

**THE NATURAL
ABILITY OF MAN**

OR

**MAN'S FREE WILL TO OBEY
THE LAW & THE GOSPEL**

Explained & Defended

By Jesse Morrell

www.OpenAirOutreach.com

“By appealing to Scripture, logic, common sense, examples from civil government, and some of the greatest minds from Church history, Jesse Morrell has annihilated every excuse the careless sinner has to sin. He also has torn down the last refuge for religious sinners, which is the Augustinian/Calvinistic doctrine of inability.”

*Brother Jed Smock,
President, The Campus Ministry USA*

“Jesse Morrell has provided much needed evidence that man is capable to meet his obligations to God. He has compiled evidence from historical Christian leaders, Biblical declarations, and the compelling demands of man's conscience and reason. An honest mind will see the truth with clear conviction.”

*Dennis Carroll,
President, Gospel Truth Ministries*

“Jesse Morrell has written a complete apologetic for natural ability. His research rivals and exceeds most doctoral thesis. The primacy of Scripture and logic in proving his points, makes this work a must read for those interested in defending God's justice in eternal punishment.”

Dave Coke, M.A.

“It is Biblical truths like the ones found in *The Natural Ability of Man* that vindicate the character of God and put full responsibility for sin upon man, where it belongs. To deny free will is to blame God for sin, which is blasphemy in the highest regard. Christians everywhere would do well to consider the truths found in this book with a willing heart and an open Bible.”

*Evangelist Kerrigan Skelly,
President of PinPoint Evangelism*

“The Natural Ability of Man is a well-researched, powerful, and readable book that clears away confusion and makes this vital Biblical truth crystal clear. The author effectively demolishes dangerous errors that have grown up around this doctrine. It will be a very valuable tool for Biblical evangelism and discipleship.”

*Pastor Mike Wiley,
Hope Church, Oregon*

"Jesse Morrell's new book 'The Natural Ability of Man' is one of his finest works next to his "Vicarious Atonement" booklet! The language is simple and understandable by even the new believer. I've been using nearly all of Jesse's works i.e.: videos, DVD's and booklets (especially his Atonement Series) in my YWAM School of Evangelism (SOE) here in the Philippines in preparing my missionaries-in-training in their theology as preachers and evangelists. I so appreciate Jesse taking the time to put all of these important doctrines in print during this generation."

*Mitch Metzger,
Missionary with YWAM Philippines*

“The Natural Ability of Man by Jesse Morrell is so comprehensive that it may be the standard in theology for many years to come. It is the most comprehensive exposition of man's natural ability in print. It could be the primary "go to" text on the subject for many years to come.”

*Dean Harvey,
Pastor, Author, & Itinerate Bible Teacher*

“In a day when it is common to hear statements like, "God only gave us the law to show us that we cannot keep it" or "We all have to sin every day" or "Even repentance and faith are not our choices but God's work in our lives," *Man's Natural Ability*

provides a necessary and refreshing rebuttal to these common misconceptions. Jesse Morrell's *Man's Natural Ability* is thorough and well documented, giving abundant Biblical and historical references to support the truth of the natural ability of man to repent, keep God's commandments, and persevere in a relationship with God. I recommend *Man's Natural Ability* as a welcome refutation to the false doctrine of the natural inability of man.'

*Michael R. Saia, author of
"Does God Know the Future?"
and "Understanding the Cross."*

DEDICATED

To all those men of God who have gone before me, who taught these blessed truths and refuted the errors that crept into the Church which make men feel comfortable in their sin; and to all those who will come after me that will dare to stand up with the bright light of truth to battle against the lies of the devil.

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PREFACE

A pastor and street preacher I admire asked me some questions regarding the doctrine of man's natural ability or man's naturally free will. He inquired about certain passages which he thought contradicted this doctrine. I wrote a response to his questions, with an explanation to my views, and have since expounded on that original writing.

What you hold in your hands is that elaborated writing, which I thought would be good to share with the general public. This response explains doctrines such as moral depravity, regeneration, conversion, grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, repentance, faith, unbelief, impenitence, atonement, predestination, eternal security, etc, all in relation to the free will of man. It also explains many passages which are commonly used against the idea of man's libertarian free will. My pastor and street preacher friend, who originally inquired about this subject, admitted that this book was a "worthy defense" of my position.

It seemed necessary to me that there be an exhaustive volume which thoroughly explains and defends the doctrine of man's free will, since this doctrine has been challenged and questioned by so many. Especially as of late, there has been a resurgence of Augustinian and Calvinistic theology. It is my humble hope that this book will help to counteract the theological influence of that resurgence.

Jesse Morrell

November 23rd, 2010

INTRODUCTION

As I travel and preach in the open air on University campuses all across America, I continually hear sinners offer their excuses as to why they will not, or cannot, repent and give up their sins. Inability is one of their greatest excuses for their impenitence. “You cannot live without sin” and “We can’t stop sinning” are their constant cries.

Sinners feel justified in their rebellion and wickedness under the view that sin is unavoidable and holiness is impossible. If disobedience was unavoidable and obedience was impossible, there could be no greater justification for disobedience. There is no greater excuse for rebellion than inability to obey. The idea of inability comforts a sinner in his sin because it gives his mind an argument against the law of God, making him feel safe from its condemnation. For that reason, the doctrine of inability must be thoroughly refuted and forever rejected.

Charles Finney said, “Ministers should never rest satisfied, until they have ANNIHILATED every excuse of sinners. The plea of "Inability" is the worst of all excuses. It slanders God so, charging him with infinite tyranny, in commanding men to do that which they have no power to do. Make the sinner see and feel that this is the very nature of his excuse. Make the sinner see that all pleas in excuse for not submitting to God are an act of rebellion against him. Tear

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away the last LIE which he grasps in his hand, and make him feel that he is absolutely condemned before God.”¹

As I was open air preaching on the University of Louisville in Kentucky, I taught that Jesus lived a life free from all sin and He is our example to follow. This is precisely what the Scriptures say, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example*, that ye should follow His steps: *who did no sin*, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:21-22). We are to follow in the steps of Him who did no sin. A professing Christian on the campus actually said, “We can’t follow Jesus!” He said this because he didn’t believe we could forsake our sins and live holy. His theology made following Jesus impossible!

Anything which nullifies the example of Jesus Christ is truly antichrist. It comes from the devil, not from God. Any doctrine which is at odds with the message of “sin no more” (Jn. 5:14, 8:11), is at odds with Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul preached that we should “sin not” (1 Cor. 15:34; Eph. 4:26), and the Apostle John preached that we should “sin not” (1 Jn. 2:1). Yet it is heard from many pulpits today, “You cannot stop sinning.” Jesus taught, “Be perfect” (Matt. 5:48), but many modern ministers say, “You can’t be perfect.” Jesus taught, “Keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). Yet many ministers say, “It is impossible to keep God’s commandments.” The Church has drifted far from Biblical Christianity upon the current of false doctrine.

The devil certainly has his preachers and ministers in the Church today (2 Cor. 11:15). Who would have thought that the devil would be a theologian? That is why there are many sin-friendly doctrines in the Church of our time. But God is the enemy of sin! Any doctrine which gives an excuse for sin is not of God. God is at war with sin! Any doctrine

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which gives sinners a weapon against God's law, which aids iniquity, which defends sin and attacks holiness, is not and cannot be from God. The truth that is from God is always in favor of holiness. God's Word attacks sin. It promotes and defends holiness.

The doctrine of inability, on the other hand, protects iniquity and results in impenitence. Any doctrine which comforts sinners in their transgressions and encourages them to continue in them, as opposed to convicting them for their sins and calling them to cease from their wickedness, is a doctrine which is from the devil. The deception of the devil leads men into servitude to sin, but the truth of God leads men into freedom from sin (Jn. 8:32-36). We must return to "doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3), and preach the "truth which is after godliness" (Titus 1:1), and forever abandon any doctrine which is the friend and accomplice of sin.

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CHAPTER ONE

NATURAL ABILITY DEFINED & EXPLAINED

Without clear and concise definitions, there can be no effective communication or meaningful discussion. Speaking, without being understood, is pointless and defeats the purpose of speaking. Without definitions for clarification, communication cannot be understood, but is bound to lead to misunderstandings. Therefore definitions are absolutely necessary and essential and are where every discussion must start.

Before we can define free will, we must define the will itself. Your will is a faculty of your personality and is the cause of your choices. It is with your will that choices are made. Just as a person thinks with their intelligence, a person chooses with their will. Just as we have a faculty, which gives us the power to think; we also have a faculty, which gives us the power to choose. Your thoughts are not the faculty of your intelligence, neither are your choices the faculty of your will. They are the fruit of those faculties; and thus your decisions are produced by them.

Henry P. Tappan said, "Will is employed to express the causality of the mind."¹ Causes always have effects. Effects always have causes. The human will is the cause of all our moral states and moral behavior. Sin and holiness are effects of the will. Free will is when the will is free to choose

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between causing good or causing evil. Sin and righteousness are not self-existent. Anything that is not self-existent has a cause. The cause of good and evil is the will of a moral being.

Natural ability is the power of the will to freely choose different possible courses. In other words, it is the ability to select between the different motives that are presented to the mind. Natural ability is the power of choice God has given man to obey or disobey His will, to embrace or reject the light that He gives us. It is the power to determine whether you will submit to God or whether you will revolt or rebel against Him. It is the freedom or liberty to choose between two alternate or opposite choices.

Methodius said, “Man was made with a free will... [with the] capacity of obeying or disobeying God. For this was the meaning of the gift of free will.”²

Power to Choose, Not Power to Do

Natural ability is synonymous with the incipency of the will, the power of self-determination, or free will. Free will is not the *ability to do* whatever you want. That is omnipotence. Many seem to think that man does not have a free will because man is not omnipotent, because man is not free or does not have the power to *do* whatever He *wants*. I cannot fly to Mars just because I have a free will. But because I have a free will, I am free to *want* to fly to Mars. Free will has to do with the ability to want, not the ability to do or perform. A man may want to do many things that he cannot do. Free will is the power to will, not the ability to do. The ability to want or to will is a moral ability; the ability to do or perform is a physical ability. Free will is the power of contingent choice, the ability to determine what you want and what you do not want. Free will is not the physical

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ability to do whatever you want. Free will is the moral ability to decide what you want.

Charles Finney said, “By natural freedom I do not mean that they have a right to do as they please; for this can by no means be true. Nor do I mean that they are free agents merely in the sense of being able to do as they will to do. In fact, men sometimes can and sometimes cannot execute their purposes of will; but be this as it may, moral liberty does not consist in the power to accomplish one's purposes. You are aware that some old philosophers defined liberty of will to be the power to do what you will to do. This, for many reasons, cannot be the true idea of freedom of the will... This freedom is in the will itself, and consists in its power of free choice. To do, or not to do -- this is its option. It has by its own nature the function of determining its own volitions. The soul wills to do or not to do, and thus is a moral sovereign over its own activities. In this fact lies the foundation for moral agency.”³

The Bible uses the term freewill to describe the voluntary action of the will.

Freewill is a Biblical term used to describe the will operating under the law of liberty as opposed to the law of necessity (Lev. 22:18, 21, 23; 23:38; Num. 15:3; 29:39; Deut. 12:6, 17; 16:10; 23:23; 2 Chron. 31:14; Ezra 1:4; 3:5; 7:13, 16; 8:28; Ps. 119:108). The Bible uses the term freewill to describe the voluntary action of the will in contrast with any forced, coerced, necessitated, or constrained volition. Freedom, when describing the operation of the will, is describing its function apart from any compulsory element. There is nothing behind the will which necessitates the volition or causes the choice, but the will itself is self-determining or self-causing. The human will is free from any causation that would necessitate its choice. Therefore, in this sense, the will is not an effect but is a

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cause.

There may be many *influences* upon the will, such as nature or motive, but these are not *causations*. The will itself is a cause. Free will gives man the power of *self-causation* in the realm of morality. The will is what determines the actions and the man is who determines the will. States of the will are therefore self-caused. With genuine liberty or freedom, the influences of nature and motive can be obeyed or disobeyed, yielded to or resisted. Either yielding and obeying or resisting and disobeying is a contingency, both being equal possibilities which may or may not occur.

Ability to Obey the Law

Free will is the ability to self-originate or create your own moral character. Free will is the power of contrary choice. The freedom of the will includes the ability to obey or disobey the law of God. God's law requires us to love Him supremely and our neighbor equally. Love is a state of the will. Love is benevolence or good will. Love is a committal of the will to promote the highest well-being of another (Jn. 3:16; Jn. 15:13). Even if we do not have the physical ability to promote the well-being of our neighbor, it does not bar us from fulfilling our moral obligation to love our neighbor. For example if we are handicapped in such a way that prevents us from doing so, but we want to promote their good or we will their well-being and *would promote it if we could*, we have fully obeyed our moral obligation to love. Physical inability does not bar a being from fulfilling their moral obligation of love, since love is an attitude of the heart or since benevolence is a committal of the will. The law requires us to have a certain state of will, namely benevolence. And free will or natural ability is the ability to be in that state or not.

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Likewise, if a person does not have the physical ability to commit adultery, say they are in prison, but they *want* to commit adultery, they are already guilty of it (Matt. 5:28). Sin is an intention of the will. The law commands and forbids states of the will. Thus, free will is the ability to will what the law commands or to will what the law forbids.

Free will, as the ability to obey or disobey the law of God, is the ability to originate selfish intentions or benevolent intentions. It is the ability to choose between having a self-centered ultimate purpose of life and having an others-centered ultimate purpose of life. It is the power of self-determination in choosing what aim or goal we are living for, either our own happiness supremely or the highest well-being of all.

Ability to Obey the Gospel

Free will is also the ability to obey or disobey the gospel. The gospel commands men to repent of their sin and trust in Christ. As we shall see further in this book, repentance and faith are choices of the will, or more specifically they are states of the will. Free will, in regards to the ability to obey the gospel, is the ability to choose to repent or remain in impenitence. It is also the ability to choose to believe or to remain in unbelief. In essence, free will or natural ability is the power of choice to obey or disobey the requirements and demands of the law and the gospel. It is the freedom or liberty to obey or disobey the light, truth, or revelation which God gives to us.

How God Governs His Creation

When talking about free will we are talking about God's moral government only. The Moral Government of God is the governing of God in the realm of morality over moral agents who are His subjects. The Bible describes God

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as a Governor (Matt. 2:6) who is the Sovereign of a Government (Isa. 9:6-7). The Scriptures also describe God as a King (Ps. 47:2; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16) who is over a Kingdom (Ps. 45:6; 47:7; Dan. 6:26; Heb. 1:8; Rev. 12:10). The Bible actually describes God as having four distinct governments. God governs over man's moral actions (*Moral Government*), God governs over rulers and nations (*Providential Government*), God governs over animals and creatures (*Animate Non-Moral Government*) and God governs over the matter of the universe (*Material Non-Moral Government*). How God governs the different departments of His Kingdom, or the distinct existences of His creation, is very important for us to understand in this discussion.

The Material Non-Moral Government *over solar systems, matter, weather, material worlds*, is governed by the law of cause and effect (Gen. 6:7, 19:24, Exo. 14:21-29; Num. 11:31; 1 Kin. 18:38; 2 Chro. 7:13; Ps. 50:1, 93:4, 135:6-7; Isa. 45:7, 45:12; Dan. 4:35; Jonah 1:4, 14-15; Matt. 5:45, 8:24-27, 24:29; Mk. 4:39-41; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 16:1-4, 8, 12, 18, 21). "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided" (Exo. 14:21). "But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (Jonah 1:4). "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!" (Matt. 8:27; Lk. 8:25)

There has been no rebellion or disobedience in this area of God's Kingdom because the objects that are being governed do not have free will as an element of their natures. In this realm of God's creation, He always gets what He wants. But we must never confuse *physical law* with *moral law*. How God governs matter is different than how God governs moral agents. Physical law is cause and effect, moral

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law is influence and response. In the former the outcome is certain; in the latter the outcome is contingent. Physical law declares what *will happen* while moral law declares what *ought to happen*.

Winkie Pratney said that “free choice means you know you can always do something else. If you cannot, you are not under moral but physical law. If you can’t help but do it, you have no true choice... Moral law is God’s basic rule for free moral agents. It consists in a revealed idea entering our mind via the conscience, a rule of obligation, an oughtness as opposed to necessity. There is no moral law when there is no choice. It cannot have elements of force, or be unavoidable.”⁴

J. W. Jepson said, “Physical law does not govern moral action, and moral law does not directly govern physical action. Moral law governs people who live in the world of substance, but moral law does not govern substance itself. It governs morality and moral relationships, including what people do with their physical world. Physical law governs everything that is involuntary, including matter and involuntary states and actions of the mind. Everything is under physical law except free will and what is caused by free will. Physical law is the law of automatic sequence, necessity, force. It is cause and effect. Moral law is the law of free will, including what is caused by free will. It is the law of intelligence, the law of liberty, the law of responsible choice. It operates by persuasion, not coercion. It does not force, but holds up to the intelligence the values to be chosen and the consequences of free choice. It moves by motivation, it rules by reason.”⁵

The Animal Kingdom or Animate Non-Moral Government *over mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians, fish, insects, etc.* is governed by the law of instinct and causation (Gen. 9:2; Num. 22:22-23; Deut. 11:31; 1 Kin. 17:4-6; Dan.

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6:22; Jonah 1:17, 2:10; Matt. 10:29, 17:27, 26:74; Mk. 5:11:13). “And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there” (1 Kin. 17:4). “Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah” (Jonah 1:17).

In this realm of God’s creation, God always gets what He wants. The Animal Kingdom has not rebelled against God. There is no free will in the Animal Kingdom. Animal behavior is preprogrammed. These creatures are normally moved by instinct and abnormally by God’s direct causation. Animals have no free will or conscience. Therefore animals not moral agents, they are not subjects to moral government, and they are not capable of moral character. Man’s natural ability (free will) and man’s natural knowledge (conscience) are what qualify man as the proper subjects of moral government.

The Providential Government *over nations, rulers, and kings*, is governed by the law of influence and also at times causation or coercion (Gen. 19:24-25; Exo. 11:9-10; 18:10; 20:2; Num. 33:53; Deut. 2:5; 2:25; 3:20; 9:23; 11:24; Josh. 1:2-6; 1:15, 8:1; 11:20; 23:15; 24:14; 1 Kin. 22:19-23; 1 Chro. 29:10-12; Esther 4:14; Ps. 22:28, 66:7; Prov. 21:1; Isa. 60:22; Jer. 21:10; 27:6; 32:27-30; 35:15; 50:9; Eze. 11:15; 17:24; 29:19; Dan. 2:21; 2:38; 4:17; 4:32; 5:21; 5:18; 7:25; Zeph. 3:8; Jn. 19:10-11; Rom. 13:1-5; Rev. 17:17). “... the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will” (Dan. 5:21). “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God...” (Rom. 13:1-2)

While God has appointed rulers and has ordained government, this does not necessarily mean that He causes or controls all of their actions and decisions. There were many

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kings who “did that which was *evil* in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 8:16-18; 8:26-27; 13:1-2; 13:10-11; 14:23-24; 15:8-9; 15:17-18; 15:23-24; 15:27-28; 16:2; 17:1-2; 21:1-2; 21:19-20; 23:31-32; 2 Kings 23:36-37; 24:8-9; 19-20).

After God appointed Saul to be the king of Israel He said, “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments” (1 Sam. 15:11). Clearly, God did not cause all of Saul’s decisions as the king, though He was the one who appointed him to be the king.

The prophet Jeremiah pleaded with King Zedekiah to be obedient towards God. He said, “*Obey I beseech thee* the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live” (Jer. 38:20). It is not a certainty that the kings which God appoints will do His will in everything. There is a real sense in which kings, while appointed by God, remain free moral agents; and therefore, are capable of doing that which is contrary to the will of God.

God may temporarily suspend the free will of a being.

On the other hand, in His providence God does at times make certain events happen and may even force leaders to perform certain actions in order to accomplish His purposes. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it withersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and to give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Rev. 17:17).

In His providence, God may even *temporarily* suspend the free will of a being and use him as an instrument in order to accomplish His will or a very important providential plan. Moral character and moral accountability is of course suspended when free will is suspended, because

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character can only be derived from free will choices and accountability can only be for free will choices. God will not reward or punish a man for doing what He Himself caused them to do. Neither is the will of a being permanently suspended, but only temporarily so. And God does not override, suspend, or violate a person's free will when it comes to salvation. But there are certain incidents in which the free will of man is suspended, or in which the very nature of man is changed from being a moral agent to a necessitated agent.

Winkie Pratney said, "God can specially over-rule man's free will in emergencies to accomplish His purpose."⁶ We saw this with King Cyrus, where God in His providence over nations predetermined the behavior of Cyrus in rebuilding the Temple (2 Chron. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3; Isa. 44:28; 45:1; 45:13). God also set aside the free will of King Nebuchadnezzar, even changing his nature, when he turned his mind into that of a beast (Dan. 4:32-33; 5:21).

It is also possible that the free will of John the Baptist was temporarily suspended for the sake of the nation of Israel and the ministry of the Messiah, until John was in jail and God gave Him the liberty to make the free choice of salvation for himself (Matt. 11:11; Lk. 1:15; Lk. 7:20). This could explain why Jesus said no man born among women was greater (Matt. 11:11; Lk. 7:28), since John was full of the Holy Spirit from His mother's womb (Lk. 1:15, 41), but also while the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than He (Matt. 11:11; Lk. 7:28), because he is not going to be rewarded for doing what God made him do. There can be no punishment nor reward where there is no free will.

All throughout the Bible we see that God determines certain things to happen, but it is fallacious to point to those examples and say that God determines *all* things to happen. Some look at examples of God's operations within His

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providential government and assume that this is how He operates in His moral government as well, or as if man never has a free will. This is a logical fallacy. Just because God may take away *some* men's free will *at certain times* does not mean that God has taken away *all* men's free will *at all times*.

Michael Saia said, "Is it not possible that God follows a general rule of allowing man freedom and yet sets aside that freedom when he deems it necessary and loving to do so? This is the very picture which seems to be portrayed in Biblical history. God accomplishes his desires through people, and although the general rule is that God allows them to freely choose to work with him, God sometimes fulfills his purposes by overriding their free will."⁷

Greg Gordon said, "God can and does override the will of men so He can make His purposes come forth. But He leaves many or most to freewill in all areas."⁸

The providential measure of suspending, setting aside, overriding, or usurping a being's free will is abnormal. Such instances are the exception and not the rule. We must not look at examples which are the exception and make them the general rule. And we cannot take the means that God uses in His government over one part of His creation and assume that the same means are used in His government over other parts of His creation. That is, we cannot assume that the mode of operation used in His providential government over nations is the same mode of operation that He uses in His moral government over free moral beings.

It is God's moral government *over men and angels* that He governs by motives presented to the mind, appealing to the choices of a moral agent's free will. It is not governed by the law of cause and effect or governed by force, but is rather governed by the law of liberty or the law of influence and response (Gen. 3:11; 4:6-7, 6:5; Deut. 30:19, Josh.

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24:15; 1 Kin. 18:21; Isa. 1:16-20, 5:4; 45:22; 55:6-7, 66:3-4; Jer. 2:9; Hos. 10:12; Jer. 18:5-11; 21:8; 26:13; Eze. 18:30-32; 20:7-8; Matt. 23:37; Jn. 1:11; 5:40; 7:17; Acts 2:40; 17:30; 7:51; Rom. 2:5-11; 6:16-17; 2 Cor. 7:1; 2 Tim. 2:21; Jas. 4:7-10; 1 Pet. 1:22; Gal. 6:17-8; Rev. 3:20; 22:17). “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life...” (Deut. 30:19) And “choose you this day whom ye will serve...” (Jos. 24:15).

In God’s moral government, God gives men and all moral beings the freedom of choice to form their own moral character by obeying His law or disobeying His law. It is in this area that His will is not always being done (Matt. 6:10). God said, “Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!” (Ps. 81:13). God said, “...when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not” (Isa 66:4). “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded” (Prov. 1:24). “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” (Lk. 13:34).

The moral government of God deals with man as a free moral agent. While God governs other aspects of His creation through physical law, causing certain events to come about, God governs moral beings through moral law, influencing certain choices to be made. Physical law is a rule *of* action; moral law is a rule *for* action. Therefore while God’s will is always done in other areas of His creation, God’s will is not always done in this particular area.

Laws Suited to the Natures of the Governed

The nature of the object to be governed actually determines the nature of the laws by which that object is governed. The law is adopted and suited to the nature of the object which is being governed. Otherwise, the law would have no tendency to govern the object at all.

Physical law is the form of government adapted to the nature of the material universe and is, therefore, an adequate form of government over that aspect of God's creation.

The law of instinct is the form of government adapted to the nature of animals and is, therefore, an adequate form of government over that area of God's creation.

Moral law is the form of government adapted to the nature of man, who was created with intelligence, sensibilities, and free will. It is, therefore, an adequate form of government over this part of God's creation. The precepts of the moral law address the mind of man, and the sanctions of the law affect the sensibilities of man. Therefore, moral law appeals to and influences the will of man. The nature of man is such that he can only be governed by moral law, unless changes were made to his nature itself.

Moral law is the form of government adapted to the nature of man.

The different or distinct forms of government in God's creation are due to the different or distinct forms of objects in His creation. God cannot govern moral beings by physical law, without first changing their natures, anymore than God can govern the stars and the animals by moral law, without first changing their natures. Stars and animals do not have the intelligence, sensibilities and free will which are necessary to be governed by moral law. Such objects cannot

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be moved by motive. While man, on the other hand, cannot be governed by physical law because of his free will. Therefore, if God were to change the mode of government that He has over stars, animals, and humans, He must first change their natures. The mode of government must be suited and adopted to the nature of the object being governed, or else the mode of government or the type of law that is over the object would have no tendency or influence to govern the object at all.

Man, as a free moral agent, could not be governed the same way that God governs the stars or the animals, because the nature of man was different from the stars and the animals. John Owen said that God “produced such a creature as man is; that is, of a nature intelligent, rational, capable of moral obedience, with rewards and punishments. But on a supposition hereof, man, so freely made, could not be governed by any other ways but by a moral instrument of law or rule, influencing the rational faculties of his soul unto obedience, and guiding him therein. He could not in that constitution be contained under the rule of God by a mere physical influence, as are all irrational or brute creatures. To suppose it, is to deny or destroy the essential faculty and powers wherewith he was created. Wherefore, on the supposition of his being, it was necessary that a law or rule of obedience should be prescribed unto him, and be the instrument of God’s government towards him.”⁹

Gordon C. Olson said, “Man alone was created ‘in the image of God.’ He was to function in an entirely different manner, not like the material universe where the law of cause and effect reigned, not like the animal world where instinct moved to action, but like God, his Creator, where the mysterious ability of self-causation was the grand characteristic. Like God, then, man is the author of his own actions and therefore is responsible for them.”¹⁰

God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will

It is important to understand that while man is free and can rebel against God's will, God is able to incorporate into His plans the free moral choices of men so that He can even get good things to come out of sin. We saw God get a good thing out of a bad situation when Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery (Gen. 50:20). God can work with the situations that He is given and incorporate into His plans the free will choices of men, both good and bad, which is what you would expect from a God of perfect goodness and perfect intelligence. But that does not mean that God controls or causes the free moral choices of men. We have a God who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). He can make "all things work together for the good of them that love God" (Rom. 8:28). God works with all things, to bring about the purposes of His will, but that does not mean that God purposed in His will to cause all things. It is one thing to *work with all things*, and quite another to *cause all things*.

It is one thing to work with all things and quite another to cause all things.

The fact that men have rebelled against God is proof that man's will is free and is not determined by God. If God caused everything, there would be no sin. Sin is the proof of man's free will. If God's will was always done on the earth, there would be no sin at all. If angels and men do not have free will, but everything is determined by God, then God is the only real agent in the entire universe. Only God would have moral character and God would be responsible for everything. If men and angels do not have free will, God must be the author of sin, since sin does exist. But if God is not the author of sin, and sin does exist, then men and angels

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must be free moral agents with the power of self-determination.

Some create a false dilemma and ask, “If man is free, how is God sovereign?” To establish and express the freedom of man and the sovereignty of God to be at odds with each other is to make an unnecessary and unreal antithesis. There is a perfect compatibility between man’s freedom and God’s sovereignty.

The Sovereign is the highest authority in a government. The Sovereign, by definition, is one who “exercises supreme authority.”¹¹ God is the Sovereign of the universe because God is the *ultimate authority* over everything, not the *ultimate cause* of everything.

Men are the authors or causes of their own choices and sin. God, as the Sovereign of the universe, creates men and angels with the faculty of free will. He then gives all moral agents His moral law, and then He allows them free choice to obey or disobey His moral law. And then He holds them accountable to His ultimate and supreme authority for their free choices. In all of this, God is Sovereign. Man’s free will is, therefore, not inconsistent with the Sovereignty of God, but is perfectly compatible with it when God’s Sovereignty is adequately and accurately defined and understood. If a person sees man’s freedom and responsibility as contrary, contradictory, inconsistent, or incompatible with the Sovereignty of God, then they either have a mistaken view of God, man, or both.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DEBATE

It is proper in our discussion on the doctrine of free will vs. the doctrine of inability, that a historical understanding of this debate be considered. While the positions of the Church throughout history are not infallible or absolutely authoritative, an understanding of the historical background of these doctrines can be helpful in making up our own mind. We should be very cautious to believe in a doctrine that was never held by the Early Church at any time period; and we should strongly reconsider any doctrinal positions which the Early Church came against during different time periods.

Many try to say that the doctrine of man's total inability is the historic position of the Church, but that is simply not true. Many take for granted that the Church has always held to the doctrine of total inability. Yet a study of history reveals that the doctrine of free will was universally taught by the Early Church, without exception, for the first three to four hundred years. The Early Church was continually defending the doctrine of free will and refuting the Gnostic's who held to the doctrine of total inability and determinism or fatalism.

The Gnostic's had a predestination philosophy, or a fatalistic mentality of "Que Sera, Sera (Whatever Will Be,

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Will Be.)”¹ But the Early Church believed that man’s free choice had a major contribution or ultimate determination to his course and destiny. The Gnostic’s, who claimed to be the real Christians, taught that man’s nature was so corrupted and ruined that man did not have a free choice between good and evil; while the Early Church taught that God has granted the faculty of free will to the nature of all mankind and has preserved that free will so that it has not been lost, as we shall see.

There are those today who make the doctrine of total inability an essential doctrine of the Christian faith and are quick to condemn anyone who would dare question or challenge it. But in the times of early Christianity, the doctrine of free will was considered orthodox and the doctrine of total inability was heretical. Being considered orthodox or heretical is merely a matter of dates. The Early Church said that only Gnostic’s deny the freedom of the will; yet many denominations of our day say that only heretics affirm it.

Gnosticism vs. Early Christianity

In the days of the Early Church, the debate between the freedom of man’s will vs. the total depravity of man’s nature was one of the major divisions between the early Christians and the Gnostic sects. Beausobre said, “...those ancient writers, in general, say that Manichaeans denied free-will. The reason is, that the Fathers believed, and maintained, against the Manichaeans, that whatever state man is in he has the command over his own actions, and has equally power to do good or evil.”² W. F. Hook said, “The Manichaeans so denied free will, as to hold a fatal necessity of sinning.”³ Lyman Beecher said, “...the free will and natural ability of man were held by the whole church... natural inability was

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to that of the pagan philosophers, the Gnostic's, and the Manichaeans.”⁴

There were many different Gnostic groups in the days of early Christianity, who also denied the freedom of man's will, such as Marcionism started by Marcion. But one of the greatest competitors and threats to the Early Church was the Manichaeans started by Manes, a Persian philosopher, also known as Mani.

The Early Church debated the founder of this Gnostic group in the “Acta Archelai,” also known as “The Disputation with Manes.” Archelaus, a bishop in the Early Church, represented their doctrine that God does not make us with ruined natures but has given us free will. Mani took the Gnostic position that man's nature was totally depraved and corrupted and that man did not have a free will.

The judges of the debate ruled in favor of Archelaus and ruled against Mani, stating that man does in fact have free will as opposed to a depraved nature. The belief of early Christianity is stated in the debate in this way, “All the creatures that God made, He made very good. And He gave to every individual the sense of free will, by which standard He also instituted the law of judgment... our will is constituted to choose either to sin or not to sin... And certainly whoever will, may keep the commandments. Whoever despises them and turns aside to what is contrary to them, shall yet without doubt have to face this law of judgment... There can be no doubt that every individual, in using his own proper power of will, may shape his course in whatever direction he pleases.”⁵

This debate of constitutional liberty vs. constitutional corruption between Mani and Archelaus dealt with the very core of Early Christianity vs. the emerging Gnosticism. The danger that the Early Church saw with the Gnostics was that they professed to be Christians and they claimed to be

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teaching Christian doctrine. In fact, the Gnostic's declared that they were the real or true Christians who had special knowledge that others did not. The Church considered Manichaeans to be imposters and Manichaeism to be a counterfeit. The leaders of Christianity were worried that Gnostic doctrine might corrupt the churches.

The Gnostics, for example, taught that the flesh was sinful in and of itself. Hans Jonas said that in Gnosticism, "The human body is of devilish substance and – in this trait exceeding the general derogation of the universe – also of a devilish design."⁶ Because the Gnostic's viewed the flesh as a sinful substance, they denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, and that is why the Scriptures called them "antichrist" (1 Jn. 4:3, 2 Jn. 1:7). "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world" (1 Jn. 4:3). "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 Jn. 1:7).

The Early Church taught that man was sinful by choice.

Gnosticism believes that sin is the substance of the body, which is inherited at conception, so that man is born sinful or with a sinful nature. The Early Church, on the other hand, taught that sin was a free choice of the will, which is originated by the individual. The Gnostics taught that man was sinful by nature, while the Early Church taught that man was sinful by choice.

It was referring to these Gnostic groups that John wrote, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out that they might be made manifest

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that they were not all of us” (1 Jn. 2:19). We can see then that the teachings of the Gnostics were condemned in the Scriptures.

On the other hand, in Philippians 4:3 Paul mentions “my fellowlabourers” “in the gospel,” and he names “Clement,” whose name he said was written “in the book of life...” History knows this man, who was Paul’s companion and who was endorsed by the Scriptures themselves, as Clement of Rome. Clement said, “It is therefore in the power of every one, since man has been made possessed of free-will, whether he shall hear us to life, or the demons to destruction.”⁷ Clement said that “free-will” was given because “he who is good by his own choice is really good; but he who is made good by another under necessity is not really good, because he is not what he is by his own choice...”⁸ Clement also said that the reason a sinner was susceptible to God’s punishment for their disobedience was because a sinner has the ability to obey God. He said, “For no other reason does God punish the sinner either in the present or in the future world, except because He knows that the sinner was able to conquer but neglected to gain the victory.”⁹ In other words, the reason that a sinner is punishable for sinning is because a sinner is able not to sin. He said that a sinner is punished, not for his inability but for his negligence.

Ignatius was another figure in the Early Church. He was a disciple of the Apostle John and was martyred in the Roman Coliseum by being eaten by lions. In contradiction to Gnosticism, Ignatius taught that men were sinners, not by nature but by choice. Ignatius said, "If anyone is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but by his own choice."¹⁰ Ignatius also said, “...there is set before us life upon our observance [of God's precepts], but death as the

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result of disobedience, and every one, according to the choice he makes, shall go to his own place, let us flee from death, and make choice of life.”¹¹

The Apostle John also had a disciple named Polycarp. Polycarp was the Bishop of the Church in Smyrna when Revelation was written. The Church of Smyrna was one of the only Churches in Revelation which Jesus did not say anything negative against (Rev. 2:8-11). Polycarp was a personal friend of Ignatius and he too was also sent to the Coliseum and was martyred as Ignatius was.

