inside the jar. I hope I’m not throwing you off with this scientific terminology. Most laymen get lost whenever Harry and me start using highly technical phrases like ‘a certain amount of.’”

“But if the fly has only a certain amount of freedom, then God has only a certain amount of control. To me, people who say God exercises only partial control over His creation have not even begun to fathom His power and might. They have not even begun to properly worship and revere Him. They are still babes at believing Scripture.”

“You’re trying to make me think again, and you ought not

do that.”

“Tell me, according to your little illustration here, how far can I go before God takes over full control?”

“I told you. To the edge of the jar.”

“Assuming there is an edge of a jar, where does the edge of the jar start?”

“What do you mean?”

“What, in my life, corresponds to the edge of the jar? If the edge of the jar is God’s control, where does it begin? Am I free from His control only when I’m in my bathroom? My house? My car? Am I free until I cross the border of my state? Until I leave the country? The world? Does my freedom from God’s control apply only to my decisions about what to eat for breakfast and what to wear, or does it extend to moral decisions? In other words, where does my freedom end and God’s control begin? Doesn’t that seem like an important question?”

“Well, er ... Harry is still working on that.”

“How long do you think it will take him?”

“Months, probably.”

“Is God controlling Harry right now?”

“Well, we’re not exactly sure. If Harry is in his ‘jar’ mode today, then God is definitely not controlling him. But if Harry is outside the jar, then God, um ...”

“Wait a minute. I thought you told me no one can go outside the jar, because the edge of the jar represents God’s ‘last shot’ at control.”

“Um, well, what I meant to say was that you can’t look like you’re going to make a run for the edge of the jar. If God sees that you’re getting so far off course that you might make a run for the edge, God intervenes and stops you.”

“But for God to intervene, He has to reach inside the jar. If He reaches inside the jar, He violates my freedom, which you say He can’t do, no more than I can control a fly. So really, God’s control is even closer than the edge of the jar. Wouldn’t you at least have to admit that? If God even occasionally has to

“If the fly has only a certain amount of freedom, then God has only a certain amount of control.”

reroute me before I reach the edge of the jar, He must have to enter my ‘free’ space. And if He enters it once, near the edge, how do you know He doesn’t enter it often, elsewhere in the jar? What proof do you have that He doesn’t enter it all the time, everywhere in the jar? What proof do you have that there even *is* a jar?”

“Yes, well, as I said, Harry is still working on this, and in a few months or so I’m sure we’ll have satisfactory answers that will more than quench your, um, God-given, um ...”

“Have you guys ever read about the Potter and the clay?”

“The who and the what?”

“The Potter and the clay. Romans, chapter nine. It’s a beautiful, ready-made Scriptural illustration of God’s control over humanity. God controls human beings like a Potter con-

trols clay. That's pretty simple to understand. A lot simpler than your illustration—don't take it personally. God makes us exactly the way He wants us. It's all Him. A piece of clay is nothing at all like a buzzing fly. And the clay isn't in any kind of a jar. It's smack in the hands of the Potter."

"Ohhhhhh, yes. The Potter and the clay illustration. Yes, now that I think of it, we did bounce that one around a bit."

"Why didn't you adopt it?"

"Well, let's just say—it didn't fit our needs."

"What needs?"

"Do I have to be totally frank with you, sir?"

"I wish you would, sir."

"Very well. That example didn't fit our need for at least a certain amount of control. It didn't fit our need for at least some little contribution we could call our own. It didn't fit our need to want to cooperate with God at least a little bit. Actually, we just didn't like being compared to a piece of clay. There. I've said it. Are you satisfied?"

"And you still wanted to be able to say God was sovereign, and to make it at least *look* like God was running things, so you—Harry rather—put the fly in a jar."

"It answered all our needs. We could have a little bit of freedom, and still make it look like God was in control."

"All along hoping never to be pinned down with detailed, logical questions, or be reminded that God already had an illustration, but one that few people like because of how damaging it is to their pride."

"You have been somewhat of a nuisance—nothing personal."

"I appreciate your honesty."

"Don't tell Harry about this."

"What do I look like, a writer or something?"

* * *


Dog on a leash; horse in a bridle; fly in a jar; it's all the same human philosophy. This "edge of the jar" exists *only* in human philosophy. There is no "edge" where our freedom ends and God's control begins. God controls everything, from our very willing and working (Philippians 2:12-13), to the hour the sparrow dies (Matthew 10:29). He's telling us this in Ephesians 1:11, and elsewhere. Is it somehow too logical? The Potter and the clay was the easiest picture He could make. Is it somehow too simple? "He, Himself gives to all life and breath and all" (Acts 17:25). Is this somehow too universal?

What humans perceive to be their "little bit of freedom" is in reality those moments they don't feel God. In Scripture, it is those times when humans relate to one another, and God makes His arm invisible. Humans are so shortsighted, they assume that when God becomes invisible, He has left town.


The "edge of the jar" is the edge of human sight. Where a man cannot see, He assumes God cannot see. Where he does not touch, he assumes God does not touch. And so he erects a wall, or an edge of glass, at this spot, at the border of his

"freedom." In reality, this is the border of his ignorance. This is not where God's sovereignty ends, it is where man's ignorance begins. On this man-made wall, or pane of glass, there ought to be a plaque. And the plaque ought to read: **HERE MARKS THE SPOT WHERE WE LOSE TRACK OF GOD.**


Instead of a humiliating plaque, however, philosophers and theologians have erected a proud philosophy. A pity. Better yet if it were overgrown with weeds. ■




Think about it, dude. Can you control me inside a jar?




Why, no, Mr. Fly. I can't control you inside a jar at all.




Very good, Einstein. So according to this ridiculous illustration, God can't control **you**.



Golly, Mr. Fly! You're right! But you've thoroughly exposed our "God is in control" facade. What should we do **now**?



Try reading the Bible, Bucko. Just leave me out of it. I've got enough problems fighting my plague stereotype.



THE THEOLOGIAN AND THE FLY

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