Polycarp had a faithful disciple named Irenaeus. Irenaeus refuted the Gnostics by saying, “Men are possessed with free will, and endowed with the faculty of making a choice. It is not true, therefore, that some are by nature good, and others bad.”¹² He also said, “Man is endowed with the faculty of distinguishing good and evil; so that, without compulsion, he has the power, by his own will and choice, to perform God’s commandments.”¹³ And, “man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will (in whom likeness man was created)...”¹⁴ And he said, “This expression, ‘How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldst not,’ set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free agent from the beginning, possessing his own soul to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God.”¹⁵

Justin Martyr was an early evangelist and apologist for the Christian faith. He labored tirelessly for the Lord until he too was martyred in Rome. He said, “We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishment, chastisement, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man’s actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is our own power. For if it is predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then

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the first is not deserving of praise and the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions – whatever they may be ... for neither would a man be worthy of praise if he did not himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were created evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for.”¹⁶

Tertullian was another leader in the Early Church. He was a Christian apologist and is known for his prolific writings. He was in perfect agreement with early Christianity when he said, “No reward can be justly bestowed, no punishment can be justly inflicted, upon him who is good or bad by necessity, and not by his own choice.”¹⁷

Methodius was a Christian martyr who lived near the end of the third century. He wrote, “Those [pagans] who decide that man does not have free will, but say that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate, are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human evils.”¹⁸ He said, “...the Divine Being is not by nature implicated in evils. Therefore our birth is not the cause of these things...”¹⁹ He went on to say that men are “possessing free will, and not by nature evil...”²⁰ He said, “...there is nothing evil by nature, but it is by use that evil things become such. So I say, says he, that man was made with free-will, not as if there were already evil in existence, which he had the power of choosing if he wished, but on account of his capacity of obeying or disobeying God. For this was the meaning of the gift of free will... and this alone is evil, namely, disobedience...”²¹ And he also said, “God did not make evil, nor is He at all in any way the author of evil; but whatever failed to keep the law, which He in all justice ordained, after being made by Him

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with the faculty of free-will, for the purpose of guarding and keeping it, is called evil. Now it is the gravest fault to disobey God, by overstepping the bounds of that righteousness which is consistent with free-will...”²²

Eusebius was a Bishop in the Early Church who is considered the father of “Church History” for his extensive writings in ecclesiastical history. He wrote, “On the Life of Pamphilus,” “Chronicle of Universal History,” and “On the Martyrs.” He clearly laid out the position of the Early Church on this topic when he wrote, “The Creator of all things has impressed a natural law upon the soul of every man, as an assistant and ally in his conduct, pointing out to him the right way by this law; but, by the free liberty with which he is endowed, making the choice of what is best worthy of praise and acceptance, because he has acted rightly, not by force, but from his own free-will, when he had it in his power to act otherwise, As, again, making him who chooses what is worst, deserving of blame and punishment, as having by his own motion neglected the natural law, and becoming the origin and fountain of wickedness, and misusing himself, not from any extraneous necessity, but from free will and judgment. The fault is in him who chooses, not in God. For God is has not made nature or the substance of the soul bad; for he who is good can make nothing but what is good. Everything is good which is according to nature. Every rational soul has naturally a good free-will, formed for the choice of what is good. But when a man acts wrongly, nature is not to be blamed; for what is wrong, takes place not according to nature, but contrary to nature, it being the work of choice, and not of nature!”²³ Eusebius went as far as to say that it was the doctrine of devils to teach that man’s will was not at liberty was but in the bonds of necessity. He said, “The devil in his oracles hangs all things upon fate, and taking away

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that which is in our power, and arises from self-motion of free will... brings this also into bondage to necessity.”²⁴

There is no shortage or lack of supply from the Early Church when it comes to quotations in regards to the freedom of man’s will; but the quotations referenced above should suffice to make my point that free will was a universal doctrine of early Christianity. What the Early Church believed and what the Gnostic’s believed should be brought to our attention and considered in this discussion. An understanding of the origin of doctrines such as inability is very helpful. The Gnostic’s held to the doctrine of man’s total inability and this doctrine did not find any acceptance at all by the Church until Augustine converted from Manichaean Gnosticism, as we shall see.

Free Will Is A Faculty Of Our Nature

The Early Church, before Augustine, taught that free will was an essential element of our God given nature. That is, they taught that it was a faculty of our constitution, and that we abuse that faculty of free will when we choose to sin. They taught that all men have the same nature in the sense that the faculty of free will is in the constitution of all.

Irenaeus said, “Forasmuch as all men are of the same nature, having power to hold and to do that which is good, and having power again to lose it, and not to do what is right; before men of sense, (and how much more before God!) some... are justly accused, and receive condign punishment, because they refuse what is just and right.”²⁵ Again Irenaeus said, “Those who do not do it [good] will receive the just judgment of God, because they had not worked good when they had it in their power to do so. But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for they were created that way, nor would the former be reprehensible, for that is

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how they were made. However, all men are of the same nature. They are all able to hold fast and to go what is good. On the other hand, they have the power to cast good from them and not to do it.”²⁶

Pelagius, who is historically known for teaching free will in the days of Augustine, was in perfect agreement with the Early Church on this point. He said, “In all there is free-will equally by nature...”²⁷

Origen said, “The Scriptures...emphasize the freedom of the will. They condemn those who sin, and approve those who do right... We are responsible for being bad and worthy of being cast outside. For it is not the nature in us that is the cause of the evil; rather, it is the voluntary choice that works evil.”²⁸ He also said, “the heretics introduce the doctrine of different natures.”²⁹

The
Christians
believed that
free will was
a faculty of
the nature of
every man.

There were two conflicting views of human nature during the days of the Early Church. The Christians believed that free will was a faculty of the nature of every man by virtue of his creation. Therefore the Early Christians viewed the sinfulness of man as being all together voluntary, caused by the freedom of their own wills. The Gnostics, on the other hand, believed that the human nature of each man was created so corrupt and ruined that mankind did not have the freedom to choose what was good. They viewed the actions of men as being caused by their natures. The Early Christians taught that it is not that some men choose evil because their nature is evil, while other men choose what was good because their natures were good, but that all men have the same nature, all having the faculty of free will in their constitution, and each man chooses by free will to be either good or evil in their moral character.

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The errors of the Gnostics were continually rejected by the Early Church, but the Gnostics continued to try to penetrate the Church with their views. The Gnostics even wrote their own gospels, known as the Gnostic Gospels today, where they stole credible names like Mary and Thomas to try to give validity to their teachings.

While many of the attempts of the Gnostics to infiltrate the Church failed, and many of their views are widely rejected today, it seems that their particular view of human nature, free will, and the nature of sin has found wide acceptance in the Church today. While the view of the Early Church on human nature, free will, and sin is seldom held to or taught in our time.

None Deny that the Early Church Taught the Freedom of the Will

Episcopius said, “What is plainer than that the ancient divines, for three hundred years after Christ, those at least who flourished before St. Augustine, maintained the liberty of our will, or an indifference to two contrary things, free from all internal and external necessity!”³⁰ One would think that if a doctrine was truly derived from the Scriptures and were taught by the Apostles, that we would find that the Early Church believed it, especially during its years when it was the most faithful to God, when men were shedding their blood in martyrdom in the Roman Coliseum. But the doctrine of total inability was not taught by the Churches which the Apostles founded; rather, the doctrine of man’s natural ability was.

Regarding the term “free will,” John Calvin admitted “As to the Fathers, (if their authority weighs with us,) they have the term constantly in their mouths...”³¹ He said, “The Greek fathers above others” have taught “the power of the human will”³² And, “they have not been ashamed to make

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use of a much more arrogant expression calling man ‘free agent or self-manager,’ just as if man had a power to govern himself...”³³ He also said, “The Latin fathers have always retained the word ‘free will’ as if man stood yet upright.”³⁴ It is a fact that cannot be denied even by those who most ardently oppose the doctrine of free will, that the doctrine of free will and not that of inability was held by all of the Early Church.

Walter Arthur Copinger said, “All the Fathers are unanimous on the freedom of the human will...”³⁵ Lyman

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existed.

Beecher said, “the free will and natural ability of man were held by the whole church...”³⁶ And Dr Wiggers said, “All the fathers...agreed with the Pelagians, in attributing freedom of will to man in his present state.”³⁷ This is a very important point because whenever a person today holds to the belief that all men have the natural ability to obey God or not to obey Him, or that man’s nature still retains the faculty of free will and can choose between

these two alternatives and possibilities, he is almost immediately accused of being a heretical “Pelagian” by the Calvinists. This accusation is being unfair to the position of free will since all of the Early Church Fathers held to free will long before Pelagius even existed.

The Pelagians agreed with free will, but that doesn’t mean that everyone who agrees with free will is a Pelagian. Such reasoning is as fallacious as saying that everyone who believes in the virgin birth is a Catholic. While the Catholics believe in the virgin birth, that belief is not exclusively Catholic, thus it is fallacious to say that everyone who believes in the virgin birth is a Catholic.

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Likewise the Pelagians believed in free will, but the belief in free will is not exclusively a Pelagian doctrine. Therefore, not everyone who believes in free will is a Pelagian. Williston Walker said that even in Pelagius' own day, Pelagius' teaching on "the freedom of the human will" was "in agreement with many in the West" and with "the East generally..."³⁸

Asa Mahan said that free will "was the doctrine of the primitive church for the first four or five centuries after the Bible was written, the church which received the 'lively oracles' directly from the hands of some of those by whom they were written, to wit: the writers of the New Testament. It should be borne in mind here, that at the time the sacred canon was completed, the doctrine of Necessity was held by the leading sects in the Jewish Church. It was also the fundamental article of the creed of all the sects in philosophy throughout the world, as well as of all the forms of heathenism then extant. If the doctrine of Necessity, as its advocates maintain, is the doctrine taught the church by inspired apostles and the writers of the New Testament, we should not fail to find, under such circumstances, the churches planted by them, rooted and grounded in this doctrine."³⁹ Rather, we find that absolutely all of the Early Church affirmed free will and explicitly denied the doctrine of total inability. If the doctrine of total inability was taught by the Apostles, you would expect that their faithful disciples who gave their lives in martyrdom would have taught it; but as we have seen, they did not.

David Bercot said, "The Early Christians didn't believe that man is totally depraved [totally unable] and incapable of doing any good. They taught that humans are capable of obeying and loving God."⁴⁰ He went on to say, "There was a religious group, labeled as heretics by the early

Christians... they taught that man is totally depraved [totally unable]... the group I'm referring to are the Gnostics.”⁴¹

When reading the writings of the early Christians, you would think by some of their quotes that they were engaged in debates with Calvinists and were seeking to refute Calvinism. However, it was actually the Gnostic's that they were debating. It was Gnosticism which they were refuting. It should cause no small concern for those who hold to the doctrine of inability that there is no support from the Early Church for their doctrine, but they actually only have the Gnostic who agree with them. At the very least, this should make them reconsider their doctrine.

Reviving an Old Truth & Confronting an Ancient Error

It is my aim to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jud. 1:3). It is my hope that this book will help return the Church, or at least a remnant in it, to the doctrines of Early Christianity on this point. The objective of this book is to confront and correct the Gnostic errors which have crept into the Church and to revive a very old Scriptural doctrine which was held universally by early Christianity in the days of its prime, but which has been largely forgotten overall by the Church ever since.

If all of the Early Christians believed in free will, we have to ask: what went wrong? When did this change and who changed it? The Apostle Paul said, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). If the Church was so perfectly united for hundreds of years on this doctrine, when did the division occur and who brought it? Who lead the Church in its departure from Early Christianity? These are very important

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questions that few consider; yet, the answer is obvious enough in history.

It was not until the fourth century that Gnostic and Manichaeism started to infiltrate the Christian Church, polluting it with their doctrines. Augustine, after saturating himself in Gnostic philosophy for many years, joined the Church and became a Bishop. He then began to contradict what the Church had always taught on human nature and the freedom of man's will and taught in accordance with the Gnostic views of human nature and free will. The Church, through the influence of Augustine, began to embrace and teach the doctrine of natural inability.

It is an undisputed and known fact of history, admitted by Augustine's admirers and supporters in their historical accounts of his life, that Augustine was influenced by, and a member of, the Manichaeism Gnostic sect. John K. Ryan, in his introduction to "The Confessions of Saint Augustine" said, "The two great intellectual influences upon Augustine prior to his conversion were Manicheism and Greek Philosophy."⁴² In their introduction to "The Confessions of Augustine," John Gibb and William Montgomery said, "In the same year in which he read the Scriptures and was disappointed in them, Augustine joined the Manichaeism sect..."⁴³ They also said, "For nearly nine years Augustine was a Manichaeism Auditor. At first he was a zealous partisan who contended publicly for his new faith, and did not hesitate to ridicule the doctrines of the Church and especially the Old Testament Scriptures..."⁴⁴

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was
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Gnostic Sect.

Remember that Manes, also known as Mani, was the founder of Manichaeism. That was the same man who

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Archelaus of the Early Church debated against on the topic of free will and inability. Augustine had been in Manichaeism for many years and studied the writings of Manes. Surprisingly, when Augustine first joined the Christian Church, he began teaching the freedom of the will when debating against the Manichaeans. He said, “We [Christians]...assert the liberty of the will, whereby our actions are rendered either moral or immoral, and keep it free from every bond of necessity, on account of the righteous judgment of God.”⁴⁵ He also said, “The religious mind... confesses... and maintains... that we do by our free will whatsoever we know and feel to be done by us only because we will it.”⁴⁶ And he said, “we sin voluntarily and not by necessity.”⁴⁷

The doctrine of free will was soon replaced with the idea of a ruined, corrupt, sinful nature.

But after refuting the Manichaeans and defending free will, when he was debating the Pelagians, Augustine unfortunately went back to the doctrine of total inability, as the Manichaeans had

taught. Beausobre also noticed this change and noted that Augustine defended free will “so long as he had to do with the Manichaeans. But when he came to dispute with the Pelagians, he changed his system. Then he denied that kind of freedom which before he had defended; and, so far as I am able to judge, his sentiments no longer differed from theirs [the Manichaeans] concerning the servitude of the will. He ascribed the servitude to the corruption which original sin brought into our nature; whereas the Manichaeans ascribed it to an evil quality, eternally inherit in matter.”⁴⁸

When Augustine forsook his position on free will, saying “I have tried hard to maintain the free choice of the human will, but the grace of God prevailed,”⁴⁹ he began to

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influence the rest of the Church with the idea of natural inability, which view the Church did not previously believe at all. The doctrine of free will was soon replaced with the idea of a ruined, corrupt, sinful nature.

Regarding the doctrine of a sinful nature, Charles Finney said, "This doctrine is a stumbling-block both to the church and the world, infinitely dishonorable to God, and an abomination alike to God and the human intellect, and should be banished from every pulpit, and from every formula of doctrine, and from the world. It is a relic of heathen philosophy, and was foisted in among the doctrines of Christianity by Augustine, as everyone may know who will take the trouble to examine for himself."⁵⁰

Harry Conn said, "Augustine, after studying the philosophy of Manes, the Persian philosopher, brought into the church from Manichaeism the doctrine of original sin."⁵¹

The corruption of our nature, or the loss of our free will, Augustine credited to the original sin of Adam. Augustine said that the "free choice of the will was present in that man who was the first to be formed... But after he sinned by that free will, we who have descended from his progeny have been plunged into necessity."⁵² "By Adam's transgression, the freedom of the human will has been completely lost."⁵³ "By the greatness of the first sin, we have lost the freewill to love God." And finally he said, "by subverting the rectitude in which he was created, he is followed with the punishment of not being able to do right" and "the freedom to abstain from sin has been lost as a punishment of sin."⁵⁴

Julian of Eclanum properly stated Augustine's position when he said, "...by the sin of the first man, that is, of Adam, free will perished: and that no one has now the power of living well, but that all are constrained into sin by the necessity of their flesh..."⁵⁵ In this teaching, that free

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will was lost and that men sin by necessity as opposed to abusing their liberty, Rev. Daniel R. Jennings said that Julian “sensed a carryover of Manichaeism thought from Augustine into the Christian Church...”⁵⁶ This is why Julian referred to the Augustinians as “Those Manichaeans...”⁵⁷ George Pretyman said about Augustine, “He was in the early part of his life a Manichaeism” but “some remains of it seem to have been still left upon his mind...”⁵⁸

By teaching that free will was lost and sin is the result of a defect in our nature, or the necessity of our corrupted constitution, Augustine was infiltrating the Church with Gnostic concepts and doctrines. Sin was no longer viewed as an ethical problem or a problem with how men use the faculty of their will. Rather, the problem of sin was now viewed as a metaphysical problem or as a fault in the faculty of the will itself.

Augustinian theology was a massive departure from Early Christianity.

Those who stood against the error of Augustinian Gnosticism, who accused Augustine of teaching Manichaeism and held unto the old ways and truths of early Christianity, were soon persecuted and condemned as heretics once Augustinianism was given civil and Church authority. The many bishops in the Church who denied that the original sin of Adam so corrupted human nature that free will was lost continued to teach that men were sinners by choice and not by constitution. As a result, they were ripped out of their pulpits, had their possessions confiscated, and were excommunicated by both state and church. The doctrine of free will that the Early Church taught was soon replaced with the Gnostic teaching of a necessitated will because of a corrupted, ruined, sinful nature. Augustinian theology was a massive departure from Early Christianity. Like Calvinism after it, Augustinianism

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used political and governmental force to silence any voice of opposition so that its doctrines could spread like a plague without challenge. Gnostic views, on this point, successfully crept into the Church.

There are major similarities and yet subtle differences between Augustinianism and Gnosticism. While the Gnostics said that man's nature was sinful and corrupt and that man didn't have a free will because man was created by an inferior god, Augustine agreed with the Gnostics that man's nature was sinful and corrupt and that man did not have a free will, but he said that God made it that way on account of Adam's sin. While the Gnostics said that flesh was sinful and therefore Christ did not have a flesh, Augustine said that concupiscence in the flesh was sinful and that this sin was hereditary or transmitted from parent to child through the physical passions of intercourse, but that Jesus avoided this hereditary sin by being conceived without physical passion and being born of a virgin. Therefore, Augustine agreed with the Gnostics in *principle*, but he differed from them in *explanation*. In this way, Augustinian theology was a modified Manichaeism or a semi-Gnosticism.

Augustinian theology was a modified Manichaeism or a semi-Gnosticism.

Consider the following facts:

- All of the Early Christians, before Augustine, believed in man's free will and denied man's natural inability.
- The Gnostics in the days of the Early Church believed in man's natural inability and denied man's free will.

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- Augustine was a Gnostic for many years, in the Manichaeism sect, and converted to the Church out of Gnosticism.
- After joining the Church and being appointed a Bishop, Augustine began to deny the free will of man and to affirm the natural inability of man
- The Church, under Augustine's influence, began to believe in the natural inability of man, which it never before held to, but which it formerly would refute.

What can we conclude by these facts except that when Augustine converted to Christianity out of Gnosticism, he brought with him some Gnostic doctrine? His views on human nature and free will were never held by the Early Church, but were held by the Gnostics. How can we possibly account for the fact that all of Christianity held to the freedom of the human will while only the Gnostic's taught a corrupted and sinful nature, until Augustine joined the Christian Church out of Gnosticism? It seems abundantly clear that Augustine departed from the theology of the Early Church and remained in agreement with the Gnostics on the issue of human nature and free will. Church doctrine and theology has been infiltrated and polluted with Gnostic heresies. The Church went wrong at the time of Augustine. Christian theology violently crashed like a train, falling off the tracks, and has continued to charge and move forward on the wrong path and in the wrong direction ever since.

The greatest contributors to modern Christian theology have been Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. Augustine was influenced by Manichaean thought and Luther and Calvin were influenced by Augustinian thought. Therefore, it is no surprise that Augustine denied free will as the Manichaeans did, and Luther and Calvin denied free will

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as Augustine did. The Manichaeans influenced Augustine and Augustine in turn influenced Luther and Calvin.

There is no dispute over the fact that Luther and Calvin were influenced by Augustine. Luther was even an Augustinian monk. William Carlos Martyn said about Luther, "The study of the Bible and of Augustine theology... lead him to the Redeemer."⁵⁹ In his historical account of Luther, Johann Heinrich Kurtz said, "Luther zealously studied the Bible, along with the writings of Augustine..."⁶⁰ Principal Tullock said that Luther "nourished himself upon Scripture and St. Augustine..."⁶¹ Robert Dale Owen said, "Calvin's 'Institutes' are based on Augustine's 'City of God'"⁶² Thomas H. Dyer said in his biography of John Calvin, "The doctrine of predestination, which is generally regarded as that of which principally characterizes Calvin, is in fact that of St. Augustin..."⁶³ Oliver Joseph Thatcher explains why, "In theology he [Calvin] was a close follower of St. Augustine. His influence was to revivify the ideas of St. Augustine and, joining them to the main ideas of the Reformation, embody them in the Church he organized."⁶⁴ The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics said, "Luther... Zwingli and Calvin, with minor divergences, agree in reverting to St. Augustine on the main issues and in the supposed interests of evangelical piety..."⁶⁵ Luther referred to Augustine *thirteen times* in his book "The Bondage of the Will"⁶⁶, and *twenty four times* in the "Works of Martin Luther."⁶⁷ John Calvin referred to Augustine *two hundred and sixty five times* in his "Institutes on Christian Religion."⁶⁸

Since Luther and Calvin were both students of Augustine and learned much of their theology from him, it is not surprising to find the remains of the Gnostic view of human nature in their theological writings. Martin Luther said, "...man has lost his freedom, and is forced to serve sin,

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and cannot will good... he sins and wills evil necessarily..."⁶⁹ He said, "Sin in his nature and of himself he can do nothing but sin."⁷⁰ John Calvin said that man does not have a "free will" in the sense that "he has a free choice of good and evil,"⁷¹ but denied this all together. Calvin paraphrases Augustine saying, "...nature began to want liberty the moment the will was vanquished by the revolt into which it fell... by making a bad use of free will, lost both himself and his will... free will having been made a captive, can do nothing in the way of righteousness... man at his creation received a great degree of free will, but lost it by sinning."⁷² The Christian Spectator said, "Augustine, and Calvin, and all of the reformers, taught the bondage, or moral impotence of the will."⁷³ While the Early Church wrote about "the freedom of the will," Martin Luther wrote an entire book called "The Bondage of the Will." This shows a clear departure from the views of early Christianity.

Luther defended his position against free will by saying, "Augustine... is wholly on my side..."⁷⁴ Calvin, like Luther, appealed to Augustine to support and defend his position. Calvin said, "Let us now hear Augustine in his own words, lest" Calvin be charged with "being opposed to all antiquity..."⁷⁵ Calvin tried to dismiss the charge of being opposed to the Early Church by saying, "Augustine hesitated not to call the will a slave..."⁷⁶ Charles Partee said "In his teaching on total depravity and bondage of the will Calvin is essentially following Augustine and Luther and not creating a so-called Calvinistic doctrine."⁷⁷

While Calvin tried to say that he was not "opposed to *all* antiquity" when it came to free will, what he meant was that he was not opposed to Augustine. Augustine was the only exception. He was opposed to all of the Early Church fathers before Augustine on this topic. John Calvin said, "...all ancient theologians, with the exception of Augustine,

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are so confused, vacillating, and contradictory on this subject, that no certainty can be obtained from their writings..."⁷⁸ Calvin believed that men like Clement of Rome and Ignatius, who personally knew the Apostles, did not understand the Epistles of the Apostles; while Augustine, who did not know the Apostles, apparently did understand them. Calvin admitted, "It may, perhaps, seem that I have greatly prejudiced my own view by confessing that all of the ecclesiastical writers, with the exception of Augustine, have spoken too ambiguously or inconsistently on this subject, that no certainty is attainable from their writings."⁷⁹

The reason that John Calvin rejected all ancient theologians and dismissed all of their writings on this matter, except for Augustine, is because all ancient theologians affirmed the freedom of the will in their writings, except for Augustine. Gregory Boyd said, "This in part explains why Calvin cannot cite ante-Nicene fathers against his libertarian opponents.... Hence, when Calvin debates Pighuis on the freedom of the will, he cites Augustine abundantly, but no early church fathers are cited."⁸⁰ That is why George Pretyman said, "...the peculiar tenets of Calvinism are in direct opposition to the Doctrines maintained in the primitive Church of Christ..." This we have clearly seen, but he also said, "...there is a great similarity between the Calvinistic system and the earliest [Gnostic] heresies..."⁸¹

The
Reformation
resurrected
Augustinian
and Gnostic
doctrines.

The Reformers sought to return the Church to early Christianity, but actually brought it back to early heresies, because it stopped short at Augustine. The Reformers did not go far back enough. Rather than returning the Church to early Christianity, the Reformation resurrected Augustinian and Gnostic doctrines. The Methodist Quarterly Review said,

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“At the Reformation Augustinianism received an emphatic re-enforcement among the Protestant Churches.”⁸² The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics said, “...it is Augustine who gave us the Reformation. For the Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine... the Reformation came, seeing that it was, on its theological side, a revival of Augustinianism...”⁸³ The Reformation was to a great extent a resurrection or revival of Augustinian theology and a further departure and falling away from Early Christianity.

Gnosticism, Augustinianism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism have much in common. Augustinianism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism teach Gnostic views of human nature and free will but under a different name. It’s the same old Gnosticism in a new wrapper. Other doctrines also seem to have originated in Gnosticism, from Basilianism, Valentianism, Marcionism, and Manichaeism, such as the doctrines of easy believism, individual predestination, constitutional regeneration, a sinful nature or a sinful flesh, eternal security or once saved always saved, and others. But no Gnostic doctrine has spread so widely throughout the Church, with such great acceptance as the doctrine of man’s natural inability to obey God.

This view has been held in both Catholic and Protestant Churches, taught by both Arminian and Calvinist theologians. Augustine taught many false doctrines such as the sinless life of Mary, praying to the dead, persecuting heretics, infant damnation, infant baptism, baptismal regeneration, etc. Yet it is his false teaching in regards to human nature and free will that has spread beyond the Catholic Church into the Protestant realm.

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Consider these facts that have been shown:

- Augustine's mind was highly influenced by the teachings of Manichaeism on the topic of human nature and free will; and in his views on the subject, he clearly departed from the views of the Early Church.
- The minds of Martin Luther and John Calvin were highly influenced by the teachings of Augustine on the topic of human nature and free will and admitted to departing from the views of the Early Church.
- The greatest contributors to modern theology have been Augustine, Luther, and Calvin.

Isn't it abundantly clear that Gnostic doctrine has infected the Church? The Gnostic doctrine of the bondage of the will, or the doctrine of man's natural inability to obey God, has crept into the Church through a "Trojan horse" and has been masquerading as Christianity ever since. It has survived the centuries through Augustinian, Lutheran, and Calvinistic theology. These groups have preserved and promoted the doctrine of natural inability. This belief has spread like a dangerous plague, finding acceptance in many denominations and churches, but what does the Bible really teach regarding man's ability? To answer this question, we need to start in the very beginning.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CREATION & SIN OF MAN

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve, He created them in His image (Gen. 1:26). Just as God has the power of thought (*intelligence*), the ability of feelings (*emotions*), and the power of self-determination (*free will*), so do those created in His image. God created them free moral agents, with all the necessary conditions or qualifications of moral agency.

Adam and Eve were free to choose their behavior for themselves and consequently they were free to decide what their moral character would be. Created morally innocent, they were now free to choose what is good and as a result have a good character, or to choose evil and as a result have an evil character. While God created their constitution and gave them a free will, they themselves would create their character by how they would use their free will.

Jed Smock said, "God can create beings with the potential for virtue, but God cannot create by fiat a morally upright person. He formed Adam in his own image, that is Adam was a sentient and rational being with the potential to be God-like in character through his moral choices."¹

Since God created man a moral being, capable of virtue or vice, He gave them a moral law to influence their decisions. The moral law was not impossible for them to obey, since they were created in the image of God. By giving

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them a moral law, He gave them the opportunity to be obedient or disobedient. By forbidding the tree of knowledge, God gave them the opportunity of forming good moral character.

God is good and He wanted the good of His creation; therefore, He did not place them in the Garden with the forbidden tree so that they would *disobey* Him, but so that they would *obey* Him. As Eusebius said, "Every rational soul has naturally a good free-will, formed for the choice of what is good."² Clement of Alexandria said, "This was the law from the first, that virtue should be the object of voluntary choice."³ By granting Adam and Eve the freedom of doing wrong, God gave them the freedom of doing right. God gave them free will and a moral law so that they could do what was right. A person has good moral character if they *could* do what is wrong but *choose* to do what is right instead. For that reason, temptation can be considered good in this sense, which is why we should count it a joy when we are tempted (Jas. 1:2), because there is a blessing for those who overcome (Jas. 1:12). The opportunity to do what is wrong is a good thing, because every opportunity to do what is wrong is an opportunity to do what is right.

Every opportunity to do what is wrong is an opportunity to do what is right.

Pelagius said, "Our most excellent Creator wished us to be able to do either but actually to do only one, that is, good, which he also commanded, giving us the capacity to do evil only so that we might do his will by exercising our own. That being so, this very capacity to do evil is also good - good, I say, because it makes the good part better by making it voluntary and independent, not bound by necessity but free to decide for itself."⁴

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Clement of Rome, who was the Apostle Paul's companion, said, "But, you say, God ought to have made us at first so that we should not have thought at all of such things. You who say this do not know what is free-will, and how it is possible to be really good; that he who is good by his own choice is really good; but he who is made good by another under necessity is not really good, because he is not what he is by his own choice... Since therefore every one's freedom constitutes the true good, and shows the true evil, God has contrived that friendship or hostility should be in each man by occasions. But no, it is said: everything that we think He makes us to think. Stop! Why do you blaspheme more and more, in saying this? For if we are under His influence in all that we think, you say that He is the cause of fornications, lusts, avarice, and all blasphemy. Cease your evil-speaking, ye who ought to speak well of Him, and to bestow all honour upon Him."⁵

While God granted Adam and Eve the ability to sin or not to sin by giving them a free will, and He gave them the opportunity to sin or not to sin by placing them in the Garden with the forbidden tree, it was not God who actually tempted them to sin in the sense of suggesting it to their minds. God does not tempt anyone to sin (Jas. 1:13) and we are to pray for God to lead us away from temptation (Lk. 11:4). But just as God allowed Satan to tempt Job, not to destroy his character but to prove his character and faithfulness (Job 1:8-12), God allowed Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, not so that they would sin, but to give them the opportunity of being genuinely loyal to Him.

It was the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve to sin (Gen. 3:1-4; 3:13-14). He suggested to them that they should disobey God. It was God who had commanded them not to sin (Gen. 2:16-17; 3:11; 3:17). God was completely sincere in His command. He really did want them to obey Him and

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motivated them to obey Him by warning them of the negative consequences of sin if they were to choose that course.

Mankind was created with the ability to obey the law of God or to disobey the law of God, which is why God commanded them to obey and the devil tempted them to disobey. It would make no sense for God to command them to do what they cannot do, or for the devil to tempt them to do what cannot be done. God knew that they were capable of obeying His law, which is why He commanded them to do so; and the devil knew that they were capable of disobeying God's law, which is why he tempted them to do so.

There was a war going on between God and the devil for the *will* of man. Man was a moral being and therefore neither God nor the devil could force him to do their will. Man was created free and therefore could not be coerced. That is why God used the means of commandment and the devil used the means of deception. The devil only has the power of suggestion over man, so that man is able to "resist the devil" (Jas. 4:7). Therefore those who are "taken captive by him" (2 Tim. 2:26) are taken captive by their own consent to his deceptions. Thus they can "*recover themselves* out of the snare of the devil" (2 Tim. 2:26) if they choose to.

It is important to understand that the decisions of will caused by a free moral agent occur after the motives presented to the mind are considered and contemplated. Both God and the devil presented to the minds of Adam and Eve considerations in order to influence the decisions of their free will. God, motivated by love, was trying to govern man by moral law, by presenting the truth about the consequences of sin, thus giving them motivation for the right choice (Gen. 2:17). God was trying to govern them with truth.

On the other hand, the devil was motivated by selfishness and was trying to govern man through deception,

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by lying about the consequences of sin (Gen. 3:4) and motivating them to make the wrong choice by making empty promises (Gen. 3:5). The devil was trying to tear down God's influence over their will by questioning and contradicting God's warning, while trying to set up his own influence over their will by making empty promises and deceitful incentives.

The declaration of consequences for violating moral law are a moral influence upon the will of a moral being when they are perceived and understood by their mind. That is why the devil challenged and questioned God's declaration when He wanted to influence the will of man to disobey God. This was the fight for the allegiance of man's will.

God is good and wanted man to do what was good. The devil is evil and wanted man to do what was evil. The devil put forth effort to get them to sin by tempting them to do so; while God put forth effort to get them not to sin by commanding them and warning them. God was trying to form in man a good moral character like He has, while the devil was seeking to create in them an evil moral character like he possesses.

After placing man in the Garden with the forbidden tree, God had warned Adam about the consequences of his possible choice ahead of time (Gen. 2:17). This is because God did not want them to sin and hoped to influence them not to by bringing to their attention the negative consequences of such a choice.

The objective of warning is that the one who is being warned would make the right choice. Warning a person about the consequences of their choices takes for granted that they have the ability of choice and assumes that they can choose between two alternatives. They were free to make the right or wrong choice and God wanted them to make the

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right choice. Yet, despite the effort and influence of God, they sinned. God had not failed man, since He had done all of His responsibility; but man had failed God by violating his obligation. “And when the women saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). They sought to gratify their natural desires in an unnatural and unlawful way, through means which God did not plan for them.

God had created them for a relationship with Him; but now through sin, that relationship with interrupted and disturbed. Because of their sin, they “hide themselves from the presence of the Lord” (Gen. 3:8). I can hear the pain in God’s voice and the grief of His heart as He asked, “What is this that thou hast done?” (Gen. 3:13). But as the Moral Governor of the Universe, the One who has created them as moral beings and gave them the moral law, and as the One who was responsible for the well-being of His creation, He had to hold them responsible and call them into account for their choices. Adam and Eve were justly held responsible for their sin because the law that God had given them was not at all impossible for them to keep.

Is God The Author Of Sin?

Just as there are self-evident truths, there are self-evident falsehoods. A good, God authoring sin, is a self-evident falsehood. Jesus stated a self-evident truth of reason when he said “A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit” (Matt. 7:18). Apart from any reasoning or explanation, the truth of this statement is automatically affirmed simply by the truth being stated. The devil is evil and is therefore not the author of

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good, while God is good and therefore is not the author of evil.

We know that Adam and Eve did not have a “sinful nature” because when God made everything He made it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The Bible says, “For every creature of God is good...” (1 Tim. 4:4) and that “God hath made men upright...” (Ecc. 7:29) God created Adam and Eve with a good nature, but the relation between your nature and your will is not causation, but influence. The condition of their nature did not necessitate the choices of their will. Their nature did not force them to do what was good, nor did their nature force them to do what was evil. Doing what was right or doing what was wrong was not determined by their nature, but was determined by their free will. If their good nature necessitated good choices, they never would have sinned. If their nature necessitated their choices and they sinned, God must have given them a sinful nature. The only way to explain their sin, without making God the author of sin, is to say that they sinned by free will and not by necessity of nature.

Though God created everything “very good” (Gen. 1:31), including the natures of angels, many of them did not remain good. Though the Bible says that Satan was a “liar from the beginning” (Jn. 8:44), this references his lie in the garden. It is not saying that Satan was a liar from his creation. We are told about Lucifer “Thou wast *perfect* in all thy ways from the day that thou wast *created*, till iniquity was found in thee” (Eze. 28:15). Lucifer’s sinfulness was not something that he was created with but something which he himself created. In fact, when he decided to rebel against God, he said in his “heart” “I will” five times. “For thou hast said in thine heart, *I will* ascend into heaven, *I will* exalt my throne above the stars of God, *I will* sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: *I will* ascend

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above the heights of the clouds; *I will* be like the most High” (Isa. 14:13-14). Therefore Lucifer sinned, not because of the good nature that God created him with, but because of his own will or decision to do so.

Adrian Rogers said, “When God created Satan, He created him in perfection. God did not create evil. God created a perfect being... He gave that perfect being perfect freedom. Now why did God give the angels freedom, and why does God give us freedom? Because God wants worship, and God wants love. Now, if God made me where I was not free, or I could not choose to do evil, then correspondingly I could not choose to do good... I would only be an animate object or a robot... So God created a being perfect... and that being choose to sin.”⁶

Just as Lucifer sinned against his nature, not because of his nature, but by his own free will, so the sin of Adam and Eve was not the result of their nature but was caused by their free will. Your nature does not cause your will. That is, the state of your nature does not necessitate the choices of your will, but the will is free to choose according to or contrary to your nature.

Clement of Alexandria said, “In no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice... originates sins... punishments are justly inflicted.”⁷ Tatian said, “Nothing evil has been created by God. We ourselves have manifested wickedness. But we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it.”⁸ Augustine even said that the “free choice of the will was present in that man who was the first to be formed... he sinned by that free will...”⁹ Cornelius Van Til said, “If God does exist as man’s Creator, it is as we have seen, impossible that evil should be inherent in the temporal universe. If God exists, man himself must have brought in sin by an act of willful transgression.”¹⁰ R. C. Sproul said, “Adam and Eve were not created fallen. They had no sin

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nature. They were good creatures with free will. Yet they chose to sin.”¹¹ James Arminius said, “The efficient cause of that transgression was man, determining his will to that forbidden object and applying his powers or capability to do it... Man therefore sinned by his free will...”¹²

There are those who believe that Adam and Eve did not have the power or ability to obey the law that God had given them. They teach that sin is not the result of man misusing his free will but that sin is the result of God’s secret, eternal, irresistible, sovereign will. They teach that God did not want Adam and Eve to obey Him, but actually wanted them to disobey Him.

John Calvin said, "The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he should."¹³ Piscator said, “God made Adam and Eve to this very purpose, that they might be tempted and lead into sin. And by the force of this decree it could not be otherwise but that they must sin.”¹⁴ Dr. John Edwards said, “He might have hindered the fall, but he would not. The reason was because he had decreed their fall, as we may gather from God’s creating the tree of good and evil before their creation...”¹⁵ Even Martin Luther unashamedly said that God was actually the cause of sin, so that all sin is caused by God and all sin is unavoidable. He said “God... effects, and moves and impels all things in a necessary, infallible course...”¹⁶ He also said, "This is the highest degree of faith - to believe that He is merciful, the very One who saves so few and damns so many. To believe that He is just, the One who according to His own will, makes us necessarily damnable."¹⁷

Where Martin Luther got the idea that man’s sinfulness was “according to His own will” or that God “makes us necessarily damnable” is a very good question. It is not taught anywhere in the Scriptures between Genesis and Revelation. God does not make men damnable because God

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does not make men sinful. Men make themselves damnable because men make themselves sinful. Sin is the result of man's free will, not the effect of God's predetermination.

While I was street preaching outside of a club in Ottawa Canada, a girl said to me "God wants us to be out here and have fun. *God wants us to get drunk!*" She thought that God wanted her to sin! I realize now that she basically believed in Calvinism. John Calvin said, "Creatures are so governed by the secret counsel of God, that nothing happens but what he has knowingly and willingly decreed."¹⁸ Of course, that girl did have a point. How could I rebuke her for her sin and call her to repentance, if God wanted her to sin?

I have often wondered if everything is caused by God, why do Calvinists get upset with me for rejecting Calvinism? My rejection would not be my own free will choice but would be caused by the secret decree of God! Or why would they be upset with me writing an entire book defending free will and refuting total inability, if this too was His Sovereign and irresistible will! If they are upset with me rejecting Calvinism or for my theology, they would be upset with the secret, immutable, irresistible, and eternal will of God! It shouldn't be me that they are upset with, it should be God! According to Calvinism, every word in this book was predestined before the foundation of the world; and since God's will is sovereign and irresistible, I could not but have written it.

I have also wondered how could any lover of holiness be expected to accept Calvinism? Calvinism teaches that God prefers sin over holiness *in every instance that sin occurs*. God could have decreed righteousness in those situations, but He chose to decree sin instead! It means that God preferred a sinful universe over a sinless universe, that God preferred rebellion over obedience, and that He preferred the misery of His creatures over their well-being! If

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a believer wants the world to be perfectly holy, are they more righteous and loving than God? If God wants sin to occur, so should we! If we don't want sin to occur, but God wants sin to occur, then we would be ungodly for not wanting sin to occur! Imagine that! If Calvinism is true, a person is ungodly if they don't want sin to exist!

According to Brown's Dictionary of the Bible, the Nicolaitans "imputed their wickedness to God as the cause..."¹⁹ Jesus said, "...the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, *which thing I hate*" (Rev. 2:15). Jesus hated their doctrine! And is there a doctrine more worthy of our abhorrence and

If Calvinism is true, a person is ungodly if they don't want sin to exist!

hatred than the doctrine which makes God the author of sin? It is Allah of the Quran of whom it is said "whom [he] pleases he causes to err, and whom he pleases he puts on the right way."²⁰ But when Paul asked the question, is "Christ the minister of sin?" he promptly answered the question with a stern "God forbid!" (Gal. 2:17) It is not the God of the Bible which is the author or cause of sin.

Yet ultimately Calvinism teaches that God is the author or cause of sin. Dr. John Edwards said, "If God by his decree did force men's wills, and so necessitate them to be vicious and wicked, then he might justly be called the Author of Sin."²¹ He then went on to say, "The eternal decree is the cause of the necessary futurition of evil acts, for the acts inevitably follow on the decree."²² And "God did from all eternity will or decree the commission of all the sins of the world, because his permissive will is his true and real will."²³

Toplady said, "Hence, we find every matter resolved, ultimately, into the mere sovereign pleasure of God, as the

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spring and occasion of whatsoever is done in heaven and earth.”²⁴

Dr. Twiss said, “It is impossible that any thing should be done, but that to which God impels the will of man.”²⁵ He also said, “God is the author of that action, which is sinful, by his irresistible will...”²⁶

Zuinglius said that “God makes angels” and “men sin...”²⁷

Tucker said, “It is certain then, that the existence of sin was the ordination of the divine will... Sin could not have existence, without, or contrary to the divine will: its being, must be the consequent of the divine purpose... Sin is the wise and holy ordination of God...”²⁸ He also said, “As nothing exists contrary to the will of Him who says I will do all my pleasure. It certainly was his will that sin should have being...”²⁹ And he said, “If God had not determined its existence, it could not have had being; unless we suppose sin to be greater than God.”³⁰

Piscator said, “We neither can do more good than we do, nor less evil than we do; because God from eternity has precisely decreed that both the good and the evil be so done.”³¹ And he said, “God necessitates man unto sin.”³² He also said, “God does holily drive and thrust men on unto wickedness.”³³ And finally, “God procures adultery, cursing, lyings.”³⁴

Peter Martyr said, “God.... is the cause of those actions which are sins...”³⁵

Vincent Cheung said, “God controls everything that is and everything that happens. There is not one thing that happens that he has not actively decreed – not even a single thought in the mind of man. Since this is true, it follows that God has decreed the existence of evil, he has not merely permitted it, as if anything can originate and happen apart from his will and power.”³⁶

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If God commanded Adam and Eve not to sin, when He secretly wanted them to sin, God was misrepresenting His own character and intentionally misleading or deceiving them. Truthfulness is the foundation of trustworthiness, but what confidence can one have in the character of a person who doesn't mean what he says? It may be simplistic, yet it is true, that the mere fact that God commanded them not to sin and warned them about the consequences of their sin is absolute proof that He did not want them to sin. It shows that they sinned despite or contrary to the influence of God. Unless the Bible was written to give us false impressions, God did not want Adam and Eve to sin.

It is the devil who is considered the father of lies (Jn. 8:44) because he was the first being to ever tell a lie. That means that when God gave Adam and Eve the impression that He didn't want them to sin, He was not lying, since the first lie came from the devil after God gave them this impression. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2) and therefore He did not give Adam and Eve a false impression when He commanded them not to sin, but He actually did not want them to sin.

While Calvinism says that "God has decreed the existence of evil," the God of the Bible says, "Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees..." (Isa. 10:1) The God of the Bible did not secretly decree that men should sin. God's eternal decree for sin was "thou shalt not" (Exo. 20:1-17). God said "thou shalt not" and *He meant it!*

Calvinism, however, makes God insincere in His commandments. God does not tell us to obey, only to decree our disobedience! God does not even tempt anyone to sin, let alone cause anyone to sin (Jas. 1:13). God is not the author of sin! We are! God never wanted sin to occur at all! God gave us a moral law and gave us the ability to obey it or disobey it. The reason that God calls sinners to repentance

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and punishes them for their sin is because their sin is not His will. It would make no sense to rebuke sinners for their sin and call them to repentance and obedience if they were already doing the will of God. We would be rebuking the will of God when we rebuke sin, if sin was God's will! Why should we ever be upset with sin, if sin is God's plan or if He secretly causes it? We would be upset with God's plan! If sin is God's plan, we should rejoice over sin! If God wants men to be sinful, we should want them to be sinful too! If God decreed the existence of sin, or if God took away our free will so that sin is unavoidable, then sin must be the will and plan of God.

The Bible explicitly tells us that God hates sin (Prov. 6:16; Isa. 61:8; Zec. 6:18; Heb. 1:9). And God commands us to hate sin (Ps. 97:10; Amos 5:15). But if sin is God's plan and God hates sin, God would hate His own plan! If sin was God's will and God commands us to hate sin, then God commands us to hate His own will! If sin was God's will, and we ought to love God's will, then we ought to love sin! The fact that God hates sin and that He commands us to hate sin should be all the evidence that we need to see that sin is not God's will or plan.

All throughout the Bible, we see God's condemnation of sin. Is God condemning the fruit of His own activity or the work of His own hands? Is God condemning His own plan? Shouldn't the will of God be commended, not condemned? A simple Bible study reveals that God has a serious problem with sin, but is God the cause of His own problem?

I have asked Calvinists, "Is God angry and grieved with sin?" They have answered, "Yes." Then I've asked,

If God wants men to be sinful, we should want them to be sinful too!

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“Was sin the secret Sovereign plan of God?” They have answered, “Yes.” Then I’ve asked, “So you’re saying that God is angry and grieved with His own secret Sovereign plan?” They don’t know how to answer that.

Consider this syllogism which assumes their premise:

- Sin is the plan of God
- God is angry and grieved with sin
- Therefore God is angry and grieved with His own plan

Logically, if God is angry and grieved with sin and sin is His plan, then God is angry and grieved with His own plan! That is the rational conclusion of their premise. But if God’s plan is good, He should not grieve over it but rejoice over it. Therefore if sin was God’s plan, God should not grieve over sin but should rejoice over sin! This of course He never does, because sin is not His plan and sin is not good.

If sin was God’s plan, and God is angry and grieved with sin, then He should also be angry and grieved with Himself because He is the one who caused it! He is the one who secretly eternally decreed it! Sin is not self-existent. Therefore sin has a cause. But to be angry and grieved with the existence of sin, but not to be angry and grieved with the one who caused the existence of sin, would make no sense. Therefore God ought to be angry and grieved with Himself if God secretly decreed the existence of sin. But God is angry *with sinners* for their sin (Ps. 7:11). Therefore, sinners are the cause of sin, not God. Even Prosper, the disciple of Augustine, said, “By no means would there be a day of judgment, if men sinned by the will or decree of God.”³⁷

It was actually Paganism which taught that God or the gods controlled and planned all things exhaustively and irresistibly through an eternal plan. Sermonides of Amorgos said, “Zeus controls the fulfillment of all that is, and disposes

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as he will. We live like beasts, always at the mercy of what the day may bring, knowing nothing of the outcome that God will impose upon our acts.”³⁸ Theognis said, “No man, Cynus, is responsible for his own ruin or for his own success: of both these things the gods are the givers... the gods will bring all to the fulfillment that they have planned.”³⁹ Vettius Valens said, “For it is impossible for any man by prayers or sacrifices to overcome what was fixed from the beginning and alter it to his taste; what has been assigned to us will happen without our praying for it, what is not fated will not happen for our prayers.”⁴⁰

Ben Sirach, the Jewish scribe during Old Testament times, rightly reasoned, “Say not: ‘It was God’s doing that I fell away’; for what he hates he does not do. Say not: ‘He has caused me to err’; for he has no need of wicked man. The Lord hates all abominations; and they that fear God love it not. When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice. If you will, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has set fire and water before you, stretch forth your hand to whichever you choose. Before man is life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him.”⁴¹

Julian of Eclanum said, “We maintain that men are the work of God, and that no one is forced unwillingly by His power either into evil or good, but that man does either good or ill of his own will; but that in a good work he is always assisted by God’s grace, while in evil he is incited by the suggestions of the devil.”⁴² The Bible explicitly says, “God hath made men upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc. 7:29). This passage shows that sin was the result of man’s own free will and God is not to be blamed in any way.

John Calvin actually blamed God for Adam’s fall by saying, “I freely acknowledge my doctrine to be this: that

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Adam fell, not only by the permission of God, but by His very secret council and decree..."⁴³ How contrary this is to the Word of God which says, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Ps. 145:17). "To shew that the Lord is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him" (Ps. 92:15). "Every *good* gift and every *perfect* gift is from above" (Jas. 1:17). "The just Lord... will not *do* iniquity" (Zep. 3:5). The Hebrew word "do" that is used here means to "accomplish," "advance," "appoint," "bring forth," "provide," "make," "procure,"⁴⁴ "produce," or "ordain."⁴⁵ That means that "The just Lord will not make, procure, produce, or ordain iniquity." We are told that, "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (Deut. 32:4). "Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity" (Job. 34:10). "Yea, surely God will not do wickedly" (Job 34:12). "Who... can say, Thou hast *wrought* iniquity?" (Job 36:23) To "wrought" iniquity, in the Hebrew, means to "make" or "ordain" it.⁴⁶ How could we say "I will... ascribe righteousness to my Maker" (Job 36:3), if God is the maker of sin? How could anyone praise God for His holiness, saying "holy, holy, holy" (Rev. 4:8), if God secretly decreed the existence of sin when He could have decreed holiness in those instances? How could we worship Him at all if the existence of all sin and misery was secretly His fault?

A secret is that which is intentionally or deliberately hidden from others. Organized crime will seek to commit their crimes in secret or to hide their actions because if their activity were publicly known, it would not be approved of by the public. Their dealings are contrary to the well-being of others; and therefore, they hide them.

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If God has a “*secret counsel*” or a “*secret will*,” then God too has something to hide. What would be so wrong with His counsel or with His will that He would need to hide it from His universe? Is God’s activity contrary to the well-being of His universe that He needs to hide, or keep secret, His will? Certainly, if the sinfulness and damnation of mankind was the will of God, He would need to keep His will a secret because this would be contrary to the well-being of His universe and would demand the disapproval of the minds of the moral beings in His universe.

The God of the Bible, however, willingly welcomes the examination of His character, knowing that He has done nothing wrong and has nothing to hide. “Thus saith the Lord, *what iniquity have your fathers found in me*, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?” (Jer. 2:5) “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? *testify against me*” (Micah 6:3). “And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, *judge*, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard” (Isa. 5:3).

God invites men to “judge” and to “testify against” Him, knowing that none can find fault with His moral character. God is so confident in the moral character that He has chosen and is sure of the moral sense that He has placed in man that He does not discourage man from doing this, but He actually encourages it. God places His actions before the minds of moral agents so that they can see the righteousness of His ways and the rectitude of His doings. When we see the moral character of God as it really is, we see how trustworthy and praise-worthy He actually is.

However, R. C. Sproul Jr. said that God secretly wanted Adam and Eve to sin and *gave them the desire to sin* because He wanted objects upon which to pour out His wrath. He then said, “I am not accusing God of sinning; I am

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suggesting that he created sin,”⁴⁷ as if creating sin and sinning were two different things. What is a sinner? A sinner is someone who creates sin. When a being originates sin through their own free will, they are sinning and consequently become a sinner. If a person says that God “created sin,” then they are in fact “accusing God of sinning.” But the Bible explicitly says that the Lord will not *make* or *fashion* iniquity (Zeph. 3:5).

Consider this logical syllogism:

If sin is the work of God, then God is a worker of iniquity.

- A sinner is someone who creates sin.
- The god of Calvinism creates sin.
- Therefore the god of Calvinism is a sinner.

It is self-evident that a sinner is someone who causes sin to exist, someone who chooses to bring about its existence. The “*workers* of iniquity,” according to the Hebrew word that is used, are those who “makes” or “ordains” sin.⁴⁸ Calvinism says that God “ordained” all sin from eternity. If sin is the work of God, then God is a worker of iniquity. If Adam sinned because God secretly caused him to, God is the real sinner, not Adam! Adam would not be a criminal deserving of punishment since he did not make a free choice. Adam would be the victim of God’s eternal and secret bullying.

If God caused all the sin of men, if we are puppets of God or marionettes in the hands of the Divine, and are not free moral agents, then God is the only real sinner in the entire universe and we cannot be justly responsible and accountable for our actions. God would be the only one who actually has moral character since God would be the only one who causes moral choices to occur.

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For example, if a man uses a gun to kill another person, the courts will hold the man accountable, not the gun! That is because the one who controlled the gun is the one who caused the crime. The gun itself had no moral character. The weapon itself could not be blamed or punished. There can be no blame or punishment where necessity, instead of liberty, reigns. The one who freely causes sin is the one who ought to be blamed for the existence of that sin.

While Adam blamed God and his wife for his sin (Gen. 3:12), and Eve blamed the serpent for her sin (Gen. 3:13), God blamed each individual for their sin. This shows that their sin was their own free choice. It reveals to us that they could have obeyed the law that God had given them. God said to Adam, “Hast *thou* eaten of the tree, whereof *I commanded thee* that thou shouldest not eat?” (Gen. 3:11) God was not to blame since God commanded him not to. God was sincere in His command. He didn’t want Adam to sin. God warned Adam ahead of time about the consequences he would face if he made that choice (Gen. 2:17). The objective of commanding and warning is that the one who is being commanded and warned would make the right choice in light of what was warned about. Therefore, the fall of Adam occurred despite the efforts of God to avoid it.

He went on and said to Adam. “Because *thou hast hearkened* unto the voice of thy wife...” (Gen. 3:17). Adam’s sin was the result or product of his own volition or choice. God said to Eve, “What is this that *thou hast done*?” (Gen. 3:13) and God said to the serpent, “Because *thou hast done this*” (Gen. 3:14). Before assigning their consequences,

There can be no blame or punishment where necessity, instead of liberty, reigns.

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God said that it was their own fault. If it was not their fault, but was secretly God's fault, then they would not have deserved any punishments whatsoever. Moral beings, with freedom of will, are rightly subject to consequences for their choices. The fact that God punished Adam and Eve for their transgression shows that their transgression was not His will, but was actually the result of their own power, ability, or free will.

Tertullian said, "...it is not the part of good and solid faith to refer all things to the will of God...as to make us fail to understand that there is something within our power."⁴⁹ To deny that mankind has genuinely rebelled against the will of God is to actually deny the fall or rebellion of man. If sin was the will of God, mankind was not rebelling against God's will by choosing to sin, but was rather acting according to it! Man would be a puppet of God, rather than a rebel against God. If sinners have acted according to the actual will of God, they are not really rebels at all. Our world would not be fallen; mankind would not be a race of rebels, but would be obedient servants of God who always do the will of God in every instance.

It does not solve the problem to say that God has a "revealed will" and a "secret will." For if holiness was God's revealed will, but sin was God's secret will, then God is insincere in His commands, His revealed will is a lie, and His secret will is His actual will. But God's revealed will cannot be a lie, because God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2); and therefore, God says He doesn't want us to sin and He means it! God's will is always that we live victorious over sin and never that we live surrendered to sin. But if God publicly favors righteousness, for appearance or reputation sake, but secretly favors sin, what kind of being is He? A person's character is what he is in secret! If God secretly decrees sin, God would secretly be sinful!

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God said, “I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth... I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are *right*” (Isa. 45:19). If God has a secret will, which is contrary to His revealed or declared will, then that secret will would be “wrong” because His revealed or declared will is “right.” If God tells us that He doesn’t ever want us to sin, but he secretly wants us to sin every time that we do sin, then we cannot trust God because He is a liar. Yet the Bible says that God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). But if God has a secret will, which is the opposite of His revealed will, we can never trust anything that God says! All the public threatening and promises in the Bible would be questionable and untrustworthy, since God says one thing when the opposite is the truth! This would lead us to believe that the opposite of the Bible might be true if God was in the habit of publicly saying one thing when secretly the opposite is true. But it is the devil, not God, which was a liar from the beginning (Jn. 8:44).

After one young convert heard a Calvinist describing Calvinism, he said to him, “Your god is my devil.” There is a lot of truth in that statement. That is because God’s plan was for holiness, but the devil’s plan was for sin. The world chose to do the devil’s will instead of God’s will. That is why the devil is called the “god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and the “prince of this world” (Jn. 12:31). There is a real war going on between God and the devil for the allegiance of man’s free will. It was God who commanded obedience from Adam, but it was the devil that tempted Adam to sin. To say that God wanted Adam and Eve to sin is to confuse God with the devil!

The Bible describes God and the devil as enemies, not friends. God and his angels actually fight against Satan and his demons (Dan. 10:13). But if God causes all things, including all the actions of the devil, then the two are not

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really at odds with each other but are in perfect harmony. John Piper said, “God is sovereign over Satan, and therefore Satan’s will does not move without God’s permission. And therefore every move of Satan is part of God’s overall purpose and plan.”⁵⁰ If it is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit to prescribe the works of the Holy Spirit to the devil (Matt. 12:24-32), then certainly it must also be blasphemy to prescribe the works of the devil to God! To credit the works of the devil to God is just as much blasphemy as it is to credit the works of God to the devil.

Martin Luther credited the works of the devil to God when he said, “Since, therefore, God moves and does all in all, He necessarily moves and does all in Satan and the wicked man...”⁵¹ So God forced the devil to sin and then condemns him for doing what God decreed him to do! He is punished by God for being what God predestined Him to be! Poor devil! This false theology makes you feel bad for the devil because he merely a puppet or marionette in the hand of the Lord.

This type of theology makes us blame God while removing blame from the devil. But if the devil is a free moral being, who has chosen to sin contrary to the will of God, then it is God who is good and the devil that is evil! But Calvinism makes God the cause of sin, while the devil is only his accomplice who has been forced to go along. No wonder John Wesley said that Calvinism destroys “all the attributes of God, his justice, mercy, and truth, yea, it represents the most holy God as worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust.”⁵² The devil has only tempted men to sin, but Calvinism says that God makes them do it!

Theodore Beza, the friend and successor of John Calvin, said, “The fall of man was both necessary and wonderful.”⁵³ Calvinists have taught that God secretly

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predestined the fall of Adam, and consequently the damnation of our race, so that the atonement of Christ would be needed and He can get the glory of our salvation. Zanchius said, "Both the elect and the reprobates were foreordained to sin, as sin, that the glory of God might be declared thereby."⁵⁴ The Bible expressly condemns the maxim: "Let us do evil, that good may come" (Rom. 3:8). Yet, this is maxim is precisely what Calvinism teaches. Cornelius Van Til said, "...it was God's will that sin should come into the world. He wished to enhance his glory by means of its punishment and removal."⁵⁵

This would be like firemen, who secretly started fires throughout the community so that their rescue work would be necessary, and they can get the glory of putting these fires out! While it is good to put out fires, it is not good to start them! The end does not justify the means in this scenario. If their secret activity is revealed, their rescue work doesn't seem so wonderful anymore. If the public knew they started the fires, they would not praise them for putting them out! They would not be viewed as heroes but as heinous monsters! Their actions would not be praiseworthy but punishable!

Calvinism says that God caused the damnation of all, so that He could predestine the salvation of the few. They say that many are on the broad road, and few are on the narrow road, because God wants it to be that way. This would be like a doctor, who infected a community with a deadly disease, resulting in the death of masses, so that He could give the cure to those *few* whom he wanted to. Nobody would ever call such a man benevolent or good.

There are insecure mothers who will cause their children to be sick, that they can appear to others to be good mothers for taking care of their sick children, and so that they themselves will feel needed. Is that really what God is

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like? How awful it is to view God as causing the wickedness of our race, just so He can cause the salvation of “the elect.” How blasphemous it is on the character of God to say that God causes the sinfulness of man just so that the atonement of Jesus Christ would be needed.

God certainly would not appear to His universe as “just” for punishing men for doing what He caused them to do. And God would not appear to His universe as “merciful” for pardoning men for doing what He caused them to do! The idea that God causes the sinfulness of the world so that He could appear to His universe as just and merciful is nonsense and blasphemous.

Felgentius, who was a disciple of Augustine, even said, “Justice could not be said to be just if it did not find, but made man an offender. And the injustice would be still greater, if God, after having predestined a man to ruin when he stood, inflicted punishment upon him after his fall.”⁵⁶

However, Calvinists imply that the fall of Adam was part of God’s plan by asking, “But wasn’t the atonement planned *before* the fall of Adam?” The answer to this question is both yes and no. God was prepared in the same way that an airplane would have a parachute on it before it crashes. It is a precautionary measure knowing the possible danger. But that doesn’t mean that the airline, who secures the airplanes with parachutes, is planning to crash the plane! Likewise Christ was *ordained before* the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20), because God prepared for the possible fall, knowing that man had free will. But Christ was not actually *slain until* the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), because that is when the fall actually occurred and atonement, therefore, became necessary for our salvation. This is the reason why the Bible distinguishes between Christ being ordained before the foundation of the world and

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Christ being slain from the foundation of the world. The application of this plan was not executed until it became necessary. The atonement was first spoken of *in definite terms* after the fall, when God predicted the crushing of the serpent's head by the seed of the women (Gen. 3:15).

God was *ready* for the fall, but God did not *plan* the fall. We must remember that God does not desire sacrifice but desires a holy people (Ps. 51:16-17; Hos. 6:7; Mic. 6:7-8). God said, "...to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22; Mk. 12:33). "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Prov. 21:3). With that in mind, it would seem that God would have preferred a sinless universe that needed no atonement at all than a sinful one that did. God did not cause the fall of our race so that He could secure the redemption of a few. God prefers holiness over sinfulness. God created everything "good" and He wanted it to stay that way. The fall of Adam and Eve was not the result of God pushing them down. Their sin was their own free choice, which God was deeply grieved with. God is not the author or creator of sin in any way whatsoever.

Calvinists will even try to use the Bible to teach that God is the Creator of sin. They misuse Isaiah 45:7 which says, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and *create evil*: I the Lord do all these things." The Hebrew word used for evil means "calamity."⁵⁷ Calamity is *physical* evil. It does not mean that God created *moral* evil. God talks about bringing "evil" or calamity to a city to punish their sins (Neh. 13:18; Jer. 21:10; 25:29; Amos 3:6). God did not say, "I make righteousness and create evil." Evil is not contrasted with righteousness but is contrasted with peace, because the evil referred to is calamity. God gives peace to the righteous but God destroys the wicked. That is because God never wanted sin to occur but wants men to be righteous. God told His people to "put away evil" from among them (Deut. 13:5;

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17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 22:22, 24; 24:7; Jdg. 20:13; Ecc. 11:10; Isa. 1:16). This command shows that evil was not God's will for them. God wants us to be holy all of the time. God wants us to be sinful none of the time.

God does not take pleasure in sin but is grieved and angry with sin (Gen. 6:5-6; Ps. 7:11). God loves righteousness but hates sin (Prov. 6:16; Isa. 61:8; Zec. 8:17; Heb. 1:9). God is pleased with men when they live holy (1 Thes. 4:1; Heb. 13:16; 1 Jn. 3:22). And all things were created for the *pleasure* of God (Rev. 4:11).

Therefore, we can conclude that God did not create sin, neither did God create us for sin! God did not create what He hates; neither did He create us to do what He hates! God takes pleasure in righteousness and God created us for His pleasure. Therefore, God created us for righteousness. We were created to live right, to walk in love and live free from sin.

God even regretted the creation of our race when He saw how we became sinful (Gen. 6:5-6). And hell was not created for mankind (Matt. 25:41). Therefore, sin was not in the mind of God when he created man, neither was man in the mind of God when he created hell. Man was created for God's pleasure. Therefore nobody was created to live in sin and to die in sin, since God takes "no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Eze. 33:11), but "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Ps. 116:15). "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness" (Ps. 5:4).

Consider these truths in logical syllogisms:

- We were created for the pleasure of God (Rev. 4:11).

God wants us
to be holy all
of the time.
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to be sinful
none of the
time.

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- God is pleased when men live holy (Isa. 61:8; Heb. 1:9; 1 Thes. 4:1; Heb. 13:16; 1 Jn. 3:22).
- Therefore, mankind was created to live holy!
- We were created for the pleasure of God (Rev. 4:11).
- God takes no pleasure in sin or in the death of the wicked (Gen. 6:5-6; Ps. 5:4; 7:11; Prov. 6:16; Eze. 33:11; Zec. 8:17)
- Therefore, mankind was not created to sin and go to hell!

If God's will was always done, sin would never have occurred and everyone would be saved. The sin and damnation of man proves the *resistible* will of God and the free will of man. Sin was actually an interruption in the plans of God (Gen. 6:5-6). Sin was not the will of God but was a rebellion against His will. This is contrary to the words of Tucker who stated, "Sin, or moral evil, is... a wise and holy ordination of God."⁵⁸ and "Not an impure thought, word, or act, more or less, can arise among the creatures, than God has actually determined the being and permission of. Omnipotence cannot pervade, or absolute wisdom guide his arm; if any thing comes to pass and he commands it not."⁵⁹ In other words, he is saying that sin is the command of God, instead of what the Bible says, that sin being transgression of God's commands (1 Jn. 3:4).

Sin was actually an interruption in the plan of God.

Tucker asked, "Does, or can, any thing come to pass, and the Lord command it not?"⁶⁰ We should let the Lord Himself answer this question in vindication of His own character. When men would worship idols and false gods, the Lord said that they were doing what "*he commanded*

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them not” (Lev. 10:1; Deut. 17:3). In other words, they were not choosing in accordance with His Divine plan or will. But if all things are the will of God, the reason that millions worship idols is because of “the good pleasure of His will.” It would be completely empty of any meaning or value for God to say that they did what “*he commanded them not*” if they were doing what He had decreed.

When Israel would sacrifice their children to the false god of Baal, God said they did “which I commanded them not, nor spake it, *neither came it into my mind*” (Jer. 19:5). When Israel sacrificed their children to the false god Molech, He said they did “which I commanded them not, *neither came it into my mind*, that they should do this abomination...” (Jer. 32:35). If God decreed that they would worship these false gods and sacrifice their children to them, God would not be able to say “*neither came it into my mind*” with any honesty. Either God is lying, or God has not decreed and ordained “whatsoever cometh to pass” as the Westminster Confession teaches.⁶¹ Either the Bible is right and the Westminster Confession is wrong; or the Westminster Confession is right and the Bible is wrong, but they both cannot be true. God could not say “*neither came it into my mind*” if it was in His mind that their sin was planned!

Someone might say, “But the Westminster Confession says that God’s decree of sin does not take away second causes, so that He is not the author of sin even though He decrees all sin.” Yes, their confession says that. But if they say that mankind is the *second* cause of sin, then that would make God and His decrees the *first* cause of sin! So while they might deny teaching that God is the “author of sin” because He is not the “second cause,” they essentially say that He is the cause of sin because they say He is the first cause of it. They object to the specific phrase “author of sin,”

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but they do not ultimately object to the notion or concept of it, since they say that He decreed the existence of sin and is its first cause.

But Israel was told, "...loathe yourself *in your own sight* for all *your evils that ye have committed*" (Eze. 20:43). The Hebrew word "committed" actually means to "make," bring forth," and "fashion."⁶² It makes sense that they should loathe themselves for their sin, since they are the authors and creators of their sin. On the contrary, how could they loathe themselves in their own sight for their sins if their actions were caused by God or if their evils were created by the Lord? Unless their actions were caused or created by their own free will, they could not loathe themselves in their own sight. If we knew in our minds that God caused our actions instead of ourselves freely causing them, it would be impossible for our minds to loathe and condemn ourselves for those actions. Men cannot blame themselves for their sin unless they know that they are the cause of their sin.

When Israel would sacrifice their children to idols, God said to them, "ye pollute yourselves" (Eze. 20:31). But if they sacrificed their children to idols because of God's fatalistic plan, God could not charge them with polluting themselves since He was really the one who polluted them. He could not charge them for what He was guilty of! God blames them and them alone for their sin, clearing Himself from all responsibility.

But Reformed Theology charges God with causing all the child sacrifices and abortions of the world, causing the slaughter of millions of innocent babies. Yet, God speaks very differently of His character when He says that He hates the hands that shed innocent blood (Prov. 6:16-17). It is no wonder that many Christians consider "Reformed Theology" to be "deformed theology." Instead of exalting God, it insults Him! Their view of "The Sovereignty of God" is really a

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mockery to God! The doctrine of free will makes man the author and cause of sin, but Calvinistic sovereignty makes God the author and cause of sin. Strangely, the former is labeled as heretical and the latter is considered orthodox! If heresy is teaching that man is to be blamed for sin, not God, then call me a Bible believing, happy heretic!

Contrary to the teachings of men like Luther and Calvin, that God is the cause of all sin, the Bible explicitly says that God is not the author of everything. Paul said, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (1 Cor. 14:33). But if Calvinism is true, God is not only the author of confusion, but He is the author of everything! He would be

Calvinistic
sovereignty
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the author of sin, which is far worse than confusion! If God causes all things, Paul would be lying by saying He is not the author of confusion. And if God causes sin, it certainly would not vindicate the character of God to say that He is not the author of confusion.

The Bible, in the Hebrew, says that the Lord will not "*ordain*" or "*work*"⁶³ iniquity (Zeph. 3:5). Yet the Westminster Catechism says that God "*ordained*" all the sins of history! And John Calvin said, "Whatever things are done wrongly and unjustly by man, these very things are the right and just works of God."⁶⁴ God cannot be a worker of iniquity and not be a worker of iniquity at the same time. Therefore, either the Bible is right and God does not ordain and work iniquity, or Calvinism is right and God ordains and works evil; but they both cannot be right because they are saying the exact opposite.

James White is a modern apologist for the Reformed or Calvinist faith and he gave us an example of the "right and just works of God." He was asked, "When a child is raped, is God responsible and did He decree that rape?"

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James White answered, "Yes."⁶⁵ All sinful actions, according to Calvinism, are the just and right works of God.

In my mind, this would make both the child and the rapist victims of God's fatalistic will! Consider the consequences of what Calvinism is saying here. If Calvinism were true, when we pray "Thy will be done" (Matt. 6:10; 26:42), we would be praying for children to be raped! In fact, if Calvinism is true, *Jesus* taught us to pray for children to be raped because *Jesus* taught us to pray "Thy will be done..." If Calvinism is true, *Jesus* taught us to pray for the occurrence of all the sins of the world! How could any Christian pray thinking that? We are supposed to pray "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven" because God's will is better than what is occurring on earth, not because everything that happens on earth is already God's will!

The best criminal defense a person could have in court would be, "It's not my fault. God made me do it." Is God the "the mastermind" behind all the crimes of our society? If He was, every crime that is prosecuted is really the work of God being prosecuted! Every sin that is condemned is the condemnation of the work of God! You can forget about praying, "...lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13), God straight out forces you to sin by His irresistible will!

Remember how Martin Luther said, "Since, therefore, God moves and does all in all, He necessarily moves and does all in Satan and the wicked man..."⁶⁶ He also said that God is a worker of iniquity by saying, "God worketh all things in all men even wickedness in the wicked..."⁶⁷ Are we to blame God for all the acts of wicked men? Think of all the awful stories you have ever heard on the news. Are we to credit to God's "Sovereignty" or "the good pleasure of His will" all of the tragedies of our world? Is God to blame for all the kidnappings each year? Or for

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how many girls are sold into the sex trade? Or for how many people die by drunk drivers? Is God the cause of all the suicides in the world?

This was not the wonderful picture that God had envisioned and planned for the world at creation! These events were not secretly decreed by God, as if God were such a heinous monster! These events are caused by man's own free will, because our race has become a heinous monster! If God decreed sin then sinners go to hell for doing the will of God. In the Scriptures, we don't see God sending sinners to hell for doing His will, but for rebelling against it.

We are to pray "Thy will be done in earth" (Matt. 6:10). This prayer presupposes that God's will is not always being done on earth. The moral condition of the earth is that of degeneracy, a state of corruption. We live in a fallen world. Morally, this world is chaotic and in disarrangement. It is in rebellion against the will of God, not in a state of submission and loyalty to Him. The Bible says that men "*rejected the counsel of God against themselves*" (Lk. 7:30). This presupposes the free will of man, which can reject and rebel against the will of God.

An example is the nation of Israel. Israel was God's vineyard which He cultivated to bring forth good grapes. But He was disappointed when they brought forth wild grapes. The Bible says, "he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes... What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (Isa. 5:1-4).

God willed one thing to take place and it didn't take place, because there are other wills involved. God said, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Isa. 1:2). Clearly the will of God is not always being done on earth. That is because mankind has been created by God as free moral agents, who have wills of

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their own, who are capable of choosing His will or rejecting it.

The Bible speaks of those who “did that which was *evil in the sight of the Lord*” (Num. 32:13; Deut. 4:25; 31:39; Jdg. 2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1; 1 Sam. 15:19; 2 Sam. 12:9; 1 Kin. 11:6; 14:22; 15:26; 15:34; 16:7; 16:19; 16:30; 21:20; 22:52; 2 Kin. 3:2; 8:18; 8:27; 13:2; 13:11; 14:24; 15:9; 15:18; 15:24; 15:28; 17:2; 17:17; 21:2; 21:16; 21:20; 23:32; 23:37; 24:9; 24:19; 1 Chron. 2:3; 22:4; 33:2; 33:6; 33:22; 36:5; 36:9; 36:12; Jer. 7:30;). That means that God did not approve of what they did and He did not want them to do it. The Bible talks about those who did “that which was right *in his own eyes*” (Jdg. 17:6; 21:25), as opposed to doing “that which is right in the sight of the Lord” (Deut. 6:18; 12:25; 12:28; 21:9; 2 Kin. 12:2; 14:4; 15:3; 15:34; 16:2; 18:3; 22:2; 20:32; 24:2; 25:2; 26:4; 27:2; 28:1; 29:2; 34:2). Regarding those who “*would not* hearken” to the Lord, God said “I gave them up unto *their own hearts’* lust: and they walked in *their own counsels*” (Ps. 81:11). “Yea, they have *chosen their own ways*” (Isa. 66:3). Clearly, God did not force them to do His will but let them go their own way. Jesus said, “*If* any man will do his will” (Jn. 7:17). Jesus said “if” because the will of God is not automatically chosen by man. If God’s will was always done, there would be no “if” about it.

Jesus even mourned over Jerusalem and said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often *would I* have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and *ye would not!*” (Matt. 23:37). So the will of Jesus was resisted by the will of man. This proves the freedom of man’s will and proves that God’s will is resistible. The fact that “Jesus wept” (Jn. 11:35) shows that He does not always get what He wants.

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Despite all these Biblical examples of the will of God being resisted and rebelled against, Tucker said, “What God does not will to be done, cannot be done: and what he wills, must be done.”⁶⁸ Nothing could be any plainer from the Bible but that the will of God is not always done! John Benson said, “There is no Scriptural evidence for asserting that God decreed the existence and entrance of sin. The doctrine is based upon stoic philosophy, logical argument, perverted Scripture and human assertions. But as for a ‘Thus saith the Lord’ for the doctrine, there is no such thing to be found between the backs of the Bible.”⁶⁹

Contrary to John Calvin’s blasphemous charge that “God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also *at his own pleasure arranged it*,”⁷⁰ the Bible explicitly and plainly describes God’s great *heartache* and *disappointment* with mankind because of their sin. What a great tragedy to read “...*it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth* (Gen. 6:5-6). The fall of our race did not bring any “pleasure” to God. It was not arranged for “his own pleasure.” God was deeply upset with mankind’s sin because that is not what He had planned for us! That is not what He created and designed us for! God did not publicly grieve over man’s sin when secretly He had caused them to do it! Mankind’s sin was not the result of God’s secret decrees, but was the result of man misusing and abusing the free will that God gave them.

Gordon C. Olson said, “Beloved, when God had made such glorious and blessed plans for His creature man, and man had forsaken the great heart of God for sinful pleasure, and further, grew worse and worse, can we form any conception of the sorrow and grief that came upon the blessed Trinity when they ‘saw’ such wickedness? And further, when God contemplated man’s glorious endowments, created so that man might fellowship with and

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understand his Creator, now being used to devise means of sinful gratification, who shall measure God's sorrow...?"⁷¹

M. W. Gifford said, "A being cannot be infinite in goodness that does not desire the happiness of every intelligent being, and feel an interest in its welfare. God must, therefore, be mindful of man, or he cannot be God."⁷²

God is a real person with real experiences. He has real pains and real pleasures. God grieves over man's sin and God rejoices over man's repentance. We must not project Greek ideas of perfection unto the Hebrew God. God is not some *impassible* being that is *unaffected* by His creation. God has taken a great interest in His creation and is deeply concerned with it.

God is an infinite being. His love for righteousness is infinite and His hatred for sin is infinite. Therefore His grief over our sin must be infinite. With infinite desire, He wants our universe to be sinless and perfect. And with infinite sorrow, He mourns over the sinfulness and corruption of our race.

CHAPTER FOUR

MAN'S ABILITY TO OBEY THE MORAL LAW

As we just saw, the fall of Adam and Eve was not an inevitable or unavoidable event, since God gave them a free will and did not predestine, decree, or cause their fall. The law that God gave Adam and Eve was, therefore, not impossible, since God had given them the ability necessary to obey it and had even given them the incentive, motive, or influence necessary to do so. The fact that they were tempted to sin implies that it was their own voluntary choice, since temptation is a suggestion to your mind, not something which forces your will, but that which influences your choices when in fact an alternative or opposite choice can be made. If they were forced to sin, it could not be said that they were tempted to sin. But since they were tempted to sin, sin was their own free will choice.

The question now at hand is whether the freedom of the will, which God endowed mankind with at Creation, survive the sin of Adam and Eve. The cause of their sin is clear; but what are the effects of their sin? Free will was the cause of their sin; but did free will survive their sin? In other words, does mankind retain free will after the rebellion of Adam and Eve?

Did God Punish Mankind By Removing Free Will?

As we saw in a previous chapter, after Augustine converted from Gnosticism, he introduced to the Church a concept that was never before held by Christians. He came to teach that when Adam sinned, God *punished* all of mankind by *removing their ability to obey Him*. God punished all mankind for Adam's sin by removing mankind's free will. In this view, God made sin unavoidable and inevitable and He made holiness impossible and unattainable.

Augustine said that the "free choice of the will was present in that man who was the first to be formed... But after he sinned by that free will, we who have descended from his progeny have been plunged into necessity."¹ He said, "By Adam's transgression, the freedom of the human will has been completely lost."² And he said, "By the greatness of the first sin, we have lost the freewill to love God."³ Finally, he said that "by subverting the rectitude in which he was created, he is followed with the punishment of not being able to do right" and "the freedom to abstain from sin has been lost as a punishment of sin."⁴ In other words, God punishes mankind for Adam's sin by making sin unavoidable and by making obedience impossible. The inability to obey is the punishment of disobedience in this view.

When we read about all of the consequences of Adam's sin, which God declared to him, the loss of free will was not included, mentioned, or even hinted at (Gen. 3:16-19). Theodore W. Elliot said that if our ability to obey God was lost "God surely would have mentioned it here. The most devastating and far reaching consequence, of the fall, that man teaches, and God does not even mention it in the curse."⁵

The Justice of God

Justice is not some arbitrary standard, which is invented by the will of God, but is an idea in the divine mind as to how everyone ought to be treated according to their intrinsic value and personal character. Consider how the following question assumes that there is a standard of justice, which God Himself abides by. “Doth God pervert judgment? Or doeth the Almighty pervert justice? (Job 8:3). The Bible even says that God has done certain things “*that he might be just*” (Rom. 3:25-26). This implies that there is a standard of justice which He complies with. And it teaches that God is just because He complies with this standard. God is just because He chooses to do that which is just.

God is an infinite Being. He is infinite in all of His natural and moral attributes. Therefore, one cannot view God as being “too just.” God is infinitely just in all of His ways.

The idea that God *punishes* all of Adam’s posterity for his sin, which is a sin that they did not cause or commit, is contrary to God’s explicit justice. God has repeatedly said, “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16; 2 Kng. 14:6; 2 Chron. 25:4). “For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even *the soul that commit them* shall be cut off from among their people” (Lev. 18:29).

This principle of justice was not only what God required of the civil government of Israel, but it is the very principle of His own moral government in the universe. “What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb... *the soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Eze. 18:2-6)

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Under the just moral government of God, “the son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father...” (Eze. 18:20).

While commenting on this truth, Albert Barnes said, “This is the great, and just, and glorious principle of the divine administration; a principle stated expressly in opposition to the charge that the innocent are punished for the crimes of the guilty; and designed forever to free the divine administration from that accusation. It would be impossible in stronger language to state the principle.”⁶

This explicit teaching of Scripture is contrary to the traditions of men, not only of the traditions of Jews in the Old Testament, but also contrary to the traditions of the theologians after the New Testament who said, “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.”⁷ But who can say that it is unjust for a person to bear their own sins? Who can say that God is unjust for holding each individual accountable for their sins and their sins only? None can accuse God with injustice for this principle of His moral government. But it would take a very long time to try to convince the mind of any rational man that they are guilty of a sin which they did not commit or to convince their mind that they committed a sin that occurred before they even existed! If you haven’t done anything, you are not guilty of anything. You are only guilty of that which you have caused.

Justice, especially God’s justice, demands that the son does not bear the iniquity of the father. It is unjust, according to retributive justice, to punish a man for a crime he didn’t commit or which he didn’t cause. *If this is not unjust, nothing ever could be unjust.* The innocent are not being treated as they deserve or according to their personal deserts, if they are punished for the sins of the guilty. It is therefore to treat them unjustly.

God is just and that is why He will not “condemn the guiltless” (Matt. 12:7). Since you can only be guilty of your

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sins, you can only be justly punished or condemned for your sins, because just punishment is according to personal guilt. According to retributive justice, a man cannot be justly *punished* for a sin that he did not commit or cause because a man cannot be *guilty* of a sin that he did not commit or cause. It is inconceivable that a person can be truly guilty of an action which they did not cause or which they did not participate in. A man is innocent of any crime that he did not commit, or that he did not cause, and therefore a man cannot be justly punished for a crime that he did not commit or cause.

Punishment for sin is earned or deserved by the one who caused the sin. Unless an individual is personally guilty, they cannot be justly punished. Hugo Grotius said, "...no one is to be punished beyond his ill-desert..."⁸ John Owen said, "There can be no obligation to punishment where there is no desert of punishment..."⁹ And he also said, "The guilt of sin is its desert of punishment. And where this is not, there can be no punishment properly so called."¹⁰ It is unjust to punish the innocent for a sin that is not theirs. Retribution, or just punishment, is according to personal demerit or personal character, and that is determined by a person's own will or choices.

Consider these truths in the form of syllogism:

- Punishment under the moral government of God is according to personal character and guilt.
- Personal character and guilt is according to personal choices.
- Therefore punishment under the moral government of God is according to personal choices.

Justin Martyr said, "We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishment,

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chastisement, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions."¹¹

Turretin said, "The justice of God does not inflict punishment, except upon him that deserves it."¹²

Dr. Richards said, "Sin guilt, ill-desert, are, in the very nature of things, personal; and punishment pre-supposes guilt, and guilt in the subject: neither the one nor the other is properly transferable..."¹³

Magee said, "Guilt and punishment cannot be conceived but with reference to consciousness which cannot be transferred..."¹⁴

Andrew Fuller said, "Real and proper punishment, if I understand the terms, is not only the infliction of natural evil for the commission of moral evil, but the infliction of the one upon the person who committed the other, and in displeasure against him. It not only supposes criminality, but that the party punished as literally the criminal.

The concept of transferred guilt would make a mockery of the justice of God.

Criminality committed by one party, and imputed to another, is not a ground for real and proper punishment..."¹⁵

The idea of *deserving* punishment before you are *born*, before you make *choices*, before you have *character*, and before you are *guilty*, is nonsensical injustice. The notion of being guilty of the sins of another through "*imputation*" implies that you are originally innocent, that it is God who makes you guilty, and that God considers you to be guilty when in fact or in reality you are truly innocent. The concept of *transferred guilt* would make a mockery of the justice of God under His moral government and would contradict everything He has said about His own justice.

Man, as a free moral being, has the power to originate and create his own choices and is therefore

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accountable and responsible for his choices and for *his choices only* (Jer. 17:10; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:5-6; 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 11:15; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:11-12; Rev. 22:12). The Bible says, "...the righteous judgment of God: who will render every man *according to his deeds...*" And, "... the Father, who without respect of persons, judgeth *according to every man's work...*" (1 Pet. 1:17). "And I saw a great white throne... And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according to their works*" (Rev. 20:11-12).

Punishment is according to personal character, personal character is determined by choices; and therefore, punishment is according to personal choices. To treat a being contrary to their character is to treat them contrary to how they deserve be treated. To treat a man contrary to how he deserves to be treated is either an act of grace and mercy, or it is an act of injustice. But it is never an act of justice. If a man is treated *more favorably* than he deserves, it is an act of grace and mercy. If a man is treated *less favorably* than he deserves, it is an act of injustice. But if a man is treated more favorably than he deserves or less favorably than he deserves, it is never an act of justice. To treat a man justly is to treat him according to his character or according to what he deserves. All men know that a man is dealt with "justly" if he "receive the due reward of" his "deeds" (Lk. 23:41).

God has given mankind an inner sense of justice so that we intuitively know the self-evident truth that, according to retributive justice, a being cannot be punished for a crime that they did not commit. All men know that retributive justice is when each individual is responsible for their own choices. If the innocent are falsely accused and are consequently punished, we all know that great injustice was

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done because they were not treated the way that they deserve according to justice.

Abraham knew this principle of justice in God's moral government and asked, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do *right*?" (Gen. 18:25). This question assumes that there is a standard of right which God abides by. The statement that, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works" (Ps. 145:17), would be vain of any real meaning or significance if there was no standard of righteousness and holiness which God freely chooses to live by. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and *upright* are thy judgments" (Ps. 119:137). The statement that God "shall judge the people *righteously*" (Ps. 96:10), implies that there is a standard of righteousness which God Himself judges by.

Abraham naturally knew that it wasn't right for the righteous, if there were any, to be punished with the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah. It is a self-evident truth of justice that "the soul that sinneth, *it shall die*" (Eze. 18:4, 20). The one who ought to "die" is the same one who "sinneth." It is unjust for a man to be punished for a sin that he didn't commit. Just punishment cannot exceed guilt, and guilt cannot exceed personal choice.

King David also knew this self-evident principle of justice. "And David said unto God, is it not *I* that commanded the people to be numbered? Even *I* it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; *but as for these sheep, what have they done?* Let thine hand, I pray thee, O Lord my God, be on me, and on my father's house, but not on thy people, that they should be plagued" (1 Chron. 21:17).

David was a king with a heart for his people. He knew God's justice and thought that if he could convince God that these people did nothing wrong, they would be spared. He thought that if he argued that he alone was guilty, then according to justice, he alone would be punished. But

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God brought a *corporate punishment* because it was a *corporate sin*. David had “commanded” that the people be numbered, but the rulers of the people had to *go number them* and the people themselves had to *stand to be counted*. Nevertheless this incident shows us how David understood the justice of God, thinking that he might be able to spare the people if he could convince God that he alone was to be blamed.

You cannot be justly punished unless you are guilty. You cannot be guilty unless you have personally chosen what is wrong. And therefore, you cannot be justly punished unless you have personally chosen what is wrong. Crime is necessarily antecedent to punishment. Criminality lays the foundation for punishment under a just government, so that without criminality there can be no just punishment. Criminality implies the choice of the offender. Unless a moral being chooses to transgress, he is not a transgressor. If criminality must come before punishment, and choice is involved in criminality, then choice must come before punishment.

Before we can be punished by God, we must first choose to rebel against the law of God. But our choice was not involved in the criminal actions of Adam. And consequently, we cannot be justly punished for it. We were not conscious of his choice neither did we consent to his choice. And since we had no participation in his sin, we do not share in his guilt, and therefore we cannot justly participate in the punishment of his sin. Punishment is according to demerit, and demerit is according to personal choices.

This is not to say that all of mankind may suffer *consequences* of the sin of Adam. However, to represent God as *punishing* men for a sin, which they did not commit, is to represent God as unjust according to the inner sense of

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justice, which God Himself has given us and according to the explicit teachings of God's justice in His Word.

It is unjust to punish a man for a crime that he did not commit, or which he could not have avoided. If the crime was not committed by the power of his agency or if the crime could not have been avoided by the power of his agency, he is beyond the limitation of just sanctions for that crime. In fact, to blame a man for an action, which he did not commit, is to *falsely accuse* him. To blame him for that which he did not do is to make an accusation contrary to reality or truth.

In civil government, whenever it is discovered that a man was executed or suffered capital punishment for a crime, which eventually became known to have not been committed by him, a great injustice is always considered and felt by the public as having occurred. Likewise, if it is discovered that a man spent many years in prison for a crime that is revealed as not being his crime, who would not recognize that he was falsely accused, mistakenly convicted, and suffered injustice all those years of imprisonment?

It is unjust to punish a man for a crime that he did not commit, or which he could not have avoided.

It is self-evident to all that no man can be justly blamed for an action that he did not cause. Neither can a man repent of an action that he did not cause, since they cannot regret doing that which they did not do. That is why Albert Barnes said, "...men are not to be represented as to blame, or as ill-deserving, for a sin committed long before they were born, and that they are not to be called on to repent of it"¹⁶ The reason a person never feels guilty for their ancestor's sin is because they are not guilty of their ancestor's sin. They are not guilty of another person's sin because they had no

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involvement in it. The laws of our mind are such that we actually cannot feel guilty or convicted for that which we know we did not commit.

The sins of our ancestors occurred without our knowledge and without our consent; therefore, we cannot feel blame for them. The reason that God never calls anyone to repent of the sins of their parents is because we are not responsible, accountable, punishable, or condemnable for the sins of our parents. We need not feel guilty for their sins neither do we need to repent for their sins, but we are guilty of our own sins and must repent of them alone.

Leonard Ravenhill said, "God will not penalize me for Adam's sin. God will not penalize Adam for my sin; but He will penalize each of us for our own sin."¹⁷ Lord Coke said, "...no one is punished for the sin of another..."¹⁸ L. D. McCabe said, "The Scriptures nowhere teach that we are guilty of the sin of Adam, or that we are punished therefore."¹⁹

While there are natural consequences, which have come upon mankind because of Adam's sin, just as our children may suffer consequences from our choices and innocent people can suffer as victims of the sins of others, the idea that God has directly punished our entire race for the sin of Adam is contrary to the justice of God. Therefore, Augustine's idea that all men have been "punished" by God for Adam's sin by having their free will removed cannot be true because it contradicts, conflicts, and clashes with God's moral attribute of justice. "Great and marvelous are they works, Lord God Almighty, *just* and true are they ways..." (Rev. 15:3). The attribute of God's justice must not be sacrificed in order to hold unto any doctrine, no matter how ancient, popular, or orthodox that doctrine is considered to be.

The Reasonableness of God

God is not only infinitely just, God is also infinitely reasonable. There are those in theology who talk derogatory of reason, as if God were not reasonable or as if reason were not a gift from Him. Only an unreasonable theology fears the use of reason. God is a reasonable being and we were made in His image. That is why God does not discourage reasoning but actually encourages it. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isa. 1:18). This takes for granted that God is reasonable and that man has the ability to reason. Reason is on God's side because God is reasonable and is the source of reason itself. The laws of logic are nothing more but the laws which govern God's thoughts. They are the laws of His divine mind.

But the idea that God punished Adam's *disobedience* by making *obedience* impossible for everyone else simply and plainly is unreasonable. It makes absolutely no sense at all. It would make more sense for God to make disobedience impossible when He saw their sin, but why would God make obedience impossible?

If you are upset with your child for using drugs, you wouldn't somehow make sobriety impossible for them and their children. If you could, maybe you would make drugs impossible for them and their children. Why then would God be so upset with Adam for his sin that He makes sin unavoidable for the rest of us? Or why would God be so upset with Adam's choice not to be holy that He made holiness impossible for the rest of us? To be angry at *sin*, and thus punish on account of that *sin* by making *sin* itself unavoidable, makes absolutely no sense but would be the height of unreasonableness.

Only an unreasonable theology fears the use of reason.

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If I want my child to walk, I will not break his legs. Or if I want my child to see, I will not pluck out his eyes. God's heart is for a holy and obedient people. It would be contrary to God's heart for Him to remove man's ability to obey. God is so much against sin that He punishes it. If God punishes man for disobedience, God must want obedience from man. And if God wants men to obey Him, why would He remove from them the ability to obey? God would have no reason to take away man's free will or to make obedience impossible and disobedience unavoidable. Pelagius reasoned, "Sin ought not so to have been punished, that the sinner, through his punishment, should commit even more sins."²⁰

Why would God give men a free will *so that they could choose holiness*, only to take away that free will by making the choice of holiness impossible at the very first choice of sin? If God granted man a free will so that man could do right and avoid evil, He would not take away man's free will because of Adam's sin so that men could no longer do right and avoid evil. If God wants obedience, He would grant and not withhold the ability to obey. Unless God wants men to sin, He would make sure that they always have a free will ability not to sin. Unless God wants men to sin, He would not take away their free will because of Adam's sin. If God makes sin inevitable and holiness impossible, we would have to conclude that God doesn't want us to be holy, but we would have to conclude that God wants us to commit sins!

If free will was removed by God as a punishment for Adam's sin, and sin became inevitable or unavoidable while obedience became impossible and unattainable, then God would be ultimately responsible for all the sins that mankind has committed after Adam. The sins of mankind would not be our fault since it was unavoidable because of our *God given nature*. All our sins would ultimately be God's fault because He is the One who made these sins unavoidable! Sin

is man's fault for which God cannot be blamed, only if man has a free will.

How Can Free Will Be Lost?

The doctrine that Adam lost the free will faculty of our nature is not rational or Scriptural. Adam could not have changed the faculties of his nature because man does not have the ability to change the faculties of his nature. Adam could not give himself free will nor could Adam take it away. Adam is not "the God of nature." The composition of man is beyond his control or determination. Adam doesn't have the authority or the power to change human nature for all mankind. Man cannot choose to change his nature; and therefore, Adam could not take away the free will that God gave mankind. Not even the devil can determine what the faculties of our nature are. Only God can create or change the faculties of our constitution which we are born with. And since God created man's nature "good," He certainly would not want to change it.

Only God
can create or
change the
faculties
of our
constitution.

Man is capable of determining or changing his character, but a man is not capable of determining or changing the constitution he is created with. The faculties of our constitution are not the result of our choice but are the product of our Creator's choice. God is our Maker. God is our Designer. God is our Creator. God is the one who forms the constitution or nature of each individual (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 27:11; 43:1; 43:7; 44:2; 44:24; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 26:10; 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Prov. 20:12; 26:10; Ecc. 7:29; 31:15; 35:10; Mal. 2:10; Acts 17:29; Rom. 9:20; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3). Our composition is God's creation. Our nature is the product of

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God's hands, which formed us in the womb; and therefore, our nature at birth is precisely what God wants it to be. To say otherwise would be to say that God does not form us in the womb or to say that God forms our nature to be what He doesn't want it to be. "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them" (Prov. 20:12). "And the Lord said unto him, who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?" (Exo. 4:11). Whatever the faculties of our constitution are at birth, they are such by the creation and design of God.

Dennis Carroll said, "The Bible does not teach that free will was lost. The Bible assumes that God created man with free will in the first place. Man does not have the ability to change his nature and free will is part of his nature. God would not destroy man's nature because He said he made it good. And the devil, he cannot change man's nature... So there is no possible way that he can lose part of his nature. God wouldn't do it. Man cannot do it. The devil cannot do it. So the way God created man is the same way man has continued to be. And God has held them responsible to obey His commandments from the beginning of the Garden of Eden, all the way through the Old Testament, into the New Testament."²¹

Some may think that sin, on its own or as a natural consequence, so ruined human nature that obedience became impossible. But free will could not have been lost by Adam's sin unless God took it away. Sin could not, of itself, damage or impair the faculty of the will. Sin is a choice of the will. It is an exercise of the faculty of will. But the choice of the will or the exercise of the will, could not of itself damage the constitutional faculty itself. Just as the choice of righteousness does not so change a man's constitution so that sin becomes impossible, the choice of sin does not so change

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a man's constitution that righteousness becomes impossible. The choice of disobedience did not impair man's constitution anymore than the choice of obedience can repair man's constitution. It is not man's constitution that changes when man's choices change. It is man's character that changes when man's choices change. The constitution or faculties stay the same; while the moral choices or the exercise of these faculties change. Man does not have the power to determine what the faculties of his nature are. If free will was lost because of Adam's sin, it would not be a *natural consequence* since your choices do not change your nature; it would have to be a *positive* or *direct punishment* from God, since God alone determines what our nature or natural faculties are.

But why would a God of justice punish us for a sin that He knows we didn't commit? And since God hates sin and loves righteousness, it makes no sense for Him to make sin unavoidable and for Him to make obedience impossible. Why would God make unavoidable the very thing that He hates? Why would He make impossible that which He loves? It simply makes no sense for God to take away our free will as a punishment for Adam's sin. God gave us a free will in the first place for good reasons and those same reasons are why God would not take away our free will because of Adam's sin. God gave us a free will so that we could freely choose to love Him and love our neighbor. Mankind still has a free will because God still wants us to love Him and love our neighbor. Neither sin nor God removed free will from mankind. That is why Alexander of Alexandria said, "Natural will is the free faculty of every intelligent nature..."²²

Sinners cannot blame their disobedience upon a defect in the constitution that God has given them or upon a lack of God's grace, because God in His justice has already

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given all men the necessary faculties and abilities to make them the proper subjects of His moral government. The idea that free will became *disabled* by Adam's sin and, therefore, needs to be *enabled* by God's grace does not make any sense. Just as it makes no sense for God to give us free will only to take it away, it would make no sense for God to give us free will then take our free will away only to give it back again! The reasons that God had in granting man's nature the faculty of free will in the first place are sufficient for God to make sure that such freedom is protected and preserved.

Irenaeus said, "God has always preserved freedom and the power of self-government in man."²³ He further stated, "...man is possessed of free will from the beginning."²⁴ Origen said, "...the faculty of free will is never taken away..."²⁵ Cornelius Van Til said, "Sin did not take away from man any of the natural powers that God had given him."²⁶ Dr. Twiss said, "...no faculty of our nature is taken away from us by original sin..."²⁷ Pelagius said, "We have first of all to discuss the position which is maintained, that our nature has been weakened and changed by sin. I think that before all other things we have to inquire what sin is, - some substance, or wholly a name without substance, whereby is expressed not a thing, not an existence, not some sort of a body, but the doing of a wrongful deed. I suppose that this is the case; and if so how could that which lacks all substance have possibly weakened or changed human nature?"²⁸ And, "'No will can take away that which is proved to be inseparably implanted in nature."²⁹ Julian of Eclanum said, "free will is in all by nature, and could not perish by the sin of Adam; which assertion is confirmed by the authority of all Scriptures."³⁰ And elsewhere he said, "...free will has not perished, since the Lord says by the prophets, 'If you be willing and will hear me, you shall eat

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the good things of the land: if you are unwilling, and will not hear, the sword shall devour you.”³¹

We read about God being emotionally disturbed and upset with men for their sin all throughout the Bible. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And *it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.* And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth...” (Gen. 6:5-7). When God changes His mind when new developments occur, it is not that God is a failure, but that creation failed God. Creation was not living up to God’s expectation and plans. But why would God be grieved over their sin and even repent of creating mankind if He was the one who removed their free will when Adam sinned? Why would God be grieved over their sin and even repent of making them if He knew all along that they were going to sin because He made obedience impossible? It only makes sense for God to be grieved and upset with sinners for sinning if they are capable of not sinning.

God chose to make Himself vulnerable when He created other beings in His image with a free will. We could bring joy or grief to God’s heart. Man, as a free moral agent, is capable of disappointing his Maker! Sin was not God’s plan, desire, or expectation. God had planned holiness for mankind and expected obedience from us. No verse could communicate God’s divine disappointment more than this passage does.

God’s disappointment over man’s sin is very telling. All disappointment implies expectation. Disappointment is nothing more than failed expectations. The fact that God was disappointed with them for their sin teaches that God created them for obedience and expected obedience from them. How could God, or why would God, expect obedience from them

if He had removed the ability to obey from them? God would not be brokenhearted over man's sin unless man's sin was avoidable. The only way that God is reasonably and rationally disappointed with them for their sin is if He knew that they were capable of not sinning and knew that they still had the natural ability to obey His law even after the fall of Adam.

God is the Author of our Nature

When discussing man's natural ability, we must understand that God is the author of our nature. This was briefly mentioned already but should be expounded upon here. It is an undeniable truth of Scripture that God is the cause of our constitution. Neither Adam nor the devil forms our nature. The Bible says that God personally forms our constitution in the womb. Just as the Bible says that God *formed* Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:7-8; 1 Tim. 2:13), the Bible uses the same words and language to say that God forms us in the womb (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 27:11; 43:1; 43:7; 44:2; 44:24; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 26:10; 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Prov. 20:12; 26:10; Ecc. 7:29; 31:15; 35:10; Mal. 2:10; Acts 17:29; Rom. 9:20; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3). "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about... thou hast made me as the clay... Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews" (Job 10:8-9, 11). "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them" (Prov. 20:12). "The great God formed *all things*..." (Prov. 26:10). "As thou knowest not what is the way of the *spirit*, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God *who maketh all*" (Ecc. 11:5). "Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that *maketh all things*..." (Isa. 44:24). "*All things* were made by

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him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn. 1:3). “For of him, and through him, and to him, are *all things...*” (Rom. 11:36). “God, who created *all things* by Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:9). “For by him were *all things* created... *all things* were created by him... by him *all things* consist” (Col. 1:16-17). “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God...” (Acts 17:29).

God did not merely create Adam in the beginning and then step back as Deism claims. The Bible says that men “*are* and *were* created” (Rev. 4:11). Our nature is not the product of mere natural generation. Theism teaches that God is actively involved in our formation. Hence, He is not uninvolved in our formation. God did not just create Adam and Eve, but God is the Creator of everyone and everything (Mal. 2:10; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16). The difference between Adam and Eve and the rest of mankind is not that God created them while we merely descend from them through natural generation, but that God created them without a womb while God creates us within one.

To blame sin upon a defective constitution is to blame our Creator for sin.

Since God is the author of our nature, it makes sense that He would make us naturally capable of obeying Him. It is the will of God for mankind to obey His law, but it is the will of the devil for us to disobey it. Since God is the author of our nature, instead of the devil, we are naturally capable of obeying His will. Since it is the will of the devil for us to disobey, it would also be the will of the devil for our nature to be incapable of obedience. Since the devil does not give us our nature, we do not have a nature that makes obedience impossible or disobedience unavoidable.

To blame sin upon a defective constitution is to blame our Creator for sin. To blame sin upon a faulty design

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is to blame our Designer for sin. But we are told that God does not even tempt us to sin (Jas. 1:3), so how can we say that God gives us a nature that cannot even help but to sin? James goes on to tell us, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...” (Jas. 1:17), but if God gives us a nature that makes sin unavoidable and obedience impossible, that is not a good gift! We would be able to say that “the worst of all gifts is from above...” How could we say, “I will... ascribe righteousness to my Maker” (Job 36:3), if He makes it so that we sin necessarily, inevitably, or unavoidably? King David said, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are they works...” (Ps. 139:14).

If we are created with a nature that makes obedience impossible and sin unavoidable, we cannot say that we are marvelously or wonderfully made! How could we praise our Creator for our constitution if He creates us with such a defective nature? But we can say with David, “I will praise thee” if we are truly wonderfully and marvelously made with the ability to obey righteousness and avoid sin.

God has created our nature or constitution with the faculty of free will. The freedom of the will is a natural attribute of mankind. All men everywhere already have within them the ability or power to obey or disobey the revealed will of God, to choose good or evil. God has given us this natural ability but how we use it is up to us. God is responsible for giving us a free will since He is the author of our nature; but we are responsible for how we use our free will since we are the ones in control of it.

The Son of Adam Had Free Will

The Psalmist said, “Lo, children are an *heritage of the Lord*: and the fruit of the womb is *his reward*” (Ps. 127:3). When Eve had her first child, she knew that this child

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was given to her by God. “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have begotten a man *from the Lord*” (Gen. 4:1). The Lord was the Maker and Designer of Cain. The Lord created His composition and constitution. The nature that Cain had was the product of the hands of God.

Cain was made in the image of God just as Adam was (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7). The Bible says that men are “made after the similitude of God” (Jas. 3:9) even after the fall of Adam. Despite the clear teaching of Scripture, some theologians object to the idea that the image of God survived the fall of Adam. They will point to the fact that Seth was made in the image of Adam (Gen. 5:3). Yes, Seth was made in the image of Adam, but Adam was made in the image of God; and therefore, Seth was made in the image of God. The descendants of Adam were made in the likeness of Adam, and Adam was made in the likeness of God, and therefore the descendants of Adam are made in the likeness of God. Just as God created Adam in His image with intelligence, emotions, and free will, so God creates Adam’s descendants in the same image. Since God wanted Cain to live righteously, He gave Cain a free will just as He had given his father Adam a free will.

God spoke to Cain as a free moral being after the fall of Adam.

God’s dialog with Cain is a very telling narrative. God tried to persuade him not to sin. God sought to influence Cain’s will by presenting motives to his mind. We know that the free agency or free will of man survived the fall of our first parent because God spoke to Cain as a free moral being after the fall of Adam. “And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not

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well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Gen. 4:6-7).

A free moral agent is an individual who is free to determine his own moral character. Free will is the ability to choose between obedience or disobedience. God spoke to Cain as if he had a free choice between two options. “*If* thou doest well” means Cain had a choice of doing well and “*if* thou doest not well” means that he had the choice of not doing well. Sinning was a possibility and not sinning was a possibility. The word “if” in both of these situations implies the possibility.

Cain had the ability of choice to do what was right or what was wrong. Cain had the power to rule over sin or not. Sin was not necessitated but was avoidable. God reminded Cain that because of this ability that he had, he had no reason to be upset. If Cain had inherited a ruined nature from his father, which made obedience completely impossible and sin totally unavoidable, Cain would have a reason to be upset because he could not rule over sin. God’s dialog with Cain would make no sense at all if free will was lost because of Adam’s sin.

We see that despite God’s efforts to persuade Cain to make the right choices and avoid sin, Cain still went on to murder his own brother. This wickedness was not the result of Cain’s nature, which he inherited from Adam. This wickedness was the result of Cain’s own will. This is implied when God said, “What hast *thou* done? (Gen. 4:10). It was Cain’s own fault. That is why God said, “...now *thou* art cursed...” (Gen. 4:11).

It is a self-evident truth that the one who is the cause of sin is the one who ought to be punished for the existence of that sin. God punished Cain for his sin because his sin was his own choice. You cannot punish someone for something that was not their fault or for something that they could not

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avoid. We know that Cain's choice was an avoidable choice because of God's previous dialog with him. God spoke to him as a free moral being that could do right and rule over sin. Therefore, Cain was punishable for his actions.

A sinner is punishable for his sin because his sin is his own avoidable choice. Sin is not birthed out of some necessity and defect in our inherited nature. Sin is originated out of the freedom of our wills. Cain had nobody to blame for his sin but himself.

The Goodness of God's Law

When asking whether or not man has the ability to obey the law of God or not, we must ask, for what purpose has God even legislated laws throughout His universe? What is the point of moral government? To answer that question, we must ask ourselves what is the purpose of any law or any government? What right does law and government have to exist anywhere?

The *right of government* is rooted in the *necessity for government*. If there is no necessity for government, the existence of government would be tyranny. But government is necessary for the well-being of people. Therefore, government has a right to exist. There is a government in family, in society, and in the universe, because it is absolutely necessary for the well-being of sentient beings that there be such.

The purpose of a civil government is to promote the well-being of the community. Civil government "is the minister of God to thee *for good*" (Rom. 13:4). Civil government is responsible for the well-being of society and so they establish social laws. Officials are elected whom we believe have the intelligence and good character to legislate for the good of the people.

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The purpose of family government is to promote the well-being of the family (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13; 29:15). Parents are responsible for the well-being of their children and so they establish family law. By virtue of age, parents know better than their little children do. Little children have inferior minds to their adult parents, being ignorant of many things of this life, so they are dependent upon the superior mind of their parents to govern their lives, to promote their well-being and keep them from harm.

The purpose of moral government or the design of God's laws is to promote the highest well-being of all (Deut 5:29; 6:3; 6:24; 10:13; Jer. 7:6, 23; 32:39; Lk. 6:9; Eph. 6:3). As our Creator, God is responsible for the well-being of His creation and so He has established moral law. There is a necessity for God's government over us; and therefore, His government is not tyranny. As our Superior, He is qualified to govern us and we are dependent upon Him to do so by virtue of our finiteness.

God has an omniscient and, therefore, superior mind. Therefore, every act of disobedience towards God is an act of distrust towards Him, a challenging and questioning of His intelligence and character; but every act of genuine obedience towards Him is an act of genuine trust towards Him, being confident in the superiority of His intelligence and the goodness of His character. If we trust God's character and intelligence, we will do whatever He says. God always knows what is best and right and God always commands what is best and right.

God told Israel that His law or commandments were "*for thy good*" (Deut. 10:13). God is a Benevolent Moral Governor. God's moral law or moral government over us is His benevolent means and effort of securing our good and the good of all. His moral law is not arbitrary but is loving

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and intelligent. God not only values Himself, but God recognizes that man also has intrinsic value (Lk. 12:7).

His moral law regards everyone according to the order of their value. Since God is supremely valuable, His moral law promotes His own happiness and glory supremely (Matt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27). We are commanded to love God supremely, which is to supremely will His good. And since all men are equally valuable, God's law promotes the well-being of men equally (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mk. 12:31-33; Lk. 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8). We are commanded to love our neighbor equally, which is to will their good as equally as our own. The object sought by the law is the well-being of everyone.

The law forbids selfishness and commands love (Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14). Love is the committal of the will to promote the well-being of another (Jn. 3:16; 15:13). The Ten Commandments (Exo. 20: 1-17; Matt. 19:18-19; Rom. 13:9), the Golden Rule (Lev. 19:34; Matt. 7:12; Lk. 6:31), the two Greatest Commandments (Matt. 22:37-39; Mk. 12:29-33; Lk. 10:27-28), are all designed to promote the highest well-being of all. God's law is good for absolutely everyone.

It should be easy for us to love the law of God when we recognize that it is not some arbitrary requirement, but see how good and reasonable His requirements really are. The law of God is absolutely good and worthy of our obedience. Imagine a universe where there was absolutely no sin! Imagine if transgression did not exist! Image if everyone always obeyed the law of God! Imagine if everyone made the choice to promote the well-being of everyone else! The universe would be full of perfect bliss and happiness.

Nathaniel W. Taylor said, "By a perfect moral government then, is here meant not a moral government which actually secures, but one which in its true nature and

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tendency is perfectly adapted to secure, and which unperturbed would secure the great and true end of such a government, even the highest conceivable well-being of its subjects.”³² Albert Barnes said about the law of God, “If obeyed, it would produce happiness everywhere.”³³ This helps us to understand why “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). The law of God is good in both precepts and sanctions. The precepts are good because they promote the well-being of all, and the sanctions are good because they uphold and maintain the precepts.

While it is true that the law shows us our sin (Rom. 7:7, 13), and therefore it shows us our need for forgiveness through Christ (Gal. 3:24), the reason that we need forgiveness through Christ in the first place is because we violated a good law. If the law was not good, we wouldn't deserve punishment for violating it and consequently we wouldn't need forgiveness for transgressing it. We deserve punishment and need forgiveness for breaking the law because the law is good in the first place. And the law is good because it promotes the rights and well-being of all. No command could possibly promote the rights and well being of all more than the commandment to love God supremely and to love your neighbor equally.

Having established the goodness of the law, we can now conclude from the goodness of the law that we have the ability to obey it. If the law of God is good, then obeying the law of God is good. If obeying the law of God is good, then to have the ability to obey the law of God would be good and not having that ability would be bad. God is good and He is the Author of our nature; therefore He would give us the ability to obey His law and would not withhold it or take it away from us. Every good and perfect gift has been given to us from above (Jas. 1:17). Since God's law is good and since

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He wants us to obey His law, He has given us the good gift of free will that we might all experience the blessedness of holiness and avoid the misery of sin

The Bible says that it is a blessing to be turned away from sin (Acts 3:26). Sin is transgression of God's law (1 Jn. 3:4). To be turned away from sin is to cease to break the law of God. Therefore, it is a blessing to cease to break the law of God! If it is a blessing to obey or keep the law of God, the law of God must itself be good. If God is good, and if the law of God is good, God would not take away our ability to obey the law, but would actually give us the ability to keep it.

The command to "sin not" (1 Cor. 15:34) and to "sin no more" (Jn. 15:14; 8:11) takes for granted that sin is bad, but God's law is good. If sin was good and what God's law demanded was bad, He would command us to sin! That is because He is good. Since God forbids us to sin but demands that we keep His commandments, sin must be bad and His law must be good. If God's law is good, why would He remove or withhold from us the ability to obey it? If sin is truly bad, why would God not give us the ability to avoid it? We must conclude from the goodness of God's law and the awfulness of sin that God has created us with the ability to obey Him and the power to avoid sinning. It makes no sense for God to create us with the inability to do what He wants us to do and the impossibility of not doing what He doesn't want us to do.

It is a blessing to cease to break the law of God.

We can conclude from the goodness of God that His law can be obeyed. The Bible describes the goodness of God's character when it says that "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8). God is a benevolent being and He wants the good of His creation. Therefore, God wants all to obey His law because

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His law promotes the well-being of all. If God really wants His law to be obeyed, He would not withhold from us the ability to obey it. If God really cares about His universe, He would make it possible for His subjects to obey His law. If God took away our ability to obey, we must conclude that God does not want His law to be obeyed. And if God does not want His law to be obeyed, God must not really love or care about His universe. God would not be loving towards Himself or towards His universe if He made His law impossible. Out of His regard for His own glory and out of His love for His universe, God has granted moral beings the capability of doing that which would result in His glory and in the well-being of His universe.

A life of holiness and obedience is what glorifies the Lord.

We are commanded to “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (Ps. 29:2). God is glorified by obedient people. God is glorified when His people choose to serve Him in holiness. Just as you “honor your father and mother” (Exo. 12:15) when you obey them, so you honor and glorify God when you obey Him. It dishonors parents when their children are rebellious, and it dishonors God when His creation revolts. If God has any regard at all for His own glory, He certainly would not make obedience and holiness impossible for us. A life of holiness and obedience is what glorifies the Lord; and therefore, He has made it possible for man to live a holy and obedient life.

It would be contrary to the very heart of God to remove from man his free will or to make obedience impossible and sin unavoidable. God’s will is to have a holy people (Gen. 6:5-6; Jer. 11:7-8; Matt. 5:48; Lk. 1:75; Eph. 1:4; 1 Thes. 4:3; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). God’s will for mankind is not sinfulness and unrighteousness but righteousness and

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holiness. Yet, if God removed from us or withheld from us the ability to obey His law, we would have to logically conclude that His will or plan for our lives was sinful. We would have to believe that God wants us to be sinful, since He has made sinfulness unavoidable and holiness unattainable. But if God wanted us to be sinful, He wouldn't command us to be holy. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). Therefore, He is sincere in commanding obedience from us. When God says that He wants us to obey Him, He is genuinely communicating to us His will. He does not command us so that we would disobey Him, but so that we would obey Him.

If God is good, He doesn't want us to sin. If God doesn't want us to sin, God wants us to be holy. If God wants us to be holy and not sin, He would give us the ability to be holy and not to sin. If God doesn't give us the ability to be holy, God doesn't want us to be holy. If God doesn't want us to be holy, God wants us to be sinful. If God wants us to be sinful, God is not good. We, therefore, must conclude that because God is good, God wants us to obey His law; and since God wants us to obey His law, He gives us the ability to do so.

God Let's Men Decide

When God created man's nature with the faculty of free will, He created man with the liberty or ability of choosing to live a sinless life or to live a sinful life. This is a decision that God has left up to man to make. Regarding the unrighteous, we are told "*choose* none of his ways" (Prov. 3:31). This means that the way that you are going to live your life is your own choice, which you are at liberty to decide. As the Bible says, "Behold *I set before you* this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing *if* ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God.... And a curse *if* ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God"

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(Deut. 11:26-28). If this does not teach that man is capable of obedience or disobedience, that man has the choice between the two, then nothing ever could! God has left the decision between obedience and disobedience up to us.

Ignatius said, "...and there is set before us life upon our observance [of God's precepts], but death as the result of disobedience, and every one, according to the choice he makes, shall go to his own place, let us flee from death, and make choice of life."³⁴

Tertullian said, "...you will find that when He sets before man good and evil, life and death, that the entire course of discipline is arranged in precepts by God's calling men from sin, and threatening and exhorting them; and this on no other ground than that man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance."³⁵

Adam Clarke commented on Deuteronomy 11:26 and said, "If God had not put it in the power of this people either to obey or disobey; if they had not had a free will, over which they had complete authority, to use it either in the way of willing or nilling; could God, with any propriety, have given such precepts as these, sanctioned with such promises and threatenings? If they were not free agents, they could not be punished for disobedience, nor could they, in any sense of the word, have been rewardable for obedience. A Stone is not rewardable because, in obedience to the laws of gravitation, it always tends to the center; nor is it punishable because, in being removed from that center, in its tending or falling towards it again it takes away the life of a man. That God has given man a free, self-determining Will, which cannot be forced by any power but that which is omnipotent, and which God himself never will force, is declared in the most formal manner through the whole of the sacred writings. No argument can affect this, while the Bible is considered as a Divine revelation; no sophistry can explain

away its evidence, as long as the accountableness of man for his conduct is admitted, and as long as the eternal bounds of moral good and evil remain, and the essential distinctions between vice and virtue exist.”³⁶

God's Divine Disappointment

Origen wrote, “Now it ought to be known that the holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to everyone . . . This also is clearly defined in the teaching of the church that every rational soul is possessed of free-will and volition.”³⁷ And, “There are, indeed, innumerable passages in the Scriptures which establish with exceeding clearness the existence of freedom of will.”³⁸

As we saw, God spoke to all of the Israelites as beings who had the freedom of choice. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life” (Deut. 30:19). “I have set before you” and “therefore choose” means that life and blessing or death and cursing was their free choice to decide and not something that God would predestine or decide for them. “Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death” (Jer. 21:8). “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Josh. 24:15). God was not going to force them to serve Him. He left that up to them to decide. That is because God wants people to willingly serve Him. God wants a people who serve Him because they truly *want* to. If God wanted to, He could have created machines that *had* to do His will. Instead, He created beings that had the choice. The Israelites had the natural ability to choose to serve Him or not, that is, they were free to decide to obey Him or to disobey Him.

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That explains why God was so disappointed with Israel for their sin. God's heart was broken over their sin. God said, "I am broken with their whorish heart" (Eze. 6:9). How awful it is to hear God say, "I am broken..." Our minds cannot conceive the depth of the grief that sin has caused the heart of God. God is an infinite being! His capacity for grief and heartache is infinite! God so greatly wanted them to be obedient to Him and bemoaned their disobedience. "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well

God's heart
was broken
over their
sin. God
said, "*I am
broken...*"

with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deut. 5:29). "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" (Ps. 81:13). "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!" (Isa. 48:18) Why would God bemoan the disobedience of Israel, unless they were capable of obedience? Why would God be grieved with their disobedience, if He was the One who made obedience impossible

and disobedience unavoidable when Adam sinned? God takes for granted, or assumes, the ability of man in these passages.

Consider these logical syllogisms:

- Disappointment implies expectation.
- God was disappointed over man's disobedience.
- Therefore, God expected obedience from man.

- Expecting obedience, if reasonable and rational, implies the ability to obey.
- God is reasonable and rational and He expected men to obey Him.
- Therefore, men had the ability to obey Him.

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- If God wants men to obey Him, He will give them the ability to obey Him.
- God wants all men to obey Him.
- Therefore, God has given all men the ability to obey Him.

Chrysostom said, “God has put good and evil in our own power... he has given us a free power to choose the one or the other...God has endued us with free agency...”³⁹

We see the freedom of man's will in the fact that God chastened His people in the hopes that they would change. He was actually disappointed that they chose not to change. “In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction” (Jer. 2:30). God hoped that they would repent and He even labored for their repentance, but God did not get the result that He hoped for and worked for. In the end, His chastisement was vain, because they decided not to receive correction. If God's effort and disappointment does not show that God has granted man a free will, what would?

How is it even possible for the divine mind to experience disappointment? The answer is that in creating beings with free will, God introduced to reality, even to His own reality, an element of contingency. Their future free choices are possibilities. These contingencies or possibilities create uncertainty, even to the divine mind. That is because God's omniscient mind perfectly corresponds with reality, and since reality now has an element of contingency and uncertainty, God with His divine omniscient mind can experience disappointment with how things turn out. God Himself can have failed expectations.

God even repented of making Saul king because of Saul's choice to backslide and become disobedient. “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is

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turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments” (1 Sam. 15:11). God actually expected obedience from Saul, which means that obedience was possible from him. It would be unreasonable for God to expect obedience when obedience is impossible. God had a genuine disappointment because God had a genuinely failed expectation. This passage shows that Saul’s will was free to choose between obedience and disobedience. God wanted Saul to obey Him, but God granted Saul the freedom to choose for himself.

There were kings such as Jehoash, Amaziah, Azariah, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah, Joash, Jotham, and Ahaz who “did that which was *right* in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 12:2; 14:1-3; 15:1-3; 15:32-34; 18:1-3; 22:1-2; 2 Chron. 24:2; 27:1-2; 28:1). They were not forced to do evil as children of Adam but were free to make the choice to do what was right.

On the other hand, there were kings such as Jehoram, Ahaziah, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam, Zachariah, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Ahaz, Hoshea, Manasseh, Amon, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, who “did that which was *evil* in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 8:16-18; 8:26-27; 13:1-2; 13:10-11; 14:23-24; 15:8-9; 15:17-18; 15:23-24; 15:27-28; 16:2; 17:1-2; 21:1-2; 21:19-20; 23:31-32; 2 Kings 23:36-37; 24:8-9; 19-20). This shows that after the fall of Adam, doing what was right or doing what was evil remained a contingent possibility for men to choose between.

The Divine “If”

It is clear in the Scriptures that God does not believe that obedience is impossible from His subjects. The Bible says that God tests men *to see if they will obey His law or not* (Gen. 22:12; Ex. 16:4; Deut. 13:3; Jdg. 2:20-22; Jdg. 3:4; 2 Chron. 32:31). Theodore W. Elliot said, “God stated that

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He was testing them to see if they would keep the way of the Lord. If they were born with a nature that makes it impossible to obey and meet the requirements of the Lord, this was a meaningless test.”⁴⁰ “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, *whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no*” (Deut. 8:2). If this does not show that God believes men have the ability to obey Him, than nothing ever could show it. Why would God test men, to see whether they will obey Him or disobey Him, if it is already certain that they will not obey, or if they do not have the ability to do so? Their moral character must be something that they can freely decide. Their moral character must not be a foregone conclusion. Character is a contingency not a certainty because the will is free. It is clear that men have the possibility of obeying God or not since He tests men to see if they will obey Him or not.

The Lord actually looks to see if there are any men who obey Him. “*The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. Every one of them is gone back: they are all together become filthy, there is none that doeth good no, not one*” (Ps. 53:2; 14:2).

It seems evident that if God is looking to see if there is any man who is not gone aside, who is not filthy, who actually doeth good, that these things must not be impossible for them. It is obvious that God must not have taken away their ability to do these things, if He looks to see if they are doing them. It is clear that God must not have predetermined what they would be, but has left it to their own choice, if God looks to see what they are. The same is implied when God said, “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the

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land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none" (Eze. 22:30). God is repeatedly looking for obedient men and is repeatedly disappointed when He doesn't find them.

However, there have been a few times when God looked for a man who would obey Him and He actually found one. God said, "*I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will*" (Acts 13:22). Notice that God "found" a man who would be obedient to Him. He did not cause or force a man to be obedient to Him. He discovered an obedient man. The fact that God looks for men who would be obedient shows that God believes obedience from man is possible. It would be unreasonable for Him to look for what He knows to be impossible. Likewise, the fact that God has actually found men who are obedient toward Him shows that obedience from man toward God is not impossible at all.

It seems that besides some events that were exceptions, David was a perfect man. "For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and *his heart was not perfect* with the Lord his God, *as was the heart of David his father*" (1 Kin. 11:4). David said, "The Lord shall judge the people: judge me, O Lord, according to *my righteousness*, and according to *mine integrity* that is in me" (Ps. 7:8). "The Lord rewarded me according to *my righteousness*; according to the *cleanness of my hands* hath he recompensed me" (Ps. 18:20). "Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from *anything* that he commanded him *all the days* of his life, *save only* in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kin. 15:5). This clearly shows us that it is possible to have a perfect heart before God and to obey His commandments in everything all the days of your life. And *if* sin occurs at all, it should be the exception and not the rule.

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God said to Israel, "*If thou wilt* walk in my ways and *if thou wilt* keep my charge..." (Zech. 3:7). But if God knew all along that nobody could walk in His ways or that nobody could keep His charge, then God was being insincere and misleading in His statements, which gave them the impression that they could or that it was a real possibility. God repeatedly spoke of Israel's future in this way, as consisting in two possibilities: a course of obedience or disobedience. God said, "*If ye walk* in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them... But *if ye will not* hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments;... and *if ye shall despise* my statutes, or *if your soul abhors* my judgments... And *if ye walk* contrary to me... and *if ye will not* be reformed by me... (Lev. 26:3-28). Their future moral character was not predetermined, either by God's will or by their nature, but they were free to determine their course themselves by their own will. What they would do was an open possibility.

All throughout the Bible, God speaks of man's obedience as a genuine possibility that can be brought to reality or as a contingency that can be brought to actuality. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). Therefore, the reason that He gave men the impression that they had a free choice between the two possibilities of obedience and disobedience is because they actually did have these alternative options. The Bible says "*if ye will obey*" (Exo. 19:5; 23:22; Deut. 11:27; 1 Sam. 12:14; Zec. 6:15). It also says "*if ye will not obey*" (Deut. 11:28; 1 Sam. 12:15; Jer. 12:17; 18:10; 22:5; 22:21; 26:4). The word "if" clearly signifies a contingent possibility or two alternative courses, which men are free to choose between. God said, "*If ye be willing and obedient*, ye shall eat the good of the land: but *if ye refuse and rebel*, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. 1:19-20). God said, "...if the wicked will

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turn from all his sins...” And also “when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness” (Eze. 18:21, 24). Man has been so created by God that he is able to pass from righteousness to sin and able to pass from sin to righteousness. Our moral character is our own choice, which we are free to decide.

Justin Martyr said, “Every created being is so constituted as to be capable of vice and virtue.”⁴¹

Clement of Alexandria said, “To obey or not is in our own power...”⁴² He also said, “But we, who have heard by the Scriptures that self-determining choice and refusal have been given by the Lord to men, rest in the infallible criterion of faith, manifesting a willing spirit, since we have chosen life and believe God through His voice.”⁴³

Tertullian said, “I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power.”⁴³

Archelaus said, “He gave to every individual the sense of free will... our will is constituted to choose either to sin or not to sin... And certainly whoever will, may keep the commandments... There can be no doubt that every individual, in using his own proper power of will, may shape his course in whatever direction he pleases.”⁴⁵

Irenaeus said, “Man is endowed with the faculty of distinguishing good and evil; so that, without compulsion, he has the power, by his own will and choice, to perform God’s commandments.”⁴⁶

James said “*If* ye fulfill the royal law...” (James 2:8). The word “if” indicates that it is possible to obey the law and possible to disobey the law. Obedience or disobedience is not certain but contingent. They are both possibilities. These contingent possibilities are reflected in the words of Job, “*It may be* that my sons have sinned...” (Job 1:5). This shows that Job believed sin to be avoidable, not inevitable.

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Conditional prophecies in the Scriptures also show that men have a choice between two possibilities. These types of prophecies show that the course of man's future is a genuine contingency, which is determined by their own volition. We see this in the following: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: *if* that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, *I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them*. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; *if* it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then *I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them*" (Jer. 18:7-10). Remember that the word "if" in passages like this implies two possibilities or alternatives. It indicates that men have the ability of either obeying or disobeying.

Those who are disobedient can repent and become obedient and those who are obedient can repent and become disobedient. God has so made man with the freedom of will that the righteous can become wicked and the wicked can become righteous. Individuals are free to determine their own moral character. It is not God who determines who repents and who doesn't or else God would never have occasion to change His plans in response to man's repentance, as this passage showed that He does. God has given men the choice to repent or not and to obey or not. It is within the self-determining power of man to decide. Nothing could be any more positive proof that God does not determine that sinners will repent or that saints will persevere in holiness than the fact that God changes His plans in correspondence with the changing choices or character of men.

The righteous
can become
wicked and
the wicked
can become
righteous.

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God let's men determine if they will repent of their sins or if they will persevere in holiness. It is within a man's power of self-determination to decide his own moral character. Sinners have the freedom of choice to repent and saints have the freedom of choice to backslide. If our will was not free, sinners would never repent and saints would never sin. The fact that sinners do sometimes repent, and that saints sometimes do sin, is proof that our will is free to choose between obedience and disobedience.

Sinners have the freedom of choice to repent and saints have the freedom of choice to backslide.

Moral character cannot be determined by what is outside of man but only by what is inside a man. Man's moral character must be self-caused, self-determined or self-originated, or else it is not really their moral character. The character of an individual must be determined internally to himself, not externally to himself. The moral character of an individual must be caused or determined by that same individual and not caused or determined by another individual.

Thus, it would be impossible for God to determine the moral character of anyone else. Moral character can only be determined by a being's own internal will. That which is moral always relates to the will. That which is a moral attribute of a being must be originated or determined by his will. Apart from free will, there can be no moral character at all. Man is spoken of in the Bible as possessing moral character; and therefore, man must be in possession of free will.

If mankind does not have a free will, why would God speak of the future in terms of what *may or may not* be? (Lev. 26:3-28; Ex. 3:18, 4:9, 13:17; Eze. 12:3). Free will would necessarily mean that the future has possibilities. If

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man's nature has the faculty of free will, this would perfectly explain why the future is spoken of as having contingencies. But if man's nature has been deprived of this faculty of freedom, why does God speak of the future in terms of contingencies as if the possibilities for man's choice still exist? We also see God expecting things to happen that didn't happen (Gen. 18:19; Isa. 5:1-5; Jer. 2:30; 3:6-7, 3:19-20; Acts 13:22). How can this be explained apart from understanding that God has so granted man the power of choice, that this freedom of his nature creates contingencies and possibilities in the future?

The following passage illustrates this truth perfectly. "Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: *and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.* And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" (Isa. 5:1-4).

Clearly, God had planned one thing, but because of man's free will, what God wanted did not come to pass. There are times when God will bring about His purposes contrary to, or despite, man's free will. But there are other times when His purposes depend upon man's free will and can even be hindered on account of that. In this case, God planned for them to bring forth good grapes, but instead they brought forth wild grapes. God planned and expected obedience from them, but they did not yield it. God would not anticipate obedience from them, nor influence them to

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obey, if they were not capable of doing so. God had influenced them to obey Him, knowing that they were capable of obeying Him, and expected obedience from them; yet, they still refused. God had apparently given them the power to *decide for themselves* what type of fruit they would bear or what type of moral character they would create. As Justin Martyr said, “Each man is what he will appear to be through his own fault.”⁴⁷

Moral Character is Self-Chosen

Man has the power of choice to determine for himself what his moral character will be because man was created in the image or likeness of God.

Moral character is not something which you are born with, or something which another being can give you, or something you possess merely by passive existence, or something you can have through the necessity of nature. Moral character requires personal and free choice. Moral character is determined by your wills obedience or disobedience to the moral knowledge of your mind. Moral knowledge plus moral choice equals moral character.

A good being is one who freely chooses what they know to be right. An evil being is one who freely chooses what they know to be wrong. Without moral knowledge and without free choice there can be neither virtue nor vice. Apart from these, there can be no moral character at all.

The Bible describes God Himself as possessing the knowledge of good and evil. “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become *as one of us, to know good and evil...*” (Gen. 3:22). Since God knows good and evil, He is under moral obligation. And therefore, He is capable of moral character.

The fact that God knows right from wrong, is under moral obligation, and freely chooses His own moral

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character, is implied in the following Scriptures: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do *right*?" (Gen. 18:25) "The Lord is *righteous* in all *his ways*, and *holy* in all *his works*" (Ps. 145:17). And, "...the Lord is *upright*: he is my rock, and there is *no unrighteousness in him*" (Ps. 92:15).

All these verses imply that there is a standard of righteousness which God Himself complies with. There can be no moral character without moral obligation. Since God is described as possessing moral character, this presupposes that God is under moral obligation.

What is it that could possibly obligate the Lord? What would impose obligation upon His will? The answer is that God's *divine will* is under obligation to His *divine mind* or *divine conscience*, which affirms the intrinsic value of the well-being of all sentient beings. Therefore, morality is not subjective or relative but is absolute and objective *even to God*.

God's
divine will
is under
obligation
to His
divine mind.

Moral law is essentially an idea of the mind. More specifically, moral law is an idea of the mind as to how a moral being ought to act and behave toward others. Since moral law originates in God's omniscient mind, and therefore, transcends man's finite mind or the arbitrary will of any being, there is a foundation, ground, or basis for absolute morality or objective moral truth.

On the other hand, if the moral law was an arbitrary invention of God's will, then He could change or reverse the moral law at any moment. The law of love could be abrogated. He could make selfishness right and benevolence wrong. It would be right for Him to forbid charity and command rape and murder. But if moral law originates in His divine mind and is, therefore, reasonable and in accordance with the nature of reality, then the moral law is

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not at all arbitrary, relative, or subjective in any sense whatsoever.

To answer the theological question, “Is it right because God commands it? Or does God command it because it is right?” The Bible says, “I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things *that are right*” (Isa. 45:19). It is not that God can just command anything and everything and it would be right simply because He commands it. Rather, God commands things because they actually are right. David said, “The testimonies that thou hast commanded *are righteous* and very faithful” (Ps. 119:138).

This implies that there is a standard of righteousness which God’s commandments comply with.

God
commands
things
because they
actually
are right.

God’s moral law is in accordance with the nature of reality. Given the nature of things, or the order of each one’s value, it is actually right to love God supremely and your neighbor equally. This is because God is supremely valuable and your neighbor is equally valuable. Because of the nature of reality, or the intrinsic value of the well-being of a sentient being, it actually is wrong for any moral being to be selfish or self-centered. Right and wrong are in no way arbitrary but are absolute due to the nature of reality.

God’s is an infinite Being and is, therefore, necessarily omniscient. God’s omniscient mind perfectly perceives reality as it actually is. Therefore, God’s omniscient mind necessarily affirms the intrinsic value of well-being because the well-being of a sentient existence actually is intrinsically valuable in the nature of reality. The mind of God cannot help but to affirm this truth.

For example, God’s own well-being is intrinsically valuable. There was never a time when God decided that His

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well-being would be valuable. His well-being simply is valuable in the nature of things. That is, God's well-being is good *for its own sake* and therefore ought to be chosen *for its own sake*. This is why the first greatest commandment requires that our choice terminates upon the well-being of God as an end in and of itself. And man's well-being, since man was created in the image of God, also has intrinsic value. Therefore, the second greatest commandment requires that the choice of our will terminates upon the well-being of our neighbor for its own sake or as an end in and of itself.

The object sought and commanded by the moral law, which is the highest well-being of all according to the order of their value, must be of intrinsic worth. Otherwise, if it were only of relative worth, or for its relation to something else, it could not be an *ultimate* object or an *ultimate* end sought and commanded by the law. No being could choose the highest well-being of all as their *ultimate* intention and purpose unless that end was intrinsically valuable. The will of any being could not choose that end *for its own sake* unless it was valuable in and of itself. But since that is the object and end sought by the moral law, and since it is demanded of us to make that our ultimate aim and intention, it must of necessity be of intrinsic value.

The moral law is, therefore, an expression of the nature of reality. The moral law is an expression of the nature of God and the nature of man, as it presupposes and essentially declares the intrinsic value of their well-being.

It is this mental perception of the nature of reality, which recognizes that the highest-well being of all is intrinsically valuable, which the omniscient mind of God necessarily affirms, which is where the idea of moral law originated from. It is the knowledge of good and evil which forms God and man's moral obligation. The moral law of God is, therefore, not only a declaration of what man ought

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to do, but also an expression of the moral obligation which God Himself chooses to live by.

That God chooses to have a holy moral character, or that He decides to comply with His moral obligation or His mind's perception of what is good, is implied by the fact that holy beings in Heaven worship Him by saying, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty*" (Rev. 4:8). The fact that God is praiseworthy for possessing a holy character indicates that a holy character is something which He has chosen to have. If God had no choice in what His character is, but was forced by some necessity to have a certain state of will, He could not be personally praiseworthy for possessing a good character.

In fact, holy angels would be more praiseworthy than God if He did not *freely choose* to be good and holy, because the angels are free to become demons whenever they want but instead choose to be good and holy. If the angels were holy through the liberty of their own wills, but God was holy through the necessity of His nature, the angels would be more worthy of praise and adoration than God.

However, God is more praiseworthy than the holy angels because from all of eternity He has freely chosen to be a good Being. And He is more praiseworthy than the holy angels because God has an infinite mind, with infinite knowledge of good and evil; and therefore, His moral obligation and consequently His moral character is necessarily infinite.

While God certainly does not choose what type of *nature* He has, He does choose what type of *character* He possesses. That is, God did not decide on, or create, His natural attributes. God simply is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He cannot help but to have these natural attributes. He never decided to have these attributes of His nature.

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However, God does choose His moral attributes. God is deliberately benevolent. He chooses to be righteous, holy, truthful, faithful, just, merciful, etc, just as His omniscient mind or divine conscience tells Him to be. Natural attributes are independent of a beings will and are altogether involuntary. Moral attributes, however, are completely dependent upon a beings will and is altogether voluntary.

For example, God's nature does not necessitate Him to be merciful. God willingly and freely chooses to be a merciful Being. Nothing forced God to send His Son Jesus Christ. Nothing forced Jesus to die for our sins. These events, which were acts of mercy on God's part, were all together voluntary and could have been avoided if God wanted them to be. This is explicitly taught when Jesus said, "I lay down my life... No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (Jn. 10:18). And, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53) God's moral attribute of mercy and all consequent expressions of that mercy are altogether voluntary and freely chosen. That is precisely why God is worthy of praise for being merciful!

Charles Finney said, "A natural attribute is that which pertains to a thing by a natural necessity, or whatever is attributable to it, as essential to its existence and nature."⁴⁸ He also said, "A natural attribute is that which belongs to the nature of a being. A moral attribute is a disposition or state of the will. It is a permanent choice or preference of the mind, in opposition to a constitutional or natural attribute, on the one hand, and to individual exercises, on the other... Moral attributes, presuppose MORAL AGENCY... A moral agent... is a being who possesses understanding, reason, conscience, and free-will."⁴⁹

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Someone might ask, “If God’s moral attributes are freely and voluntarily chosen, why is it that the Bible state that God *cannot* lie? Doesn’t that mean that God is forced to be honest and is not free to be otherwise?” Actually, when the Bible says, “God... cannot lie...” (Titus 1:2), the Greek word used for “cannot lie” means “veracious.”⁵⁰ Therefore, this passage teaches that “God is veracious.” You could say, “God cannot lie *because* God is veracious.” Veracious is defined as “observant of truth; habitually disposed to speak truth.”⁵¹ Therefore, this passage means that God is habitually or continually dedicated to honesty. He is utterly unwilling to lie. He is completely and totally committed to truthfulness. In God’s case, since He is an infinite Being, He is *infinitely* committed to truth and *infinitely* opposed to falsehood. On account of that, God cannot lie.

The expression “cannot” in the Scriptures, at times, is used to express an utter unwillingness. For example, when Joseph was sexually tempted and he cried, “...how then *can* I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen. 39:9) Certainly, Joseph had the ability to be sexually immoral if he wanted to but he absolutely did not want to be sexually immoral. Also, “Whosoever is born of God... *cannot* sin” (1 Jn. 3:9). Certainly, Christians are capable of sinning in regards to the ability of their constitution. But they are utterly unwilling to sin in regards to the state or disposition of their will. So when the Bible says that God “cannot lie,” this does not necessarily indicates that God does not have a free will, or that the Omnipotent cannot even do that which little children can do, but that God is completely, totally, utterly, and absolutely unwilling to lie.

The fact that God’s character is self-chosen is also taught by the fact that man has the ability to imitate God in being holy. “Be ye therefore perfect, *even as* your Father which is in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). “But *as* he which

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hath called you is holy, *so be ye holy in all manner of conversation*" (1 Pet. 1:15). We are not commanded to be as holy as God is *in degree*, since God is an infinite being and we are finite beings and, therefore, we cannot be as holy *to the same degree* that He is. But we are commanded to be holy *in the same way* or *in the same manner* that God is holy.

But if God was holy by the necessity of His nature, instead of through the liberty of His will, we could not be holy in the same manner that God is holy. Since we are commanded to be holy and perfect, *as* God is holy and perfect, and a command is a declaration as to what type of choice you should or shouldn't make, this means that we are to be holy and perfect by choice and, therefore, this implies that God is holy and perfect by choice. The command to, "Be ye therefore *followers* of God" (Eph. 5:1) which actually means in Greek to be "*an imitator*"⁵² of Him, implies that God's own moral character is self-caused, self-determined, or freely chosen by His free will, since we are told to be like Him in character by our own free choice.

Jed Smock said, "How reverent and marvelous it is to the great God, for us to know that His actions are not fixed, predetermined, and mechanical, but free, intelligent and benevolent. The truth that God is freely good sets men at liberty to obey the Lord's commandment to 'Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect.'... Just as God is author of His own actions and character, man is the initiator of his own volitions, character and moral nature. The God who wills that none shall perish has put man's destiny into his own hands."⁵³

If God did not have a conscience, or a knowledge of good and evil, and if God did not have a free will, or the power of choice between good and evil, then God could not have moral character at all. But since the Bible does describe God as possessing moral character, God therefore possesses

a conscience and a free will. And since man was made in the image of God, man has a free will just like God has. And further still, since man has a free will just like God has, man can choose for himself what his moral character will be, just like God chooses for Himself what His moral character is.

The Holy Spirit Believes in Man's Free Will

The working of the Holy Spirit presupposes the ability of man to choose the condition or quality of his moral character. That is, the work of the Holy Spirit takes for granted that man freely decides for himself to be either obedient or disobedient to the moral law. The Bible says that the Spirit of the Lord *strives* with men (Gen. 6:3). To “strive” in Hebrew means to “plead.”⁵⁴ God would not plead with us to change, all along knowing it to be impossible. God did not take away our ability to repent, only to then afterwards call us to repentance! The only reason that the Holy Spirit would plead with men or influence men to obey is because men are capable of obeying but are unwilling to do so. They, therefore, need moral influence.

If men are not capable of obeying, the Spirit strives in vain.

If men are not capable of obeying, the Spirit strives in vain. But to strive in vain is foolish and folly. Who would dare credit folly and foolishness to the Spirit of God? The Spirit of God is called the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding (Isaiah 11:2). Either man is capable of obeying or else the Spirit of God is *foolish*. And if the Spirit is foolish, the Bible is *wrong* for calling Him the Spirit of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Therefore, either man is able to obey or the Spirit is foolish and the Bible is wrong.

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The power to decide is also necessary for any genuine conviction of sin. The Holy Spirit has come to convict the world of their sin (Jn. 16:8). Sin is transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4). Therefore, the Holy Spirit has come to convict all men for their violations of God's law. If men are incapable of obeying God, how could they truly be convicted in their hearts for their sin? Conviction is when a person is convinced that they are guilty and are convinced that they deserve punishment. Conviction is when a person is convinced in their conscience that they deserve condemnation. But how could they truly be convinced that they deserve punishment for their disobedience, unless they are convinced that they are capable of obedience? If they were convinced that the law was impossible, instead of feeling conviction, they would feel justified and excused by inability. If men were conscious of inability, they would have an excuse for disobedience. If they are capable of obedience, they have no excuse for disobedience. The Holy Spirit has come to convict the whole world of their sin, because the whole world was capable of avoiding their sin. The Holy Spirit is able to convict men for their sin because deep down they are conscious of having the ability to obey. No man could possibly regret his past actions unless he presupposed that his past actions were avoidable. All men assume the truth of their free will when they regret something they did.

Michael Pearl said, "If we cannot choose to do good.... Why do we feel guilt when we fail? Why do we blame ourselves for not being good? Are we that irrational? We suffer guilt only when we know we have acted differently from how we should have acted. No one feels an obligation to act in a manner he deems impossible. Guilt, being self-incrimination, only occurs when we blame ourselves for our failure. So the universality of guilt is

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irrefutable testimony to the universal belief that we are indeed capable of willing to do good.”⁵⁵

Rev. E. W. Cook said, “Could a convicted soul, in the extremity of its torment from remorse, see and feel that back of its wickedness there lay a necessity under which it acted, the remorse would cease at once. It would instantly clear itself from blame and from mental suffering by the reflection, ‘I could not help it,’ and be at peace. There would no longer be ground for remorse, or the possibility of it. There might be any amount of regret at the unpleasant consequences which have followed, but there could be no self-reproach at being the guilty author of those consequences, and this is the essential ingredient in remorse... Remorse is the soul’s testimony that the sinful conduct was inexcusable. If in certain complicated cases of human action there are some things which appear excusable, and others not, the remorse reaches only those which are seen to be inexcusable, and keeps exact pace with the inexcusableness. Whatever is seen to be excusable, ceases to distress. Self-reproach extends only to that for which the soul can find no good excuse... The testimony of the soul under remorse is, that in the precise circumstances in which it acted wrong, it should have acted exactly the other way – either not to do what it did, or to do that which it neglected to do. Observe – The conviction of the remorseful soul is that there should have been an entire change in the conduct, with no change in the circumstances. It blames itself for acting as it did, the circumstances remaining as they were; thus giving its own highest testimony to its own perfect freedom.”⁵⁶

A writer in the Early Church, possibly Pelagius or one of his disciples, said, "When will a man guilty of any crime or sin accept with a tranquil mind that his wickedness is a product of his own will, not of necessity, and allow what he now strives to attribute to nature to be ascribed to his own

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free choice? It affords endless comfort to transgressors of the divine law if they are able to believe that their failure to do something is due to inability rather than disinclination, since they understand from their natural wisdom that no one can be judged for failing to do the impossible.... Under the plea that it is impossible not to sin, they are given a false sense of security in sinning..."⁵⁷

Charles Finney said, "It is inconceivable that man should be under moral law and government, without the power of free moral action. The logical condition of the existence of a conscience in man is that he should be free... That man is free is evident from the fact that he is conscious of praise or blameworthiness. He could not reasonably blame himself unless it were a first truth that he is free."⁵⁸

Winkie Pratney explains how all those who have ever been angry with themselves presupposed the liberty of will, assuming the power of contingent or alternative choice. He said, "The reason you were angry with yourself was that you knew you were capable of better things, but did not do them." Likewise he said, "God is angry with the wicked every day because He knows what they are capable of and to what depth they have fallen."⁵⁹

Men are not caused to sin. Men are the cause of sin.

Freedom vs. Causation

Men are not caused *to* sin. Men are the cause *of* sin. A sinner is rightly *the object* of God's wrath and anger (Ps. 7:11), because a sinner is the originator or cause of sin (Ps. 7:14; Matt. 5:19; 12:35, Lk. 6:45, Acts 5:4). Men give birth to sin. A sinner "*travaileth* with iniquity, and hath *conceived* mischief, and *brought forth* falsehood" (Ps. 7:14). There is no sinfulness in man for which he is not the cause of, and

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that is why there is no sinfulness in man for which he is not responsible and accountable for. Sin is not self-existent. Sin is caused by a sinner. A sinner causes his sin to exist when he did not have to cause it to exist. Men are called “workers of iniquity,” which means that they labor to make, produce, or to create sin. The anger that God has with sinners, because of their sin, presupposes that they are the cause of their sin. If a sinner was not the cause of sin, God would not be angry with them because of sin. God punishes transgressors for their sin because they are the cause of their sin. Being angry with sinners and punishing sinners for their sin presupposes that they are the cause of their sin and that they did not have to cause their sin to exist. If a man uses his car to run over people, the man goes to jail, not the car. People would be upset with the man, not with the car. The cause of the crime is what is the proper subject to punishment for the crime, and only avoidable actions are punishable actions. These are self-evident truths of justice.

Ransom Dunn said, “If volition is necessitated, and can in no given case be different from what it is, then there can be no responsibility attending volition. If we cannot hold the knife responsible for stabbing a man, while the hand which grasps the knife and directs the blow is held by another, how can we hold the man responsible while the power which constitutes his agency is held and controlled by force beyond his agency?”⁶⁰

Methodius said, “For if he were made as any of the elements, or those things which render a similar service to God, he would cease to receive a reward befitting deliberate choice, and would be like an instrument of the maker; and it would be unreasonable for him to suffer blame for his wrong-doings, for the real author of them is the one by whom he is used.”⁶¹

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Thomas Chalmers said, "The morality of any act is with its willfulness... That an action then be the rightful object, either of moral censure, or approval, it must have had the consent of the will to go along with it. It must be the fruit of volition – else it is utterly beyond the scope, either of praise for its virtuousness or of blame for its criminality. If an action be involuntary, it is as unfit a subject for any moral reckoning, as are the pulsations of the wrist."⁶²

The reason that sin is punishable is because sin is avoidable. The justification for the punishment of sin is the possibility of the avoidance of sin. It is not justified to punish sin if it is not possible to avoid sin. It is unjust cruelty to punish a man for what was unavoidable. Imagine if a civil government made a law which stated, "Every citizen must have white skin. If anyone has a skin color other than white, they must immediately change their actual skin color. Anyone found with a skin color other than white will be publicly executed." Such a law would be tyranny because such a law requires the impossible.

Sin is punishable because sin is avoidable.

Yet, there are preachers who say that God requires us not to sin, but say it is impossible for us to cease from sin or to avoid sinning. And they say that God is just in requiring this! It is unjust to require that which cannot be done and it is unjust to punish that which cannot be avoided. The same injustice that would exist if the government of man executed a person for having black skin would also exist if the government of God sent sinners to hell forever for their sin, if their sin was unavoidable or if their obedience was impossible. But the punishment that God threatens is worse than any punishment that men could threaten! Therefore, in this scenario, the government of God would be much more unjust!

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Richard S. Taylor said, “If we view the problem Scripturally, sin is inexcusable. If it is unavoidable, however, it is excusable. Therefore to say sin is inexcusable is to declare sin to be avoidable.”⁶³

Obligation Does Not Exceed Ability

My conscience affirms wholeheartedly that God “will not lay upon man more than right; that he should enter into judgment with God” (Job 34:23). However, Martin Luther said that “the law demands of men what they cannot do...”⁶⁴ In other words, our moral obligation exceeds our moral ability. The law demands the impossible. Men are not able to fulfill their moral obligation.

Consider what the law itself actually requires from everyone and see if this is true. “He said unto him, what is written in the law? How readest thou? And he answering said, thou shalt love the Lord thy God *with all thy* heart, and *with all thy* soul, and *with all thy* strength, and *with all thy* mind, and thy neighbor *as thyself*. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right...” (Lk. 10:26-28).

Notice that God does not command that we love Him with faculties that we do not possess, but rather that we love Him with all that we currently possess, “with all thy,” as opposed to with that which is not currently yours. The commandments are directions to man as to how he is to use his ability. They are a declaration as to what man ought and ought not to choose. The commandments of God are not impossible, demanding that we love Him with a heart, soul, mind and strength that we do not have. Rather, it is possible to keep the law of God, which demands that we love Him with all of what we do have, with all that we are capable of, to the very highest of our ability, no more and no less.

The God-given commandments and our God-given ability directly correspond with each other. Our moral

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obligation does not exceed our moral ability, but our moral obligation is precisely limited to the extent of our moral ability. The command of God is that we love to the very highest of our ability, no more and no less; and therefore, we are able to keep the law of love; we are able to keep the commandments of Jesus (1 Jn. 2:3; 3:22; 5:2-3; Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 22:14). Obedience is always possible, and disobedience is never necessary or unavoidable. The law of God is the law of our ability: to love Him supremely and our neighbor equally, according to our ability, with all of our ability, or "with all thy."

Clement of Alexandria said that the call of "the Divine word... requireth but that which is according to the ability and strength of every one."⁶⁵ He also said, "What the commandments direct are in our own power..."⁶⁶

Gordon C. Olson said, "The words 'all thy' express our obligation. It is the exertion of 'thy' personality and ability that is required – 'all' this ability."⁶⁷

Asa Mahan said, "...the law, addressing men...requires them to love God with all their 'mind and strength,' that is...with the power they now actually possess."⁶⁸

James B. Walker said, "Men can do what they can do, in the circumstances, and God requires no more."⁶⁹

Charles Finney said, "Entire obedience is the entire consecration of the powers, as they are, to God. It does not imply any change in them, but simply the right use of them."⁷⁰ Finney also said that the law "simply requires us to use what strength we have. The very wording of the law is proof conclusive, that it extends its demands only to the full amount of what strength we have. And this is true of every moral being, however great or small."⁷¹ Again Finney logically said, "...entire obedience to God's law is possible on the ground of natural ability. To deny this is to deny that

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man is able to do as well as he can. The very language of the law is such as to level its claims to the capacity of the subject, however great or small that capacity may be. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Deut 6:5). Here then it is plain, that all the law demands, is the exercise of whatever strength we have, in the service of God. Now, as entire sanctification is nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have, it is, of course, forever settled, that a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, on the ground of natural ability."⁷²

God commands that you use "thy heart" and "thy soul" and "thy mind." The command of God is directed towards our current faculties, and it does not exceed the limits of those faculties. We are to love Him with "all" of these faculties, not with less or with more than those faculties are capable of. Man is not responsible for more than he can perform, and so man is not accountable for more than he can perform. Man's responsibility is in accordance with all of his ability; and man's accountability is according to his responsibility. Therefore, man will not be accountable for that which was beyond his power because man is not accountable beyond his responsibility, and his responsibility is never beyond his ability. Even Augustine at one point said, "God does not demand impossibilities."⁷³

The extent of God's commandments is the exact extent of man's ability, and the extent of man's ability is the extent of God's commandments. The one establishes and determines the limitations and boundaries of the other. Since man will be judged by the commandments, the extent of man's accountability will be in proportion to the extent of man's ability. A man will not be accountable for that which he was not capable of. He will not be judged for that which was outside of the realm of his control or power.

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The law of God is therefore the law of our ability: to love Him supremely and our neighbor equally, according to our ability, with all of our ability, to the highest of our ability, no more and no less. There is, then, no inability in which a sinner can hide behind as an excuse, no commandment that a sinner can point to as tyrannical, since all the commandments of God can be kept without exception.

God Is Not A Despotic Tyrant

The extent of man's moral obligation is the extent of man's moral ability. If man's moral ability had ceased, man's moral obligation would have ceased, because man is morally obligated to love God with all of his ability and to love his neighbor as he loves himself. If man has no ability to love God, he is not obligated to love God at all, because the command only requires him to love God with all of his ability. The moral obligation of the law would cease if the moral ability of man had ceased.

The reason that God commands men to obey His law and the reason He holds them as morally obligated to do so is because He knows that they are capable of doing so. Henry P. Tappan said, "That which he has no power to do, he cannot be commanded nor bound to do."⁷⁴ Our choices are the subject of God's commands, and we are bound to fulfill those commands, because the power of our will is capable of creating the very choices which are being commanded. That which is not a choice, or that which cannot be chosen, is that which cannot be justly commanded. Since love is the fulfillment of the law, and love is a choice, the law strictly speaking only commands or demands from us a state of will. Choices or states of will, which men are capable of having or making, are the proper subjects of the law of God.

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While preaching on North Carolina State University in Raleigh, a Calvinist admitted to me that he viewed God as a “despot” and a “tyrant” because he believed God commanded the impossible of us. This is not surprising. Men cannot help but to view God as a despotic tyrant while they view His demands upon us as impossible.

The influence that God has over free moral beings depends upon the impressions that their minds have of His goodness and character. It is our mind’s impressions of God, which influence the choices of our will. By the laws of our mind, which God created us with, we cannot help but to view Him as unreasonable, unjust, and cruel, and consequently, as a being not worthy of worship and service as long as we view Him as a tyrannical despot.

But when we view God as reasonable, just, and benevolent, as the Moral Ruler of the universe, who only demands of us what we are capable of, we cannot help but to view Him as a Being worthy of worship and service because of the laws of our mind, which He has created us with.

The moral attributes of a good being are automatically approved of by our God-given conscience, and the moral attributes of an evil being are automatically disapproved of by our God-given conscience. To view God as commanding the impossible of His subjects, by necessity of our minds, is to view Him as a God of injustice rather than a God of justice. Such impressions of God do not inspire the heart to worship but rather to abhorrence.

Pelagius rightly said, “Nothing impossible has been commanded by the God of justice and majesty... Why do we indulge in pointless evasions, advancing the frailty of our own nature as an objection to the one who commands us? No one knows better the true measure of our strength than he who has given it to us nor does anyone understand better how much we are able to do than he who has given us this

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very capacity of ours to be able; nor has he who is just wished to command anything impossible or he who is good intended to condemn a man for doing what he could not avoid doing.”⁷⁵ He also said, “In the manner of good-for-nothing and haughty servants, we cry out against the face of God and say, ‘It is hard, it is difficult, we cannot do it, we are but men, we are encompassed by frail flesh!’ What blind madness! What unholy foolhardiness! We accuse God of a twofold lack of knowledge, so that he appears not to know what he has done, and not to know what he has commanded; as if, forgetful of the human frailty of which he is himself the author, he has imposed on man commands which he cannot bear. And, at the same time, oh horror!, we ascribe iniquity to the righteous and cruelty to the holy, while complaining, first, that he has commanded something impossible, secondly, that man is to be damned by him for doing things which he was unable to avoid, so that God – and this is something which even to suspect is sacrilege – seems to have sought not so much our salvation as our punishment!”⁷⁶

When Erasmus was debating Martin Luther on the freedom of the will, he responded to Luther’s notion that God makes men necessarily sinful and damnable by saying that this view presents God as “to delight in the torments of the miserable, and to be an object of hatred rather than of love.”⁷⁷

E. M. Bounds asked, “Does God give commandments which men cannot obey? Is He so arbitrary, so severe, so unloving, as to issue commandments which cannot be obeyed? The answer is that in all of annals of Holy Scripture, not a single instance is recorded of God having commanded any man to do a thing, which was beyond his power. Is God so unjust and so inconsiderate as to require of man that which he is unable to render? To infer is to slander the character of God.”⁷⁸

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Nelson G. Mink said, “He does not ask us to do the impossible...”⁷⁹

Jed Smock said, “Does God command the impossible? If He did, that would make Him a despot, a tyrant. But God is the Benevolent Moral Governor of the universe. When He gives us a command, He provides a promise or the means to enable us to fulfill the command.”⁸⁰

There is no state of mind or body more miserable than to be tormented in hell. Therefore, there could be nothing crueller than to eternally damn to hell beings that violated the law when they never had the ability to obey the law in the first place. Nothing more unjust is conceivable because no form of pain possible can exceed that of hell. If men cannot obey the law for which they are being punished for, the law ceases to be good and punishment ceases to be just.

Some have asked, “How can a finite being obey an infinite God?” The answer is that an infinite God would also be infinitely good, infinitely just, infinitely reasonable, and infinitely considerate. Therefore, an infinite God would not require, at threat of eternal hell, anything from a finite being that was beyond his ability. God is not cruel or inconsiderate towards His subjects as to demand from them the impossible. The law of God is a reflection of the character of God. The law of God is good, reasonable, and just because God is good, reasonable, and just.

The command of a just ruler most certainly does imply the ability of the subject. A just command takes for granted that what is forbidden can be avoided by choice and that what is demanded can be acquired by choice. The command to “cease to do evil” (Isa. 1:16), and to “sin no more” (Jn. 5:14), presupposes that evil and sin are choices that we are able to avoid. The command “thou shalt not” commit adultery, bear false witness, steal, murder,

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blaspheme, etc, (Deut. 20:3-17), all take for granted that we are capable of committing these actions and that we are capable of avoiding these actions. For example, if committing adultery or not was not our choice, we could not be forbidden from it and purity could not be demanded of us. But since it is a choice to commit adultery or not to commit adultery, we can be commanded not to commit adultery.

A command is meant to be obeyed. The simple fact that men are commanded to obey the law of God shows that men, by the power of their will or through their ability of choice, can actually obey the law of God. Man would not be told to do so if he could not do so. The command would be meaningless if man had no choice in the matter.

The command of a ruler, without the ability of the subject, would be injustice or cruelty. God is not a tyrant, and His laws are not tyrannical. Pharaoh commanded brick, but gave no straw, and then beat those who failed to perform the impossible. Pharaoh was a tyrant for doing such, and Scripture assigns the fault to Pharaoh, not with those subservient to him. "There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants are beaten; but *the fault* is in thine own people" (Exo. 5:16). The fault was with the ones making impossible commands, not with those who broke those commands. When an impossible law is broken, the problem is not with the transgressor, the problem is with the law itself and with the one who issued the law.

That which is a vice in Pharaoh could not be virtue in God. What Scripture condemns in one is condemnable in all. What is a vice in one is a vice in all. The equality and impartiality of justice demands that what mars the character

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of one must mar the character of all. That which is a blemish to one must be a blemish to all. Punishment, whether inflicted by Pharaoh or God, is just only if that for which a being is punished for was avoidable. But punishment, whether inflicted by Pharaoh or God, is unjust if that for which a being is punished for was unavoidable.

Tertullian said that God granted man free will “that he might constantly be the master of his own conduct by voluntarily doing good, and by voluntarily avoiding evil: because, man being appointed for God’s judgment, it was necessary to the justice of God’s sentence that man should be judged according to the merits of his free will.”⁸¹

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God does not command obedience while giving no ability to perform that which is commanded, only to punish with eternal torment those who do not obey when they had no ability to obey in the first place. According to the Scriptures, the fault would be with the commander, not with the transgressor, when the commands are broken. Sin would ultimately be the fault of the one who gave the unreasonable or impossible law, since sin is transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4), and there can be no transgression where there is no law (Rom. 4:15; 5:13; 1 Jn. 3:4). To issue impossible laws is to make sin unavoidable and thus to be the cause of sin. Therefore, transgression of the impossible law is the fault of the law itself, and the fault of the one who decreed the law.

When an impossible law is broken, transgression could not be the fault of the one who broke the law because he naturally could not keep the law. The one who decrees an impossible law is the ultimate cause of sin. The precious truth of revelation, however, is that God is not the author of sin. He is not the ultimate cause of transgression because

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God's moral laws are not unreasonable but can, in fact, be kept. Natural revelation (*conscience*) and supernatural revelation (*Scripture*) assign the fault of sin to sinful men. They are the cause of their own rebellion. They are the authors of their own sin. God is angry with the wicked (Ps. 7:11). This is because they are the cause of their wickedness. Sin is not self-existent. Sin is an effect that is caused by the will of a sinner. Augustine, at one point, admitted, "In all laws, warnings, rewards, punishments, etc. there is no justice, if the will is not the cause of sin."⁸²

The Justice of God's Wrath

Men cannot be blamed for their sinful state if they are not the cause of their sinful state. God does blame sinners for their sinfulness and rightfully so. Sinners are misusing and abusing their God-given free will by causing sin to exist. Tertullian said that the person who chooses to sin chooses to "make a bad use of his created constitution..."⁸³ Augustine said, "Evil is making a bad use of a good thing."⁸⁴

Charles Finney said, "The fact is, sin never can consist in having a nature, nor in what nature is, but only and alone in the bad use which we make of our nature."⁸⁵ Pelagius said, "Every single member is made a weapon of wickedness to defeat righteousness, if it turns its function to bad use."⁸⁶ According to Dr. Wiggers, Pelagius said that sinners, "abuse the liberty granted to them" while the righteous are "rightly using freewill."⁸⁷

Men cannot be blamed for their sinful state unless they are the cause of their sinful state.

While I was street preaching in the city green of Waterbury CT, a sinner asked me why it wasn't acceptable for us to sin since God has given us freedom of choice. Rather than understanding that we are responsible for our

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actions because we have a free will, he expected to be able to sin with impunity because of free will. I explained to him that sin was a misuse of our nature or natural faculties. God gave us a free will so that we would choose the good over evil, not so that we would choose evil over the good. God gave us the ability to do wrong so that we could freely do what is right. God wanted us to use our ability of choice to imitate Him in holiness. If we use our liberty for selfishness, or if we use our ability of choice to choose what is evil and do what is wrong, we are misusing our liberty of choice and are justifiably held accountable.

Since God has granted man free will, God's moral government over man is not tyrannical but reasonable and just. God does not condemn the incapable for failure to perform the impossible. God condemns those "who have received the law . . . but have not kept it" (Acts 7:53). God condemns sinners for their failure to do what they could have done. Sinners are condemned for voluntarily and freely choosing darkness over the light (Jn. 3:19). Sinners abide under the wrath of God for being *morally criminal by choice* (Rom. 2:5), not for being *morally crippled by birth*. The fault is with their own choices (Isa. 14:13-14; Lk. 19:14, 27; Jn. 5:40), not with their God-given constitution (Ecc. 7:29). God punishes men because they refuse to obey Him or because they choose to disobey Him.

Just punishment for disobedience presupposes the ability to obey. Since the God of the Bible is just and since He punishes sinners, this implies or presupposes that sinners have the ability to obey. If men cannot obey God, yet God still requires obedience and punishes disobedience, then God's law is tyranny and God's punishments are cruel. But the Hosts of Heaven do not describe the judgments of God as tyrannical and cruel, but declare "true and righteous are thy judgments" (Rev. 16:7; 19:20). Sinners rightly and justly

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deserve to be punished for their disobedience because God has given them the ability to obey; yet, they have selfishly refused to do so.

Miner Raymond said, "It is axiomatic that that for which any agent is morally responsible must be within his control. If man be responsible for obedience or disobedience to the divine commands, then obedience and disobedience are both equally within his power. Which of them shall result is not determined by any thing external to him. His own power of choice selects the one, it being at the same time a power equally adequate to select the other. That for which an agent is morally responsible must be an election; that is, a selection with an alternative."⁸⁸

L. D. McCabe said, "Accountability necessitates the origination of choice between obedience and disobedience."⁸⁹

Tatian said, "That he who is wicked may be justly punished, being made wicked by himself; and that he who is just may deservedly be praised on account of his good actions, having through his power over himself, not transgressed the will of God. Such is the nature of angels and men."⁹⁰

Pelagius said, "If men are thus [sinners] because they cannot be different, they are not to blame... Sins ought not to be visited with even the smallest punishment, provided they cannot be avoided."⁹¹

Dr. Davenant, Bishop of Salisbury, and one of the English divines sent to the synod of Dort, said, "All these sinful actions, and the like, are committed by reprobates, out of their own free election, having a power whereby they might have abstained from committing them."⁹²

Jerome said, "God has bestowed us with free will. We are not necessarily drawn either to virtue or vice. For

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when necessity rules, there is no room left either for damnation or the crown.”⁹³

Epiphanius said, “It would be more just to punish the stars, which make a wicked action necessary, than to punish the poor man, who does that wicked action by necessity.”⁹⁴

It would be unjust for God to send men to hell for their sin if they couldn’t help it or if their disobedience could not have been avoided. But the Bible says that God is just in all His ways; and therefore, sinners must have the ability to avoid their sin, they must have had the power necessary to obey. If we could not obey God, He would owe us forgiveness for our disobedience because that is what true

If men cannot obey God, it is not their fault that they do not obey God.

justice would demand. Justice demands that sins that are unavoidable be forgiven or overlooked. Justice demands that the transgressions of an impossible law be pardoned or passed by. Justice does not allow for unavoidable actions to be punishable. The Bible, however, says that our salvation is a matter of grace not justice. Grace is unmerited or undeserved favor. If men truly have the ability to obey, but they simply refuse to do so, than anything God does to save that person is truly an act of grace. God did not owe us the gospel. God did not owe us His Son or the influence of the Holy Spirit. Everything that God has done for man’s salvation has been an act of grace because man was capable of obeying God in the first place and therefore justice calls for our punishment.

If men cannot obey God, it is not their fault that they do not obey God. It is not their fault because they cannot choose what natural abilities they would or would not have. That is God’s choosing since He is our Maker and forms us in the womb. But if it is not their fault that they do not obey God, then they do not deserve punishment for their lack of

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obedience. If they do not deserve punishment, they do not need atonement, grace, or mercy. *Therefore if the doctrine of inability is true, the doctrine of atonement, grace, and mercy cannot be true.*

On the other hand, if men can obey God then it is their own fault if they do not obey Him. If disobedience is their own fault because it is their own free choice then they deserve punishment. And if they deserve punishment, then they need atonement, grace, and mercy. Therefore the doctrine of atonement, grace, and mercy can only be true, if the doctrine of man's natural ability is true. *In this way, every passage that speaks about atonement, grace, and mercy, actually implies or presupposes the natural ability of man.* Man only needs atonement, grace, and mercy, if he deserves punishment for his sins. And man only deserves punishment for his sins if he had the power or ability of avoiding them.

Here is this truth presented in logical syllogisms:

- Man only needs atonement, grace, and mercy if he deserves punishment.
- Man only deserves punishment for his disobedience if he is capable of obedience.
- Therefore, man only needs atonement, grace, and mercy if he is capable of obedience.

- Man only needs atonement, grace, and mercy if he is capable of obedience.
- The Bible speaks of man's need for atonement, grace, and mercy.
- Therefore, the Bible implies or presupposes that man is capable of obeying.

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While open air preaching at Yale University, I rebuked the students on the campus for their sin. This campus is known for its “naked parties” and homosexuality. Their newspaper boasted that not even Harvard parties as sinfully as they do. While rebuking them, I explained that they knew better than to sin and they were capable of not sinning. They both knew better and were capable of better. Therefore, they have no excuse and ought to be ashamed of themselves. Similarly I used the same line of reasoning for theodicy while open air preaching at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. I explained to the students that God’s wrath against them was justified. “God has given you a free will so you are capable of not sinning. He has given you a conscience so you know right from wrong. You have freely chosen to do what you know is wrong. Therefore, you are rightly and justifiably the objects of God’s wrath. You truly deserve punishment! Therefore, you need to repent of your sins and find the mercy of God through Jesus Christ.”

The truth is that men have personally sinned; therefore, they personally deserve damnation. That is why they personally need a Savior. A person needs the atonement of Jesus Christ, not for the sins of their ancestors, but for their own sins. “All *we* like sheep have gone astray, *we* have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all” (Isa. 53:6). “JESUS: for he shall *save* his people from *their* sins” (Mat. 1:21). A person only needs forgiveness for their own personal sins, which is why Jesus taught that God will “forgive *your* trespasses” (Matt. 6:15; Mk. 11:25; 11:26). No man needs forgiveness for a sin that they did not commit or cause. We do not need forgiveness for the *singular* “sin” of Adam. The Bible says that men need forgiveness for their own personal *plural* “sins” (Matt. 1:21; 26:28; Acts 2:38).

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The Bible says, "Great and marvelous are they works, Lord God Almighty, *just* and true are they ways..." (Rev. 15:3). "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do *right*?" (Gen. 18:25) The Bible also says that "damnation is *just*" (Rom. 3:8). As a just Judge, God punishes men according to their deserts or demerits, according to the moral quality of their personal choices. God is absolutely justified in sending the wicked to hell because the wicked truly deserves to go to hell. Sinners deserve punishment because they originate sin when they don't have to. Men deserve hell, not because of their involuntary or inherited constitution, but because of their intentional character or individual choices.

The justice of God's judgment is affirmed all throughout the Bible. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son..." (Eze. 18:20). Our sin, and consequently our damnation, is not something that we can blame on our ancestors or anyone else. Contrary to the injustice which John Calvin stated, "Adam drew all his posterity with himself, by his fall, into eternal damnation,"⁹⁵ we must take full and personal responsibility for both our sin and our damnation. The road to hell has been paved by our own sin. No man needs to feel guilty for any sin other than his own. No man needs to repent for any sin other than his own. And no man will be damned for any sins other than his own. God's wrath is justified. His judgment is just.

God expresses the justice of His moral government over and over again throughout Scripture. It is amazing that this point has been so widely misunderstood and misrepresented. Men are accountable for their choices and their choices only.

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God will “give every man according to *his ways*, and according to the fruit of *his doings*” (Jer. 17:10).

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man *according to his works*” (Matt. 16:27).

“...the righteous judgment of God: who will render every man according to *his deeds*...” (Rom. 2:5-6).

“So then every one of us shall account *of himself* to God” (Rom. 14:12).

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in *his* body, *according* to that *he hath done*, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

“Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be *according to their works*” (2 Cor. 11:15).

“... the Father, who without respect of persons, judgeth *according to every man’s work*...” (1 Pet. 1:17).

“And I saw a great white throne... And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to *their works*” (Rev. 20:11-12).

“And, behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man *according* as *his work* shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

Clearly, we are responsible and accountable for our sins and our sins only.

Theodore W. Elliot said, “...each person is responsible for his own sin and not for the sin of any one else...”⁹⁶

A. W. Tozer said, “...men are not lost because of what someone did thousands of years ago; they are lost

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because they sin individually and in person. We will never be judged for Adam's sin, but for our own. For our own sins we are and must remain fully responsible."⁹⁷

John Fletcher said, "All our damnation is of ourselves, through our avoidable unfaithfulness . . . everyone shall die for his own avoidable iniquity."⁹⁸

Barnabas said, "He who chooses" to break the commandments "will be destroyed with his works..."⁹⁹

Hermas said, "All who therefore despise Him and do not follow His commands deliver themselves to death, and each will be guilty of his own blood."¹⁰⁰ Origen said, "...we have freedom of will and we ourselves are the cause of our own ruin."¹⁰¹

Titian said, "We die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us."¹⁰²

Prosper, a disciple of Augustine, said that those who "perish" do so because of "their voluntary iniquity."¹⁰³

Irenaeus said, "Man, a reasonable being, and in that respect like God, is made free in his will; and being endued with power to conduct himself, he is the cause of his own becoming sometimes wheat and sometimes chaff; therefore will he be justly condemned."¹⁰⁴

Tertullian said, "For a law would not be imposed upon one who did not have it in his power to render that obedience which is due to law. Nor again, would the penalty of death be threatened against sin, if a contempt of the law were impossible to man in the liberty of his will...Man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance."¹⁰⁵

What nonsense it is to hear J. I. Packer say, "Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent."¹⁰⁶ This sounds like the arbitrary and tyrannical Allah of the Quran, of whom it is said, "He causes to err whom he pleases and guides whom he pleases;

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and most certainly you will be questioned as to what you did.”¹⁰⁷ But if man is not the free author of his own actions, but is controlled by God in all that he does, how can he be responsible for anything that he does? His actions are not his own fault, since he is not the ultimate cause of them; and therefore, he cannot be responsible or accountable for them. Harry Conn rightly said, “...what is caused cannot be free will or accountable, responsible or guilty. That which is free cannot be caused, or it isn't free, nor can its behavior be predicted with certainty. That which is free is responsible, accountable, and can become guilty provided it is a sentient being.”¹⁰⁸

Notice that in the Bible, man's freedom to choose between obedience and disobedience is in exact relation to accountability, or is directly connected to receiving rewards and punishments. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life...” (Deut. 30:19) “Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God.... And a curse if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God” (Deut. 11:26-28). “Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose” (Job 34:33). Responsibility presupposes free will. Moral government, or commands, punishments, and rewards, makes perfect sense in an open system of free will. But moral government, or commands, punishments, and rewards, makes absolutely no sense in a system of determinism. Precept would be useless and sanctions would be heartless and meaningless if the subjects of moral government did not have the freedom of choice.

Sin is punishable because sin is avoidable. That which cannot be avoided cannot be justly punished. God's condemnation and execution of penalty is justly exerted

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upon the capable for violation of commandments that could be kept. Condemnation for violation of commandments is justly deserved upon condition of capability, upon condition of being able to keep the commandments. Condemnation for breaking a law that could not be kept is unjust condemnation. Eternal damnation for breaking that which was unavoidably and inevitably to be broken is unjust eternal damnation. God does not send to hell those who are victims of their birth, victims of nature, victims of their parents, or victims of fate, who haven't any power, option, or ability of obeying all that was required of them. Rather, God sends deserving criminals and rebels to eternal hell (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rev. 21:8), those who freely, of their own accord, chose to walk contrary to the righteous demands of God's reasonable and just commandments when it was well within their power or well within their ability of will to obey and conform to all of their moral obligations and requirements.

Charles Finney said, "...every excuse for sin charges blame upon God, and virtually accuses Him of tyranny. Whoever pleads an excuse for sin, therefore, charges God with blame... INABILITY. No excuse is more common. It is echoed and re-echoed over every Christian land, and handed down age after age, never to be forgotten. With unblushing face it is proclaimed that men cannot do what God requires of them... Hence, those who plant themselves upon these grounds charge God with infinite tyranny... And you, Christian, who make this dogma of inability a part of your "orthodox" creed, may have little noticed its blasphemous bearings against the character of God..."¹⁰⁹

Winkie Pratney said, "Many sincere men are saying, 'God gave us good laws to keep,' and in the next breath saying, 'we are actually unable to keep them!' If this is true, then God's laws are not good! No law is good that asks the impossible of its subjects. If God demands obedience to

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impossible laws then God is not just . . . If God demands such obedience under penalty of death, then God is not only unfair, but monstrous. What kind of being would pass laws upon his subjects they are unable to keep, and then condemn them to death for their failure to obey? This is a blasphemy on God's character."¹¹⁰

To assume that God commands the impossible at the threat of eternal torment is to directly slander the character of God. Such assumptions blame God for our sin rather than to rightly blame ourselves! Cruelty cannot be ascribed to God's character because injustice cannot be ascribed to His government. The character of God does not allow anyone to go to hell for failure to perform moral impossibilities. Men go to hell for their failure to perform moral possibilities. Men go to hell for being unwilling, not for being unable.

Men cannot blame God or His laws for their own disobedience and rebellion. God is not responsible for the sin of the world because God has granted man a free will and has only decreed laws that are reasonable and good. All men who voluntarily choose to disobey God are responsible for their sin. Sinners cannot blame God or His laws for sin. God blames them, that is, He blames their own will for their sin.

Punishments and rewards under the moral government of God make perfect sense given the understanding of man's free will. Punishments and rewards take for granted the freedom of man's will. Punishments and rewards are taught all throughout the Bible. Therefore, the freedom of man's will is assumed all throughout the Bible.

Clement said, "Neither praise nor condemnation, neither rewards nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary."¹¹¹ John Fletcher asked, "...if you take away free will, how does he [God] judge the world?"¹¹² Justin Martyr said, "Unless the human race has the power of

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avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions.”¹¹³ Again he said, “We [Christians] maintain that each man acts rightly or sins by free choice... Since God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free will, they will justly suffer in eternal fire the punishment of whatever sins they have committed.”¹¹⁴ Origen said, “The Savior...declares that it lies with us to keep what is commanded and that we will reasonably be liable to condemnation if we transgress.”¹¹⁵ Lactantius said, “And he [God] can give a punishment for those who do not obey – for it was in their power to obey if they so wished.”¹¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria said, “Each one of us who sins with his own free will, chooses punishment. So the blame lies with him who chooses.”¹¹⁷ Again he said, “It is by one’s own fault that he does not choose what is best.”¹¹⁸ And again, “If one chooses to continue in pleasures and to sin perpetually... let him no longer blame either God, riches, or his having fallen. Rather, let him blame his own soul, which voluntarily perishes.”¹¹⁹

The
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The words “sinner” and “transgressor” all imply man’s choice to violate the law of God. A sinner is someone who chooses to sin and a transgressor is someone who chooses to transgress the law. The word “temptation” itself implies man’s choice to *yield* or *resist* sin. Temptation implies man’s ability to obey or disobey God’s law. If sin was forced by some sort of necessity, temptation could not exist at all. That is because man would never be in the position where he could freely choose between good and evil or choose between two possibilities; and therefore, man could never be in the position of temptation. The existence of temptation is dependent upon the existence of free will.

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Temptation implies man's free will to choose to sin or to choose not to sin. But if we are born in such a way and in such a state that we cannot help but to sin and be sinful, the devil is out of a job. He only needed to tempt Adam, but he does not need to tempt us if we inherit from Adam a nature, which does not have the ability to avoid sinning but which makes sin unavoidable. He does not need to tempt us to sin if sin is already unavoidable, inevitable, or a necessity of our nature. The fact that the devil still goes around tempting men to sin takes for granted that men have a free will to sin or not to sin and are not forced to sin by any necessity of their nature.

The Bible teaches us that before sin is committed, temptation is contemplated. Temptation always precedes sin. Temptation is antecedent to sin because temptation is a mental consideration of motives and sin is the volition of the will. Before there can be volitions of the will, there must be motives in the mind. No choices can occur without motives, and since sin is a choice and temptation is a motive, there can be no sin without temptation. The motives are antecedent, while the choices are consequent, so that temptation is antecedent and the sin is consequent. Since the consideration of motives always comes before choices of the will, temptations or suggestions to the mind always come before the decisions of the heart to sin. With temptation there are alternative possible options for the will to choose between. Since temptation comes before all sin and implies the option of sinning or not sinning, we must conclude that all sin is avoidable and no sin is unavoidable.

The common phraseology of "*giving into temptation*" implies the choice and consent of the will and indicates the voluntary nature of sin. If you have ever been tempted to sin, but you have chosen not to commit that sin, you have proven with your own experience the truth that temptation does not

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exceeds our ability. You have proven with your experience what the Bible says, that we are able to bear temptation and there is always a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).

In this way our very own consciousness or memory of the past and awareness of the present testifies to the reality of the freedom of choice in our existence. With every possible choice of disobedience, there is a possible choice of obedience. Therefore, we have the ability not to sin; we have the ability to keep the commandments of God; we have the power to obey His moral law.

God's Call to Obedience

God said to Israel, "Wherefore I will yet *plead* with you, saith the Lord, and with your children's children will I *plead*" (Jer. 2:9). "And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I *plead* with you face to face. Like as I *pleaded* with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I *plead* with you, saith the Lord God" (Eze. 20:35-36). God does not force men to obey Him, but God pleads with me to obey Him. The fact that God earnestly and sincerely pleads with men to be obedient towards Him takes for granted that they actually can be obedient towards Him. If this were not possible of them, God would not plead with them to do it.

God said through Jeremiah, "For I *earnestly protested* unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying *Obey my voice*. Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear..." (Jer. 11:7-8). Why would God "*earnestly protest*" that they should "obey" if their obedience was impossible? If their obedience was not a choice that they could make, earnestly protesting that they should choose to obey would be nonsense!

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After Adam and before Christ, Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, “*Obey I beseech thee* the voice of the Lord, which I speak unto thee: so it shall be well unto thee, and thy soul shall live” (Jer. 38:20). Jeremiah was literally pleading and begging for him to be obedient to the Lord, which takes for granted that it was his choice to make and that he was capable of making it. If the king could not be obedient and yet Jeremiah pleaded with him anyway, Jeremiah might as well have asked the king to capture the stars or darken the sun! If Jeremiah was in the habit of asking for the impossible, he might as well have begged the king to level the mountains or fly to the moon! What folly and foolishness it would be to earnestly beg a man to do what you know he is not capable of doing! Unless the prophets were absurd, every time they called men to obey the Lord, they were assuming that it was their choice to make and that they were capable of doing so.

The Apostle Paul had an interaction with a sorcerer which is very telling. Paul said, “O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, *wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*” (Acts 13:30). To call this man an “enemy of all righteousness” in the Greek means that he was “actively hostile.”¹²⁰ This shows that he was this way, not through the passivity of birth or nature, but through the activity of his will. Paul’s whole rebuke would be mean and harsh if this man was just a poor pitiful creature that couldn’t help it. Unless this man was sinful by choice or the cause of his own sinfulness, why rebuke him for his sinfulness? Why speak so harshly to him unless this man had the power of changing his character, or unless he was free to be otherwise than he was? Asking him “*wilt thou not cease*” would be a pointless question if he couldn’t stop. Paul clearly took the truth of free will for granted in his interaction with sinners, just as all

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the confrontation of sin that we see in the Bible takes for granted that truth.

The Bible says, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6), "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground" (Hos. 10:12), "Return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good" (Jer. 18:11), "Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God; and the Lord will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you" (Jer. 26:13). The Bible continually speaks as if man could obey God and it never even hints to the idea that he cannot.

The commands "*Let* your heart therefore be perfect" (1 Kin. 8:61), "be ye therefore perfect" (Matt. 5:48), and "be ye holy" (1 Pet. 1:15) all implies that holiness is volitional and that sin is avoidable. The command to "put away evil" (Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 22:22, 24; 24:7; Jdg. 20:13; Ecc. 11:10; Isa. 1:16) implies that evil is a choice of our will, not a substance of our nature. The command to "cease to do evil" (Isa. 1:16) and to "sin no more" (Jn. 8:11) implies that all sin is volitional and that holiness is possible. As Methodius said, "...this alone is evil, namely, disobedience..."¹²¹

If sin was something other than an avoidable choice, the commands to be perfect, to be ye holy, to cease to do evil, and to sin no more would make no sense at all. These commands take for granted that man has the ability to stop sinning and to be holy. It presupposes that it is within our power and control - something which we are free to choose if we want to.

Our moral character is not some involuntary part of our being which we did not determine or which we do not have the ability to change. The Bible says "to *refuse* the evil,

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and *choose* the good” (Isa. 7:15-16), which shows that good and evil is volitional. Evil is something that we are capable of refusing, and good is something that we are capable of choosing. “*Let not* sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should *obey* it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12). The word “obey” and the phrase “let not” implies the consent of the individual. “If iniquity be in thine hand, *put it away*, and *let not* wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles” (Job 11:14). The phrases “put it away” and “let not” implies the choice of the will. “Therefore *remove* sorrow from thy heart, and *put away* evil from thy flesh...” (Ecc. 11:10). To “remove” or “put away” is a choice of our will.

Since sin
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from sin
is a choice.

Jesus said to “cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside may be clean also.” We must choose to put away any sin that is within us. Since sin is a choice, to be free from sin is a choice. God commands sinners to turn themselves from “*all*” their transgressions and to cast away from themselves “*all*” their sins (Eze. 18:30-31). This takes for granted that “all” sin is their choice and that it is something which they have control over. We are told to cleanse ourselves from “*all* filthiness of the flesh” (2 Cor. 7:1) and to “lay aside *every* weight and sin...” (Heb. 12:1). This too implies that “all” and “every” sin is our choice which we have control over. No sin is involuntary or something which exists independent of the will.

Jesus spoke of one individual who first said, “I will not,” when confronted with a command, but then “afterward repented” and did according to it. And there was another who first said he would, but afterward repented and did it not (Matt. 21:28-30). This clearly or explicitly shows that a man’s character is a contingency and can change whenever he decides. A man can change his mind about sinning even

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after formerly making up his mind to sin. And a man can change his mind about obeying even after formerly making up his mind to obey. Man can choose contrary to his previous choices. He can choose contrary to his habit of choice because the will is at all times a free faculty. The will, as a free faculty, means that it has the power of contrary choice. If this were not true, this parable could not be true. If this parable could not be true, Christ would be found a liar! And Christ is certainly not a liar! Therefore, the will is free to *choose* and to *change*.

Sinners and saints both have a free will. The disobedient (*sinners*) are free to choose to become obedient. And the obedient (*saints*) are free to choose to become disobedient. Sinners and saints can both change their mind. Those who make up their mind to obey can later make up their mind to disobey. And those who make up their mind to disobey can later make up their mind to obey. “The righteous” have the freedom or ability to “turneth from his righteousness” and “the wicked” have the freedom or ability to “turn from his wickedness” (Eze. 3:20; 18:26-27; 33:18-19).

The will, as a free faculty, means that it always has the power of contrary choice.

Jesus said that he came to call *sinners* to *repentance* (Matt. 9:13). Those who are “sinners” are those who are choosing to break the law of God. That is because sin is transgression of God’s law. Repentance, or to repent, is to change your mind about the choices you are making. Therefore, to repent of your sin is to change your mind about breaking God’s law. Jesus Christ said that He came to call transgressors of God’s law to change their mind about transgressing His law. God is now commanding all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). But why call sinners to

repent of breaking God's law unless they are capable of keeping God's law? Jesus was not a fool. Why would Jesus command men to be perfect (Matt. 5:48) if this wasn't possible? Why would Jesus waste his breath to tell us to waste our time and energy? Some say, "You should *try* to be perfect." But what good is it to try to do the impossible? If it cannot be attained, why try? Trying would be a waste of time and energy.

In fact, it would be folly and insanity to attempt to accomplish that which you know cannot be accomplished. What would you think of a man who tried to walk through walls, who knew full well that it cannot be done? A rational person cannot sincerely attempt to do what he knows cannot be done.

To try to attain that which is affirmed to be unattainable is impossible itself.

Asa Mahan said, "We are now prepared to answer... the question whether the Will can act in the direction of perceived and affirmed impossibilities? The true answer to this question, doubtless is, that the Mind may will the occurrence

of a known impossibility, but it can never aim to produce such an occurrence... while the Mind may thus will the occurrence of an impossibility, it never can, nor will aim, that is, intend, to produce what it regards as an impossibility..."¹²²

To try to attain that which is affirmed to be unattainable is impossible itself. No man can sincerely attempt to do that which he knows cannot be done. The heart cannot aim at doing that which the mind perceives to be impossible. If you try to do something, you take for granted that what you are trying to do can actually be done. If Jesus commanded us to *be* perfect or even commanded us to *try to be* perfect, and if He genuinely wants us to obey such a

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command, it must be because it can be done. If it could not be done, trying to do so would be impossible and commanding it to be done would be insincere and pointless.

Charles Finney said, "Are we not always to infer, when God commands a thing, that there is a natural possibility of doing that which he commands? I recollect hearing an individual say, he would preach to sinners that they ought to repent, because God commands it; but he would not preach that they could repent, because God has nowhere said that they can. What consummate trifling... It is always to be understood, when God requires any thing of men, that they possess the requisite faculties to do it. Otherwise God requires of us impossibilities, on pain of death, and sends sinners to hell for not doing what they were in no sense able to do... That there is natural ability to be perfect is a simple matter of fact. There can be no question of this. What is perfection? It is to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. That is, it requires us not to exert the powers of somebody else, but our own powers. The law itself goes no farther than to require the right use of the powers you possess. So that it is a simple matter of fact that you possess natural ability, or power, to be just as perfect as God requires."¹²³

It is self-evident that commandments imply man's ability of choice, rebuke implies man's ability of choice, and punishment implies man's ability of choice. If man has the freedom of choice, commanding him is rational, rebuking him is reasonable, and punishing him is responsible. If man does not have the ability of choice, commandments would be useless, rebuking would be pointless, and punishments would be heartless. We must conclude that God's commands are useless, His warnings are pointless, and His punishments

are heartless, or we must believe in man's freedom, liberty, power, or ability of choice.

Obedience Is Not Impossible

Consider how angry Moses was at the children of Israel for worshipping a false god. "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it" (Exo. 32:19-20). How unjustified was his rage and treatment towards them, if they could not but worship a false god! How unreasonable, unjust, harsh, and cruel Moses was towards the Israelites for their sin if they had not the power or ability to avoid their sin! Moses acted towards them as if they had the power to refrain from their idolatry, as if they could have rather chosen to worship God. Moses' attitude and treatment of sinners shows us that he believed they had the power of contrary choice.

God's treatment toward sinners also would be unreasonable, unjust, harsh, and cruel if they had not the ability or power of avoiding their sin. God flooded the whole world because of its sinfulness (Gen. 6:17) and God entirely destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness (Lk. 17:29). Why was God so upset with them for their sin unless they could have avoided it? How could God justly punish them, unless their sin was their own choice, and unless they could have chosen otherwise? God's attitude and treatment towards sinners shows us that God believed that they had the power of free choice or that they had the ability of being obedient.

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The idea that obedience toward God is impossible for men is contradicted by the fact that all throughout the Bible we have examples of men who did obey God. We already saw how there were kings such as Jehoshaphat, Amaziah, Azariah, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah, Joash, Jotham, and Ahaz who “did that which was *right* in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 12:2; 14:1-3; 15:1-3; 15:32-34; 18:1-3; 22:1-2; 2 Chron. 24:2; 27:1-2; 28:1). Others also have obeyed God. “Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). “And the Lord said unto Satan, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (Job 1:8). “Zacharias.... And his wife... Elisabeth... were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:5-6). “And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them...” (Matt. 21:6). All of these examples were of men obeying God before Calvary and before Pentecost. If they did not receive this ability to obey God from Calvary or from Pentecost, it must have been at Creation that they received this ability. But the fact that they did obey God is proof that it is not impossible to obey Him.

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We are told that king Hezekiah “claved to the Lord and departed not from following him, but *kept his commandments*, which the Lord commanded Moses” (2 Kin. 18:6). To say that he “kept his commandments” is the opposite of saying that he “broke his commandments.” Keeping commandments is the opposite of breaking commandments. Therefore, since Hezekiah kept the commandments, it shows that the commandments are not

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impossible to be kept. It shows that breaking the commandments is not unavoidable.

Another example is King Josiah, who “turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses” (2 Kin. 23:25). Therefore, it is not impossible to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, as the commandment requires. We know that it can be done because it has been done, as even the Apostle John said that “we keep his commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3, 3:33, 5:2, 5:3). To say that “we keep his commandments” is the opposite of saying “we break his commandments.” But if God’s commandments were impossible, then they could not be kept and we could not help but to break them.

If no man were capable of keeping the commandments of God, no man would be *fit* for the Kingdom of God! Only those who are obedient to the law of God will be allowed to live in His Kingdom. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). “...he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 Jn. 2:17). “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom *all* things that *offend*, and them which *do iniquity*; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:41-42). Jesus said, “if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17). “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived...” (1 Cor. 6:9). “He that overcometh shall inherit all things...” (Rev. 21:7) “And there shall in no wise enter into it *anything* that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or maketh a lie...” (Rev. 21:27) “Blessed are they that *do* his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in

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through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and *whosoever* loveth and maketh a lie" (Rev. 22:14-15). Being obedient towards God in heart and life is not the *grounds* (reason or cause) of our entrance into Heaven, but it is a *condition* (not without which) for our entrance into Heaven. Though we can never *deserve* Heaven because of what we have done, we must be *fitted* for Heaven or else we cannot enter it. If a man dies in his sin he will never be allowed into the Holy Kingdom. That is why Jesus said to the unrepentant, "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall *die in your sins*: whither I go, ye *cannot* come" (Jn. 8:21). Those who die in their sins cannot go to Heaven because their moral character is incompatible with the peace and happiness which will exist there. Therefore the commandments of the Lord are not impossible for us to obey but our return to obedience to them through repentance is actually a necessary condition for our entrance into the Kingdom of God.

However, the Westminster Catechism says, "No man is able, either of himself, or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but does daily break them in word, thought, and deed."¹²⁴ The Bible says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that *ye are able*; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be *able* to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). The former says, "...no man is able..." while the latter says, "...ye are able..." Which one is right? Either the Bible is right or the Westminster Catechism is right, but they both cannot be right. That is because man cannot be able to bear temptation while at the same time unable to avoid sin. If man can bear temptation, he can avoid sin. If man cannot avoid sin, he cannot bear temptation. The Bible

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teaches that we never have to sin because there is always a way of escape when we are tempted. Temptation, like God's moral law, never exceeds our ability.

Jesus said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30) And the Apostle told us, "His commandments are not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3). Why would the Bible even say, "Blessed are they that *keep* judgment, and he that doeth righteousness *at all times*" (Ps. 106:3), if we could not keep God's commandments, but sin at all times as the Westminster Catechism says? Why hold out the promise of blessedness to men if they do righteousness "at all times" if they cannot do righteousness at all times? If we must "daily break them in word, thought, and deed" then we cannot "doeth righteousness at all times." And holding out this promise of blessedness would be vain and folly.

Charles Finney said, "But you take the ground that no man can obey the law of God. As the Presbyterian Confession of Faith has it, 'No man is able, either by himself, or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed.' Observe, this affirms not only that no man is naturally able to keep God's commands, but also that no man is able to do it 'by any grace received in this life;' thus making this declaration a libel on the gospel as well as a palpable misrepresentation of the law of its author, and of man's relations to both. It is only moderate language to call this assertion from the Confession of Faith a libel. If there is a lie, either in hell or out of hell, this is a lie, or God is an infinite tyrant. If reason be allowed to speak at all, it is impossible for her to say less or otherwise than thus. And has not God constituted the reason of man for the very purpose of taking cognizance of the rectitude of all His ways?"¹²⁵

One of the reasons that Finney was successful as a revivalist was because he was solid as a theologian. His view

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of natural ability leads to true conviction and true conversion. True conversion requires true repentance, which includes a deep and sincere regret for all past sins. Regretting previous choices presupposes the truth of the liberty of the will or the power of contrary choice. Therefore, the truth of free will must be revived and presented to the minds of sinners, so that they will be able to deeply and sincerely regret their sins, be genuinely repentant, and consequently truly converted.

We must not only preach against the falsehood of total inability, which slanders the character of God and is calculated to relieve the mind of conviction and to relinquish the heart of guilt, and further confirms and strengthens the will in disobedience and rebellion. But we must also preach the truth of natural ability, which glorifies the character of God and is calculated to bring genuine conviction to the mind of sinners. We must declare that truth that make them feel the heavy weight of their guilt and, therefore, influences their will into total submission and surrender to God.

While I was open air preaching at the University of Iowa, a sinner excused and justified his wickedness by saying, "I can't be perfect. I am only human." I explained to him that the fact that he is human is the very reason he can be morally perfect. A stick or a stone cannot be morally perfect because they can't have moral character at all. The existence of moral character requires the existence of moral knowledge and the ability of free choice. God has given mankind both a conscience and a free will, thereby making it possible for us to be morally perfect. By saying, "I am only human," he thought that he was excusing his sin. The truth is that because he is human that he will be without excuse on judgment day.

In the days of George Fox, he said that while he would preach in the open air, "...the professors were in a

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rage, all pleading for sin and imperfection, and could not endure to hear talk of perfection, and of a holy and sinless life.”¹²⁶ These professors would use the Bible to justify their unholy lives. George Fox said, “I bade them give over babbling about the Scriptures, which were holy men’s words, whilst they pleaded for unholiness.”¹²⁷ Albert Barnes said, “The design of the Bible is to make men holy; and any doctrine that leads to lax notions of holiness, and to indulgence in sin, is *prima facie* evidence that it is contrary to the Scriptures.”¹²⁸ Paul said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for *instruction in righteousness...*” (2 Tim. 3:16) The Scriptures were never intended to give man an excuse for not following Christ or to give men a defense for their sin! The Scripture is to reprove, correct, and instruct us in the walk of righteousness. Therefore, any Scripture that is used to teach that men cannot live free from sin in this life is a passage that is being twisted and misused.

A modern phrase I have heard is “sinning saint.” The idea of being a saint, while you are sinning, is nonsense. It is an absurd contradiction to say that a person can be a saint, which means a holy person, *while at the same time* being a sinner, which means an unholy person. You cannot be an unholy holy person or a holy unholy person. A person is holy or sinful, benevolent or selfish, obedient or disobedient, but never *both at the same time* (Matt. 7:17-18; Jas. 3:11). You cannot be one thing and be its opposite simultaneously. You cannot be living for the glory of God and the well-being of your neighbor as your end, while at the same time living for yourself as your end, since these are two opposite ends. The unity or simplicity of moral action is absolutely necessary in order to understand the concepts and nature of total depravity and entire sanctification. You only have one heart. You only have one will. Therefore, you cannot serve two masters (Lk.

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16:13). You cannot be a sinning saint anymore than you can be a saintly sinner. The Bible doesn't use the phrase "sinning saint." It uses the word "hypocrite," which is a more fitting and honest description. It is hypocrisy for a person to call themselves a saint and then to go on sinning. Anyone who names the name of Christ must choose to depart from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19).

Christians who return to their iniquity, or those who return to their disobedience to God's law, are backsliders. The New Testament gives us a definition of a "backslider," describing them as someone who turns from the way of righteousness by turning away from the holy commandment. "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Pet. 2:20-21). The reason that they are backsliders is because they have turned away from the way of righteousness. They have turned away from the holy commandment of God. This is what happened with the Apostle Judas. "Judas by transgression fell" from his "ministry and apostleship" (Acts 1:25). This means he fell through his choice to disobey God's law.

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I have heard many people say, "Everyone sins;" "Everybody is a sinner;" "We all sin every day;" and worse of all, "Everybody is a hypocrite." I know of a Church that has unashamedly called itself - "A Church Full of Hypocrites." Their excuse is, "Everybody is a hypocrite."

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Contrary to this idea that everyone is a *make-believer*, there are genuine *believers*. Jesus boldly taught that hypocrites will go to hell (Matt. 24:49-51). He commanded us not to be like the hypocrites (Matt. 6:5; 6:16; Lk. 12:1). That means it is possible not to be a hypocrite. That means that we have the ability to live a genuinely holy life. We do not have to be sinful. We can choose to be holy. We do not have to break the law of God. We can keep His commandments. We do not have to sin. We can choose to glorify God.

Jesus even rebuked men for their hypocrisy (Matt. 15:7; 22:18; Matt. 23:13-29; Mk. 7:5; Lk. 11:44). That shows that hypocrisy is a free choice of the will. Men choose to be hypocrites. They don't have to be hypocrites. Men *should not* be hypocrites and men are *capable of not* being hypocrites. Otherwise, rebuking anyone for hypocrisy makes no sense and sending a man to hell for hypocrisy would be unjust cruelty. Jesus rebuked

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hypocrites for their hypocrisy and God damns hypocrites for their hypocrisy. Therefore, hypocrisy is a choice which can be avoided.

It is a contradiction when the Church says, "Nobody is perfect;" "You can't keep the commandments of God;" "You can't stop sinning;" "Everybody is a hypocrite;" and then they will be outraged when Jim Baker is caught in a financial scandal, or when Jimmy Swaggart was caught with a prostitute, or when Ted Haggard was exposed for drugs and homosexuality. If sin is unavoidable and everyone is a hypocrite, why be upset when the sins of these Church leaders are exposed to the public? The Church and the world are both upset and outraged when those kinds of events

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happen because both the Church and the world know that sin is a choice that is avoidable.

I cannot count how many times I have heard people say, "The law of God is impossible. We cannot keep the commandments of the Lord." I've heard that from the pulpits but I haven't heard that from the Bible. The Bible says, "we keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 3:22; 5:3). Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). The Bible says about Christians that "we love him" (1 Jn. 4:19) and therefore the Bible says, "we keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 3:22). The Bible says, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Rev. 22:14). Since the Bible says, "we keep his commandments," the Bible does not teach the commandments are impossible for man to keep.

Here is a logical syllogism:

- If you love Jesus, you will keep His commands.
- Christians love Jesus.
- Therefore, Christians keep His commands.

I have heard, "We keep His commandments some of the time." But if you can obey God some of the time, there is no reason why you cannot obey God all of the time. If we can go a second without choosing to sin, then we can go a minute without choosing to sin. If we can go a minute without choosing to sin, then we can go an hour without choosing to sin. If we can go an hour without choosing to sin, then we can go a day without choosing to sin. If we can go a day without choosing to sin, then we can go a week without choosing to sin. If we can go a week without choosing to sin, then we can go a month without choosing to sin. If we can go a month without choosing to sin, then we can go a year without choosing to sin. If we can go a year

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without choosing to sin, then we can go the rest of our life without choosing to sin. And if we can go the rest of our lives without choosing to sin, then we can go all of eternity without choosing to sin. No sin at any time is ever excusable because all sin at any time is avoidable.

Hermas said, "Sir, these commandments are great, and good, and glorious, and fitted to gladden the heart of the man who can perform them. But I do not know if these commandments can be kept by man, because they are exceeding hard." He answered and said to me, "If you lay it down as certain that they can be kept, then you will easily keep them, and they will not be hard. But if you come to imagine that they cannot be kept by man, then you will not keep them. Now I say to you, If you do not keep them, but neglect them, you will not be saved... since you have already determined for yourself that these commandments cannot be kept by man."¹²⁹

Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, said "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: *fear God, and keep his commandments*: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecc. 12:13-14). For what purpose is the admonition to "fear God, and keep his commandments" unless this very thing can be done? Why say "whether it be good, or whether it be evil" if what is good cannot be done and if what is evil cannot be avoided?

The Bible makes a beautiful promise when it says, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). What an empty promise and straight out lie this would be if we cannot live morally pure in this life. Those who hunger and thirst for moral purity, would be dissatisfied throughout their entire

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life, if sin cannot be avoided or if holiness cannot be attained.

Even Biblical prayers like, "keep me from evil" (1 Chron. 4:10) or "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Lk. 11:4), would be a completely empty and vain prayer if you cannot live free from sin in this life. The best promises would be nullified and the best prayers would be denied if sin absolutely cannot be avoided in this life.

One writer in the Early Church, possibly Pelagius or one of his disciples, said, "Is it possible then for a man not to sin? Such a claim is indeed a hard one and a bitter pill for sinners to swallow; it pains the ears of all who desire to live unrighteously. Who will find it easy now to fulfill the demands of righteousness, when there are some who find it hard even to listen to them?"¹³⁰

A person must have a very low view of our Creator and of His grace to believe that we cannot avoid sin in this life. Has God so created us that we cannot avoid sin? Or is sin greater than the grace of God? Is the grace of God insufficient? Is His creation defective? Sin is avoidable because God has created us with a free will and He affords us the help or assistance of His grace.

Of all people, even Augustine at one time said, "We must not instantly with an incautious rashness oppose those who assert, that it is possible for man to be in life without sin. For if we deny the possibility of this, we shall derate both from the free will of man, which desires to be in such a perfect state by willing it; and from the Power or Mercy of God, who effects it by the assistance which he affords... if I be asked, 'Is it possible for a man to exist in the present life without sin?' I shall confess, that it is possible by the grace of God, and by man's free will."¹³¹

Even if nobody in all of history ever kept the commandments of God, this would not negate the fact that

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we are capable of doing so. Obedience is a *possibility* even if disobedience is the only *actuality*. Even if everybody in the world lives and dies in sin, it is still true that nobody ever had to sin and nobody ever has to sin.

The moral law does not declare what men will do, but it declares what men can and should do. It is not easy to live a sin free life, but it can be done. Sin is an avoidable choice (Isa. 1:16; Eze. 18:30; Jn. 5:14; 8:11; Rom. 6:12; 1 Cor. 15:34; Heb. 12:1; Eph. 4:26; 1 Jn. 2:1). The only reason a person does not live a sinless life, or the reason that a person lives a sinful life, is because they freely choose to sin. To live a sinful life or to live a sinless life is a matter of free will choice.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD'S PROBLEM WITH SINNERS

It doesn't take reading the Bible very long to realize that God has a problem with sinners. By reading the will of God in the Bible and by looking at the condition of the world around us, we realize that this world is not what God intended it to be. Mankind does not live the way God planned for us to live. What exactly is the nature of the problem? If God's problem is not that sinners cannot obey Him, what is the problem that He has with them?

God's problem with sinners is not that they *can't* obey His law but that they *don't* obey His law. A sinner's problem is not inability but unwillingness. God's problem with sinners is rebellion. The nature of rebellion is not inability but unwillingness. Rebellion or sin has to do with a person's moral state, not with the state of his constitution. The problem with a sinner is not his constitution; the problem with a sinner is his will. His problem is not the abilities that he has, but how he uses the abilities that he has. A sinner is a rebel because while he could obey God, he refuses to do so. The problem that God has with sinners is not that He has made them unable to obey (*a problem with their nature*), but that they have made themselves unwilling to obey (*a problem with their will*).

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Here is the problem shown through syllogism:

- God’s problem with man is his sinfulness.
- The nature of sin is moral not constitutional.
- Therefore, the nature of God’s problem with man is moral not constitutional.

The moral depravity or sinfulness of man is not in the *faculty* of his will but in the *usage* that a sinner makes of the faculty of will that God gave him. The free will faculty of a

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sinner is still intact despite Adam’s sin and despite all of his own sin, but the use that a sinner makes of his free will is morally depraved. The sinfulness of man is moral and relates to the *usage* of his will. The sinfulness of man is not constitutional or relates to the *faculty* of the will itself. It is not that the wicked are constitutionally broken and need to be constitutionally repaired or rebuilt. It is that they are morally rebellious and need to be

influenced into submission. The will of a sinner needs to be redirected.

All Men Have Knowingly Chosen To Be Sinners

God’s problem with mankind is that we have *willingly* and *knowingly* become sinners. Sin is the free choice of the will to disobey the revealed or known law of God (Jn. 9:41; Rom. 2:14-15; Jas. 4:17). Jesus said, “If ye were *blind*, ye should have no sin...” (Jn. 9:41). James said, “Therefore to him that *knoweth* to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17). A man is a sinner because he does what he knows is wrong. Sin is synonymous with rebellion. It is the choice to disobey the revealed law of God.

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Even if a person chooses to do something which they believe is wrong, when in reality it is not wrong, they are still committing sin in their heart (Rom. 14:22-23; 1 Cor. 8:9-13). Such action shows that they are in a state of rebellion against what their mind tells them to be good and are in allegiance to what their mind tells them is wrong. Even though their action or conduct is not wrong in reality or in itself, they themselves are wrong and blameworthy because of the state of their intention.

On the other hand, if a person obeys all the knowledge that they have but commits an action which they do not know is wrong, when in fact it is wrong, this is not necessarily indicative of a wicked heart, or reveal that their will is rebellious, or a manifestation of an evil intention. It could simply be an innocent lack of knowledge. They might choose not to commit such an action if they only knew better. Since they are not doing it out of a wicked heart, or have a rebellious will, or have an evil intention, such an action cannot be a blemish on their moral character or indicate that their character is corrupt.

Moral attributes are those attributes which are voluntarily chosen by our will in accordance with or contrary to the moral knowledge that our mind possesses. If a man always does what he believes or knows is right, there is no blemish at all on his moral character. There would be no rebellion in his heart or wickedness in his intention. Such a man would be "blameless" or "faultless," since he always does what he believes and knows to be right.

While the Old Testament does talk about those who might commit "sin through ignorance" (Lev. 4:2; 4:13; 4:27; 5:15; Num. 15:27), this concept is not found anywhere in the New Testament. This is because in the Old Testament, the Israelites were under obligation to the dietary and ceremonial laws. These types of laws were not natural to them but would

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have been foreign to their minds. Therefore, they might unknowingly violate such laws because of the foreign nature of such laws. It is not that they could possibly be ignorant of their own actions, since they are the cause of their actions, but that they could have been ignorant of the commandments and law of God.

But for the Gentiles and in the New Testament, we are only under obligation to the moral law. The moral law is revealed to all of us naturally through our conscience (Rom. 2:14-15). The moral principles of God's moral law are not foreign concepts to our minds. A person cannot commit adultery or murder on accident or without knowing that it was wrong. All men naturally know that selfishness and all of its manifestations are wrong.

Since we are only under moral obligation to the moral law, and since the moral law is naturally known by us, the New Testament nowhere speaks of sins of ignorance but teaches that all sin is an intentional choice and known rebellion.

Since God doesn't want us to sin, He has made His moral law clearly known to us. Even if we were somehow going to commit sins in ignorance, or if we had sins in our lives which we were not aware of, the Lord would bring these to our attention in order for us to avoid committing them (Gen. 20:3-7). This is because He doesn't want us to sin and so He will make it known to us what sin is. Therefore, even this type of scenario would not bar us from living a life free from sin.

It is also true that the Israelites knew that they should study and know the law. God commanded them, "And thou shalt teach them [His laws] diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7). Therefore, if the Israelites

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were ignorant of the law, their ignorance itself would have been an intentional choice to violate a known obligation. If they commit a “sin through ignorance” they are rightly held responsible because their ignorance of the law would have been deliberate. They would have been the type of people Peter said “willingly are ignorant” (2 Pet. 3:5). The law was available to them to know and to obey; and therefore, if they did not know and obey it, it was a willful choice to violate a known obligation. Their ignorance of the law would have been, therefore, a criminal act itself.

The Hebrew word used for "ignorance" means "inadvertent."¹ An alternative phrase to “sin through ignorance” according to Brown Driver Briggs is “inadvertent sin,”² or according to Strong, “inadvertent transgression.”³ Inadvertent is defined as, “Not turning the mind to; heedless; careless; negligent.”⁴ To say that an Israelite could commit a sin through ignorance simply means that they could commit a sin inadvertently. "Inadvertently" is defined as, "Heedlessly; carelessly; from want of attention; inconsiderately."⁵ Therefore, Israel could commit a “sin through ignorance” in that they could “violate the law through a want of attention to it, through a negligence to turn their mind to the law and consider it.” Whether they commit a sin through ignorance or not depended entirely upon whether they choose to be negligent to study the law or choose to turn their minds to it and consider it.

God gave Israel the incentive to study and know the law by declaring that they would still be guilty even if they didn't know it. “And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he know it not, yet is he guilty, and he shall bear his iniquity” (Lev. 5:17). They would be guilty just as if he had known the law, even if they didn't know the law, because the law was revealed and made available to

them. Their ignorance of the law would not bar them from their obligation to the law. Otherwise, Israel could simply refuse to know the law of God and, consequently, not be under moral obligation to it. If they were not considered guilty if they were simply ignorant of the law of God, their *willful ignorance* would have made them innocent or guiltless no matter what they do. They would have been free to forget the law of God and live however they want. God, therefore, took away their incentive to ignore His law and gave them motivation to study and obey it.

Since God revealed His law to the Israelites and made it available to them, and since God has written the moral law upon our hearts so that we cannot help but to know it, sin is a deliberate choice or act on our part. If we sin, we have violated a known or revealed obligation. If we sin, our own voluntary choice is involved.

Augustine even once said, "There can be no sin that is not voluntary, the learned and the ignorant admit this evident truth."⁶ John Wesley said, "Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of a known law of God."⁷ A. W. Tozer said, "Sin is the voluntary commission of an act known to be contrary to the will of God. Where there is no moral knowledge or where there is no voluntary choice, the act is not sinful; it cannot be, for sin is the transgression of the law and transgression must be voluntary."⁸

Since Jesus said, "If ye were *blind*, ye should have no sin..." (Jn. 9:41), and since James said, "Therefore to him that *knoweth* to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17); infants are, therefore, morally innocent. This is because they don't yet know right from wrong and they cannot yet know right from wrong. They have "no knowledge between good and evil" (Deut. 1:39) and do not yet "know to refuse the evil, and choose the good" (Isa. 7:15-

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16). Consequently, infants haven't yet made any moral choices. Infants have not yet "done any good or evil" (Rom. 9:11). Without moral knowledge, you cannot have moral obligation or make moral choices. And without moral obligation and without moral choices, you cannot have moral character. It is impossible for infants to have moral knowledge due to the undeveloped state of their minds. Therefore, in their case, ignorance does equal innocence. Their ignorant state is not criminal since it is unintentional and unavoidable.

Since infants are without moral knowledge, moral obligation, moral choices, and consequently without moral character, they are exempt from the wrath of God. Only those who have a developed mind or have enough knowledge are "*without excuse*" before God (Rom. 1:20). The "wrath of God" is coming upon those who "*hold the truth in unrighteousness*" (Rom. 1:18). That means that God's wrath is against those who possess the truth and yet are sinning anyway. Infants, therefore, have an excuse for their behavior and are not under the wrath of God because they do not yet possess moral knowledge of right and wrong.

The moral accountability of each individual is proportionate to the knowledge that they have. "Very I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:15). Sodom and Gomorrah, for example, were not under moral obligation to obey the gospel because they had no knowledge of the gospel. It was impossible for them to possess such knowledge. But as soon as the gospel was known to those cities that Jesus preached to, they became obligated to obey that knowledge. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Lk. 12:48). Since infants do not have any moral knowledge whatsoever, they are not accountable or responsible to God at all.

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Since infants are without moral knowledge, without moral obligation, and without moral choices, this adequately explains why the Bible explicitly describes infants as morally “*innocent*” (2 Kin. 21:16; 24:4; Jer. 13:26-27; Ps. 106:37-38; Matt. 18:3). When Bible talks about the shedding of “*innocent blood*” (2 Kin. 21:16), the context of this passage is child sacrifices. It says that King Manasseh "made his son pass through the fire" (2 Kin. 21:16). That is, he sacrificed his innocent child upon the altar of a false god. God had commanded, “thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire of Molech” (Lev. 18:21).

That is why it says that King Manasseh did "after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel" (2 Kin. 21:2). King Manasseh practiced the same abominable rituals that the heathen, who used to occupy the land, did by sacrificing innocent children to Molech. God had specifically commanded, "When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire" (Deut. 18:9-10). It was the heathen practice of the former occupants of the land to sacrifice innocent children. It says of King Manasseh, "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel" (2 Kin. 16:3).

Since King Manasseh sacrificed children, it says that he "shed" "*innocent blood*" (2 Kin. 24:4). Clearly, God views infants as morally innocent. According to the meaning of the Hebrew word “*innocent*” in this passage, God was literally calling infants “*blameless,*” “*clean,*” and “*guiltless.*” This means that children are not blameworthy, filthy, or guilty.

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While infants are born morally innocent, since it is impossible for them to be born any other way, all men have chosen to be sinners *from their youth* (Gen. 8:21; Jer. 22:21; 32:30). This is when they reach the age of accountability. All men, who have come of age, are conscious of the fact that they have deliberately broken the law of God. We have all, at some point, freely given into temptation contrary to the demands of our conscience. Our will has freely chosen contrary to the moral knowledge of our mind.

Sin is the transgression of God's law (1 Jn. 3:4). God's law forbids selfishness or self-centeredness by forbidding us from loving ourselves supremely or loving ourselves above our fellow man. It commands benevolence supremely toward God and equally toward our neighbor (Lk. 10:27). Both selfishness and benevolence are choices of the will. They are the motives and intentions of the heart. Therefore, sin at its essence is the choice, motive, or intention of selfishness; while obedience at its essence is the choice, motive, or intention of benevolence.

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All men naturally know that benevolence is morally right and that selfishness is morally wrong. When the Bible says that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), that means that all men have chosen to be selfish. It means that we have all *chosen* to do what we *knew* was morally wrong. In this way, we have willingly and knowingly chosen to be transgressors.

This is God's problem with mankind. "...the Lord hath a controversy with his people" (Mic. 6:2). God's problem with men is that they have *freely* and *personally* chosen to go their own way and to be sinners (Gen. 6:12, Ex. 32:7, Deut. 9:12, Deut. 32:5, Jdg. 2:19, Hos. 9:9, Ps. 14:2-3,

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Isa. 53:6, Ecc. 7:29, Rom. 3:23, Rom. 5:12). The Bible says, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way*” (Isa. 53:6). The phrase “gone astray” and “we have turned” indicates individual volition or personal deliberation. Men are sinners because they choose to sin. Sinners are deliberate rebels against the moral government of God.

- A sinner is someone who chooses to sin.
- Men are sinners.
- Therefore, men are sinners by choice; men are sinners because they choose to sin.

Mankind is a race of criminals. Mankind is a race of beings using their free will to rebel against their Maker. The criminality of man lies in his free choice to be a sinner. Regarding our race, God said, “Every one of them is *gone back*: they are all together *become filthy*, there is none that doeth good no, not one” (Ps. 53:2; 14:2). Only the morally innocent can become guilty, only the morally clean can “become filthy.” This description of the sinful state of man describes a degenerate state, one which they have “gone back” into. It is not a state that we were helplessly born into but a state that we have deliberately chosen to become or fall into. It says that they “become” this way. Men “become” sinners when they choose to sin.

Ignatius said, “If anyone is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but by his own choice.”¹⁰ Origen said, “The Scriptures...emphasize the freedom of the will. They condemn those who sin, and approve those who do right... We are responsible for being bad and worthy of being cast outside. For it is not the nature in us that is the cause of the evil; rather, it is the voluntary choice that works evil.”¹¹ Tatian said that because of “freedom of choice... the

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bad man can be justly punished, having become depraved through his own fault.”¹² Clement of Alexandria said about sinners, “...their estrangement is the result of free choice.”¹³ Theodore of Mopsuestia denied the concept “that men sin by nature, not by choice.”¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa said, “For that any one should become wicked, depends solely upon choice.”¹⁵

We see then that men are sinners, not because they have a corrupted and ruined nature which makes them sin or which is sinful itself, but because free will is a faculty of their nature and they use that faculty to choose to sin. But if all men are free to sin or not to sin, why have all men freely chosen to sin? If Adam had freely chosen to sin, with all the advantages that he had over us, it is no wonder that we too have chosen to sin, since we must deal with the world, the flesh, and the devil. While Adam faced temptation from only one source, the world we are born into is full of temptation everywhere. And the devil has had many years of practice in deceiving mankind. The devil has not stopped tempting men. We encounter far more temptation in our world than Adam did in his. And we face a craftier devil than Adam faced. So it is not unbelievable to think that we have freely chosen to sin just as Adam did. The Bible says, “But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant” (Hos. 6:7).

We have all freely sinned just like Adam did. We are all conscious of having sinned; and we are all conscious of having alternative possibilities, which we can choose between when we are tempted. That we have free will and that we have all sinned are both true. We never had to break the law of God, but we all have broken the law of God.

We never had to break the law of God, but we all have broken the law of God.

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This is the great tragedy of our race and it has brought much heartache to God. A sinner has nobody to blame for his sinfulness but himself. God has made sin avoidable by giving us a free will and God has influenced us not to sin by making conscience part of our nature; but despite the efforts of God, mankind has sinned anyway. "God hath made men upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Ecc. 7:29). God's problem with men is not with their constitutional abilities but with *how they are using* their constitutional abilities. Our sin cannot be blamed on anything behind our will, outside of our will, or independent of our will. Our will itself is the cause of sin. It is in our will that sin originates.

The Bible says, "And the Lord said... they have *rejected* me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). Jesus taught, "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, we *WILL NOT* have this man to reign over us" (Lk. 19:14). These citizens had rebellious hearts against their ruler. They had disobedient wills. Their problem was not their nature or with their constitutional abilities. Their problem was their will. It is not that they *could not* obey God, but that they *would not* obey God. It was a moral problem, not a constitutional problem. Men are sinners through the liberty of their will, not through a necessity of their nature. Again Jesus taught, "But those mine enemies, which *WOULD NOT* that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). Jesus said that their problem was their will, not their nature. Their problem was not inability, but how they were using their ability. Jesus didn't say that they "could not" but that they "would not." That is precisely why it is just for Jesus to slay them. They could submit to His reign but refuse to. Therefore, they rightly and justly deserve punishment.

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If they could not obey, however, it would not be right or just to command them to obey or to punish them for not doing so. It would be as cruel as punishing the lame for not walking or to punish the blind for not seeing. Sinners are objects of God's wrath for sinning because they choose to sin when they don't have to. God does not punish sinners because they *couldn't* obey Him, which would be a fault of their nature, which they have no control over. God punishes sinners because they *wouldn't* obey Him, which is a fault of their will, which they themselves cause. God told Israel, "As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye *WOULD NOT* be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God" (Deut. 8:20). Sinners are punishable, not because they were not capable of obeying God, but because they were not willing to obey God.

Justin Martyr said, "We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishment, chastisement, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is our own power. For if it is predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise and the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions – whatever they may be ... for neither would a man be worthy of praise if he did not himself choose the good, but was merely created for that end. Likewise, if a man were created evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for."¹⁶

Walter Arthur Copinger said, "If we were shut up, so to speak, by a moral necessity, our actions would lose their quality of moral or immoral. Praise and blame, reward and punishment uniformly imply that we consider the individual

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who is the recipient of such to be a free and responsible agent – that we deem it quite possible he might have acted otherwise than he did: and so soon as we discover that he acted under compulsion, whether arising from a physical or moral necessity, we no longer estimate his conduct or judge his actions by the standard of duty. All just ground of punishment... would be gone...”¹⁷

God had seen so much wickedness from mankind because of the influence of the devil that it is no wonder that when Job was an upright and perfect man, God took the occasion to boast about him to the devil (Job 1:8). But when God was boasting to the devil of the moral purity of Job, the devil knew that Job’s uprightness and moral perfection was volitional and, therefore, he sought to bring about circumstances which would influence Job to choose to curse God and die (Job 1:9-12). The devil knew that Job was living holy by choice. Therefore, he thought to influence Job to change his choice. It would make no sense for God to praise Job for his character or for the devil to try to influence him to change his character, unless his character was determined by his free choice. But just as it would make no sense to praise a being for being holy and righteous unless he was voluntarily holy and righteous by choice, unless he was free to be otherwise, so also it makes no sense to punish a being for being wicked and evil unless he was voluntarily wicked and evil by choice and was free to be otherwise.

Theodorite said, “For how can He punish [with endless torments] a nature which had no power to do good, but was bound in the hands of wickedness?”¹⁸

Irenaeus said, “Those who do not do it [good] will receive the just judgment of God, because they had not worked good when they had it in their power to do so. But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for

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they were created that way. Nor would the former be reprehensible, for that is how they were made. However, all men are of the same nature. They are all able to hold fast and to go what is good. On the other hand, they have the power to cast good from them and not to do it.”¹⁹

John Fletcher said, “As to the moral agency of man, Mr. Wesley thinks it cannot be denied upon the principles of common sense and civil government; much less upon those of natural and revealed religion; as nothing would be more absurd than to bind us by laws of a civil or spiritual nature; nothing more foolish than to propose to us punishments and rewards; and nothing more capricious than to inflict the one or bestow the other upon us; if we were not moral agents.”²⁰

Servitude to Sin or Righteousness is Voluntary

Someone might ask, “If men are sinners by the liberty of their will and not by the necessity of their nature, or if their problem is unwillingness but not inability, why does the Bible call them servants of sin?” It is important to understand that just as Christians are “servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18), yet this does not mean that they cannot sin, so also sinners are “servants of sin” (Rom. 6:16, 17, 20), but this does not mean that they cannot repent. Christians choose to serve righteousness when they are free to choose otherwise. And sinners choose to serve sin when they are free to choose otherwise. Whom or what you serve is a matter of free choice.

Sinners are described in the Bible as servants of sin, but this does not mean that they are servants of sin *against their will* instead of servants of sin *by their will*. To serve righteousness or to serve sin is a choice of the will. The Bible says that men “yield” themselves to sin (Rom. 6:13). Paul said, “...ye have *yielded* your members *servants* to uncleanness and to iniquity” (Rom. 6:19). To “yield” is to

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consent, surrender, or submit. Yielding indicates or implies choice. A servant of sin is someone who chooses to obey sin. It is not that men obey sin because they are servants of sin, but that they are servants of sin because they obey sin. A person must sin before they are a servant of sin, and a person must be tempted before they can sin, and with temptation is the choice to sin or not (1 Cor. 10:13). Therefore, those who are servants of sin are servants by free choice.

The choice to commit sin makes a person the servant of sin. “Jesus answered them, verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (Jn. 8:34).

Men make
the choice
to be ruled
by sin
rather than
to rule
over sin.

Committing sin comes before being a servant of sin. A person is a servant of sin because they first choose to serve sin. You are the servant of whoever you choose to serve. You are the servant of whoever you choose to obey. “Know ye not, that to whom ye *yield yourselves* servants to obey, *his servants ye are to whom ye obey*; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16). To be a servant

of sin or a servant of righteousness, a man must first yield themselves servants to obey. Yielding obedience comes before the servitude. Men are servants of sin because they choose to serve sin, because they yield obedience to it. In the Greek, the word Paul used for servant means, “one who gives himself up to another’s will.”²¹ Therefore, men make the choice to be *ruled by sin* rather than to *rule over sin* (Gen. 4:7).

Charles Finney said, “God made men to be free, giving them just such mental powers as they need in order to control their own activities as a rational being should wish to. Their bondage, then, is altogether voluntary. They choose

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to resist the control of reason, and submit to the control of appetite and passion.”²²

On the other hand, Martin Luther said, "For if man has lost his freedom, and is forced to serve sin, and cannot will good, what conclusion can more justly be drawn concerning him, than that he sins and wills evil necessarily?"²³

Luther's view, that men are "forced to serve sin" because they have lost their freedom, make sinners pitiful victims deserving of compassion, rather than punishable criminals deserving of condemnation. It would make them deserving of pity rather than punishment!

Suppose a man tampers with the braking system of a person's car so that the brakes become disabled. If the owner of the car, unaware of this defect, drives the car and accidentally crashes and kills other people, can he be justly charged with manslaughter? No, because the tragedy was not the result of his own negligence or choice. That man would be the subject of pity, not prosecution or punishment. But men suppose that God and Adam have so tampered with our human nature that our free will has become disabled. How then can we be justly charged with any of our sins, if they are the result of necessity, or if we are forced to do them?

If a man deliberately takes his car, with fully functional brakes, and plows down innocent people, then he certainly is liable to severe prosecution! Likewise, sinners are punishable for serving sin for the precise reason that sinners are choosing to serve sin, when in fact it is within their power to choose to serve God. Their free will is fully functional; and therefore, they are liable to severe prosecution under God's moral government.

God's Frustration with Israel

In considering God's dealings with Israel, we see that God did not force them to do His will. He influenced them, but He did not force them. He left it up to their free choice. God said, "...when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and *chose* that in which I delighted not" (Isa 66:4). "Because I have called, and ye *refused*; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded" (Prov. 1:24). "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:21). Why would God stretch forth His hand to them, if they were not capable of being obedient to Him? Why would God complain of their disobedience unless their obedience was a possibility, which they refused to make an actuality? Why would God make the effort of reaching out to them unless they were capable of doing what He wanted? Their problem was not that God didn't want them to obey, or that God didn't give them the ability to obey, but that they were choosing to be disobedient out of the freedom that God had granted them.

Disobedience is not the fault of someone's nature (*inability*). God determines what type of nature we have. Disobedience is the fault of someone's free will (*unwillingness*). Men determine what type of choices they make. Rebellion is not a constitutional problem, caused by a fault in our design. Rebellion is a moral problem, caused by our own will. Sin is not the necessary result of a deficiency in our constitution or a defect in our nature, but is freely caused by the misuse of our constitution or through the abuse of our nature.

Pelagius said, "And lest, on the other hand, it should be thought to be nature's fault that some have been

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unrighteous, I shall use the evidence of the Scripture, which everywhere lay upon sinners the heavy weight of the charge of having used their own will and do not excuse them for having acted only under constraint of nature.”²⁴

We see this all throughout God's dealings with Israel. He doesn't ever say, "They disobey me because they cannot obey me." Neither does He say, "They cannot obey me because I took away their free will when Adam sinned." God never says that Israel *could not* obey, but that they *would not* obey. God never treated them as if they were incapable of obeying Him because of their nature, but He treated them as if they could have obeyed Him if they wanted to. He accuses them of not being willing to obey, which is the nature of rebellion. God never *excuses* them for their rebellion but continually *accuses* them for it, which shows that it was the fault of their will and not the fault of their nature.

God never excuses them for their rebellion but continually accuses them for it.

"Notwithstanding ye *WOULD NOT* go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God" (Deut. 1:26).

"So I spake unto you; and ye *WOULD NOT* hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the Lord" (Deut. 1:43).

"As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye *WOULD NOT* be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God" (Deut. 8:20).

"And yet they *WOULD NOT* hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord: but they did not so" (Jdg. 2:17).

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“Notwithstanding they *WOULD NOT* hear, but hardened their necks, like the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God” (2 Kin. 17:14).

“Because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and *WOULD NOT* hear them, nor do them” (2 Kin. 18:12).

“That whosoever *WOULD NOT* seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death...” (2 Chron. 15:13).

“Yet he sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the Lord; and they testified against them: but they *WOULD NOT* give ear” (2 Chron. 24:19).

“And the Lord spake to Mannasseh, and to his people: but they *WOULD NOT* hearken” (2 Chron. 33:10).

“And testifies against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdraw the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and *WOULD NOT* hear. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet *WOULD* they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands” (Neh. 9:29-30)

“Because they turned back from him, and *WOULD NOT* consider any of his ways” (Job 34:27).

“But my people *WOULD NOT* hearken to my voice; and Israel *WOULD* none of me” (Ps. 81:11).

“To whom he said, this is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they *WOULD NOT* hear” (Isa. 28:12).

“For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye *WOULD NOT*. But ye said, No” (Isa. 30:15-16).

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“Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned? For they *WOULD NOT* walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law” (Isa. 42:24).

“For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord, that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they *WOULD NOT* hear” (Jer. 13:11).

“Because they have not hearkened to my words, saith the Lord, which I sent unto them by my servant the prophets, rising up early and sending them, but ye *WOULD NOT* hear, saith the Lord” (Jer. 29:19).

“But they rebelled against me, and *WOULD NOT* hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt...” (Eze. 20:8).

“Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they *WOULD NOT* hear, so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 7:13).

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered they children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye *WOULD NOT*” (Matt. 23:37).

“To whom our fathers *WOULD NOT* obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt” (Acts 7:39).

God's problem with Israel was that they were not making the choices that He wanted them to make. They were sinners because they were choosing to sin. “Yea, they have *chosen* their own ways” (Isa. 66:3). “We have sinned and have *committed* iniquity, and have *done* wickedly, and have *rebelled* even by *departing* from thy precepts and from thy

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judgments: neither have we *hearkened* unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land” (Dan. 9:5-6). God rebuked Israel saying, “...ye have not *inclined* your ear” (Jer. 7:24, 26; 11:8; 17:23; 25:4; 34:14; 35:14-15; 44:5), and by saying, “...ye have not *hearkened*” (Jer. 25:3-4, 7; 26:5; 29:19; 34:14, 17; 35:14-15). “Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearkened unto me, saith the Lord” (Zech. 1:4). Their disobedience was their own choice or fault, which God was very upset about because He wanted them to obey Him. God complained that Israel would not obey Him, which implies that they could have obeyed Him. Why would He complain about their disobedience if He had created them incapable of obedience? Why would God rebuke Israel for their unwillingness unless they were capable of being willing? The reason that God rebukes them and complains about their being in such a state is because He had created them capable of obedience and He had called them to be so, but they were choosing to be in a sinful state anyway.

While God calls men, it is they themselves which must choose. Each man determines the moral condition of his own heart. We read, “*Let* your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments...” (1 Kin. 8:61) and also, “*let* none of you imagine evil against his brother in his heart” (Zec. 7:10). The words “let” indicate our choice of consent. The Psalmist said, “*I have inclined mine heart* to perform thy statutes always, even unto the end” (Ps. 119:112). This shows his personal determination. God complained and rebuked Israel saying, “ye have not *hearkened*, nor *inclined* your ear to hear” (Jer. 25:4) and “ye have not *inclined* your ear, nor

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hearkened unto me” (Jer. 35:15). “For I *earnestly protested* unto your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even unto this day, rising early and protesting, saying *Obey my voice*. Yet they obeyed not, nor inclined their ear...” (Jer. 11:7-8). The Israelites were told, “Now *set your heart* and your soul to seek the Lord your God...” (1 Chron. 22:19). The problem God had with Israel was that they were “a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that *set not their heart* aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God” (Ps. 78:8). We are told that “*they set their heart* on their iniquity” (Hos. 4:8). The setting of their heart signifies the deliberation of their will, it indicates their personal volition.

Stephen rebuked the Israelites by saying, “Ye stiffnecked and *uncircumcised in heart* and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). Stephen was rebuking them for disobeying a specific commandment, “*Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart*, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut. 10:16). This command and rebuke indicates that men determine for themselves what type of heart they will have. God bemoans and complains saying, “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me” (Isa. 1:2). Despite the efforts of God to have an obedient people out of Israel, they rebelled against Him. God’s will is not always done because God’s will is not the only will in the universe.

What is rebellion? Rebellion is the volition of the will, not the necessitation of nature. God’s problem with Israel was that they were choosing to be rebellious. He said, “That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that *will not* hear the law of the Lord” (Isa. 30:9). God’s problem with men has been that they “refused” to obey Him (1 Sam. 8:19; Neh 9:17; Ps. 78:10; Pro. 1:24; Isa. 1:20; Jer. 5:3; 8:5; 9:6; 11:10; 13:10; Eze. 5:6; Zec. 7:11). God complained,

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“This evil people, which *refuse* to hear my words...” (Jer. 13:10). Refusal is a deliberation or volition of the will. “They kept not the covenant of God, and *refused* to walk in his law” (Ps. 78:10).

What a heart breaking tragedy it is to read “I have called, and *ye refused*; I have stretched out my hand, and no man *regarded*...” (Prov. 1:24). This has been God’s complaint against Israel, “...they have *refused* to receive correction; *they have made* their faces harder than a rock; they have *refused* to return” (Jer. 5:3). God said “they *refused* to hear my words” (Jer. 11:10). Clearly, men have the ability to “refuse” or to “choose” (Job 34:33). God repeatedly accused Israel of *refusing to hearken* unto his voice, for choosing not to *incline their hearts* (Jer. 7:13; 11:8; 25:3-4; 26:5; 32:22; 35:14-15; 44:4-6). How awful it is to hear God say, “I spake unto you... but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not...” (Jer. 17:13). “But my people *would not hearken* to my voice, and Israel *would* none of me. So I gave them up to *their own hearts* lust: and they walked in *their own counsels*. Oh that my people had *hearkened* unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!... The haters of the Lord should have *submitted themselves* unto him” (Ps. 81:11-13, 15).

God did not force them to obey Him and to do His will, but He called them to obedience and gave them the choice. He allowed them to walk in their “own counsels.” God calls, but we must answer, hearken, and submit ourselves. God commands, but we must obey. We see all throughout the Old Testament that God was grieved over Israel’s disobedience and confronted their rebellion. This must be because God has given them the ability to obey, but they would not. The problem was the refusal of their will. They decided to be rebellious against His will. They decided reject the will of God and resist His influence in their lives.

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God was justifiably upset with them because they were the cause of their avoidable sins.

Who Do We Blame For Our Sin?

We abundantly see that men are sinners, not by necessity of their nature, but by their own moral choice. The fault is man's character not his constitution. It could not be any clearer from all the passages listed that the problem God has with sinners is not that they *could not* obey Him, but that they *would not* obey Him. "Would not" means choice of the will. God wants men to obey Him, but men do not want to obey God. To blame our nature for our sin is to blame the God of nature or "nature's God" for our sin. To blame our capacities for our wickedness, by saying that we were incapable of obedience, is to blame our Creator for our wickedness.

Asa Mahan said, "The next dogma deserving attention is the position, that mankind derived from our first progenitor a corrupt nature, which renders obedience to the commands of God impossible, and disobedience necessary, and that for the mere existence of this nature, men 'deserve God's wrath and curse, not only in this world, but in that which is to come.' If the above dogma is true, it is demonstrably evident, that this corrupt nature comes into existence without knowledge, choice, or agency of the creature, who for its existence is pronounced deserving of, and 'bound over to the wrath of God.' Equally evident is it, that this corrupt nature exists as the result of the direct agency of God. He proclaims himself the maker of 'every soul of man.' As its Maker, He must have imparted to that soul the constitution or nature which it actually possesses. It does not help the matter at all, to say, that this

Men are sinners, not by necessity of their nature, but by their own moral choice.

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nature is derived from our progenitor: for the laws of generation, by which this corrupt nature is derived from that progenitor, are sustained and continued by God himself... If, then, the above dogma is true, man in the first place, is held as deserving of eternal punishment for that which exists wholly independent of his knowledge, choice or agency, in any sense, direct or indirect, He is also held responsible for the result, not of his own agency, but for that which results from the agency of God.”²⁵

Michael Pearl said, “The excuse that our wills are captive comes from our unwillingness to admit being at fault in our sin... We imagine our wills to be dysfunctional because we know that if such were true it would be a perfect alibi. To charge a man’s evil to the faulty constitution of his soul is to acquit him of all blame. Who then would be to blame but the creator of this captive will?... God is responsible for my attributes (nature); I am responsible for my actions. To blame my actions on my attributes is to excuse myself of responsibility.”²⁶

A sinner’s problem is not constitutional; otherwise he could blame God *who forms us in the womb* (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 27:11; 43:1; 43:7; 44:2; 44:24; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 26:10; 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Ecc. 7:29; 31:15; 35:10; Mal. 2:10; Jn. 1:3; Rom. 9:20; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16). The sinner’s problem is moral. Sin is his own fault because it is his own choice. God is not responsible for the sin of the world because God has created us with the ability to obey and not sin. God has given us the ability to be loyal and good or to be rebellious and evil. That is our own choice; and therefore, it is our own fault if we do not use our ability to obey Him. If free will is true, sin is man’s fault not God’s fault. If free will is not true, sin is God’s fault not man’s fault.

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Everything God makes is good (Gen. 1:31; 1 Tim. 4:4). The problem with the world is not the nature or constitution God has given us. The problem is that God's creation has corrupted itself (Gen. 6:12). The problem with the world is the choices that men have made. The problem is not with the nature or constitution of man but with the will of man. Sin is not a weakness or a sickness; sin is wickedness.

If the sinner's problem is constitutional, he would be a *cripple* – someone who *cannot* obey God. If the sinner's problem is moral, he is a *criminal* – someone who doesn't *want* to obey God. If sinners are constitutionally cripples, they *deserve pity*. If sinners are morally criminals, they *deserve punishment*.

Regarding the wicked, Jesus said that he “*shall cut him asunder*” (Matt. 24:51). Jesus will say, “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and *slay them before me*” (Lk. 19:27). God will, “*devour the adversaries*” (Heb. 10:27). The Lord will deliver sinners “*to the tormentors*” (Matt. 18:34). By God, sinners will be thrown or “*cast into hell*” (Lk. 12:5). Jesus Christ “*will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*” (Matt. 3:12). The God of the Bible cuts the wicked in half, slays them before His eyes, and devours them with His indignation. He delivers them to be tormented. He throws them into hell and burns them with unquenchable fire. It is abundantly clear from the Bible that God views sinners, not as constitutional cripples deserving of pity, but as moral criminals who are worthy of eternal punishment. God views sinners as moral beings, who are capable of obeying His law but who refuse to do so. They are capable of virtue but are choosing vice instead. Man is constitutionally capable of obeying God, but the problem is that he is morally unwilling to do so.

CHAPTER SIX

GOD'S MEANS OF SOLVING THE PROBLEM

It is a self-evident truth that the nature of the desired object determines the nature of the means which will secure that end. Otherwise, there would be no relation between ends and means. If the end is moral, the means must be moral. If the end is physical, the means must be physical. The nature of the desired object determines the nature of the means, which must be employed to secure that end. The desired object, or the end God has in mind, is a holy people (Lk. 1:75; Eph. 1:4; 1 Thes. 4:3).

A holy being is one who freely chooses what is right. The moral attribute of holiness is a voluntary attribute which is caused by a being's own will. Therefore, God wants to have a people who willingly obey Him and live for what is good like He does. It is, therefore, essential that the means God uses, which are necessary to secure this end, must respect the free will of man. If the means used to secure this end does not respect man's free will, then the end itself of free obedience or a holy people would not be reached or secured.

Want To vs. Have To

God once complained, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips;

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but *their heart is from far from me*" (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8). God has always wanted a people that obey Him from the heart. It is heart obedience that truly honors and glorifies God.

Suppose a man has two daughters who both serve him breakfast in the morning. The father asks them, "Why did you do this?" One of them responds by saying, "Because I love you and *wanted* to serve you." The other says, "Because I had to. Mother *made* me do it." Which of them truly honored their father? Not the one who did it because she had to, but the one who did it because she wanted to.

Likewise if Christians serve God because they have to, because of some irresistible will, God would not be as glorified as He would be glorified if Christians served Him because they wanted to out of their own free will. The one who is being served is being honored by the service when the one who is doing the service is free not to serve.

Walter Arthur Copinger said, "It is a mistake to think that a denial of free will brings greater glory to God. The truth is that by denying to man the gift with which God has endowed him, we take away his accountability for his actions, we impeach the wisdom and goodness of God, we outrage His justice and deny Him the rule of a moral government. We, in short, withhold from God the glory which He desires in man, and seek to force upon Him a glory of our own devising and for which He has no desire."¹

God does not want heaven full of beings that *have to* be with Him, but who *want to* be with Him. The story of the prodigal son illustrates this point (Lk. 15:11-32). We see that the father did not force his son to stay, nor did the father force his son to return. The father left the decision of staying, leaving, and returning up to the son. The father did not want his house to be full of people who had to be there, but who wanted to be there. This gives us great insight into the very

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heart of God the Father and as to what type of beings He wants to dwell in His presence.

Athenagoras said, “Just as with men who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice (for you would not either honor the good or punish the bad; unless vice and virtue were in their own power, and some are diligent in the matters entrusted to them, and others faithless) so it is among the angels... Some free agents, you will observe, such as they were created by God, continued in those things for which God had made and over which he had ordained them; but some outraged both the constitution of their nature and the government entrusted to them.”²

I personally have a profound respect and deep admiration for the “holy angels” (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 14:10). We are told that “his angels” “do his commandments” and “do his pleasure” (Ps. 103:20-21). It is no wonder that their moral character is referred to as *holy*. It is not that they were simply or merely created with a holy character, as moral character cannot be created by anyone except by the one who possesses it. But that the angels were created morally innocent and have chosen to form their own moral character. The holy angels have personally and freely chosen to serve and obey God.

At any moment they are free to become demons and devils if they wanted to, but instead they choose to be sinless and holy! And they have always chosen to be this way since their very creation! This is truly wonderful and good and worthy of respect. They have freely lived in perfect and flawless obedience to God since their very beginning. God granted the angels freedom of will. They could choose between loyalty and rebellion. And while one third chose to be sinful, two thirds have chosen to be holy (Rev. 12:4). This not only tells us something about the nature and character of angels, but it also tells us about God and His Kingdom.

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The Kingdom of God is not full of saints who were “*drafted*” by force, but full of those who voluntarily “*enlisted*” by choice. The inhabitants of heaven could sin, but they don’t want to. The citizens of heaven are capable of sinning, but they are unwilling to sin.

Ambrose said, “We are not constrained to obedience by a servile necessity, but by freewill...”³ It is amazing to think that God even granted the angels the freedom of will to be loyal to Him or to rebel. It is not only to man that He has given this choice. This shows us that God never wanted heaven to be full of beings that *have* to love, worship, and serve Him. God wanted heaven to be full of beings that *want* to love, worship, and serve Him.

Love, worship, and service are only true and genuine if they are voluntary. If the law of necessity instead of the law of liberty were the law of heaven, then heaven would be empty, void, and barren of all true and genuine love, worship, and service. God could have created beings that were incapable of vice; but in doing so, He would have created beings that were incapable of virtue.

Vice is when a being could do right but chooses to do wrong instead. Virtue is when a being could do wrong but chooses to do right instead. For this reason, God took the risk of giving men and angels free will. He wanted them to be capable of being truly virtuous beings.

King David rejoiced when Israel made offerings “with a *willing* mind” (1 Chron. 29:9). He said, “I will *freely* sacrifice unto thee” (Ps. 54:6). Even Paul wanted men to do what is good, not out of “*necessity*,” but “*willingly*” with their “*mind*” (Phil. 1:14). Paul wanted men to do what was good with a “*readiness to will*” (2 Cor. 8:11). If Paul wanted men to willingly do what was good, how much more does

God took the risk of giving men and angels free will.

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God! God wanted offerings from Israel that were made “*willingly with his heart*” (Exo. 25:2). God wanted Israel to offer “*freewill offerings*” (Lev. 22:18). These freewill offerings were a “*sweet savour unto the Lord*” (Num. 15:3). Clearly, the Lord takes great delight and pleasure when men worship Him freely and willingly! God wanted men to “*serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind...*” (1 Chron. 28:9). God actually searches for a man who will obey Him (Ps. 53:2; 14:2; Eze. 22:30; Acts 13:22). This implies that obedience is their own choice, which He does not force them to do.

It does not glorify God’s nature and character to have beings serve Him who are nothing more than machines or puppets. But if beings, which have free will, choose to love, worship, and serve Him when they don’t have to, then this truly magnifies and glorifies His nature and His character! How awesome of a God He must be if free beings choose to love, worship, and serve Him! He must be truly worthy! God is glorified by those who choose to be holy (Ps. 29:2; 96:9). Therefore, God took the risk of giving mankind and even angels free will, granting all of us the freedom to choose to be loyal to Him or to rebel against Him.

With the freedom or liberty that God granted mankind, we have revolted. Now God wants to transform disobedient men, who have rebelled against Him *out of their own freedom*, and turn them into obedient men, who are faithful to Him *out of their own freedom*.

The Bible tells us to be holy and perfect as God is holy and perfect (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). This means that we need to choose to have the same moral character that God chooses to have, to have the same motives of heart that He has. We can have the same motive of love that He has and even love our enemies like He does (Lk. 6:35). While we cannot be holy or perfect to the same *degree* that God is,

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since He has far more knowledge and more ability than we do, we can be holy or perfect in the same *manner* that God is. That is, we can do what we know is right in the same way that God does what He knows is right.

We certainly can never be as perfect in degree as God is while we are on earth or while we are in heaven because we will always be finite and He will always be infinite. Our natural and moral attributes will not be infinite even in heaven, so even in heaven we will not be as holy in degree as God is. God would not ask us to be holy in the same degree that He is since that is impossible and unreasonable by virtue of our created finiteness. But God wants heaven and earth to be full of free moral beings that choose to do what they know is right and choose to do what they know is good, just like He does. He wants the universe to be full of benevolent beings that freely choose to love one another, just as He freely chooses to be benevolent towards all. Therefore, mankind's freedom of choice must be regarded by God when He employs means to accomplish this purpose. God regards our free will in *conversion* for the same reason that God granted our free will at *creation*.

The nature of the problem determines the nature of the solution.

The Solution Is Determined By the Problem

Regeneration is not a change of man's created constitution but a change of man's chosen character. It is only logical that the nature of the problem determines the nature of the solution. Since the sinner's problem is not constitutional but moral, the solution to this problem must not be constitutional but moral. That is, man does not need a constitutional change in order to come to God because his constitution is not keeping him back from God. Man needs

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moral influence to be brought to God because it is his own unwillingness that is keeping him back.

James B. Walker said, "God does not choose to purify men by physical omnipotence, but by moral means and influence only..."⁴

Gordon C. Olson said, "Man cannot be regenerated or controlled by sheer force or by divine omnipotence, but only by the application of appropriate means. We have seen that God's great love has moved Him to make plans for man's full reconciliation to Himself. Man is complete in his constitutional faculties by creation, so does not need any new ability to be added to his personality. But man has used his endowments wrongly and has brought defilement to his whole inner being.... We were to be "created" anew in the sense of being transformed or completely changed, the word meaning to make habitable, to reduce from a state of disorder to order. This great change is a moral change in which the subject himself has an active part. It is not a simple act of God's power without man's agency. Therefore, some means must be brought into existence that both God and man can use in this complete inner renovation of personality."⁵

If regeneration were constitutional, it would be by force. The same type of power that God used in creating the universe, He would use in recreating man's constitution. A constitutional change (*making the incapable capable*) would be brought about by irresistible force. God would be recreating the constitutional faculty of the will, granting him new abilities. God alone would be active while man would be entirely passive.

But if regeneration is moral, it would be by moral influence or by moral force. If it is moral, it would be by resistible influence. Both God and man would have an active role in this process or experience of regeneration.

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The Bible does not describe being born again or regenerated as a constitutional change where we receive new abilities. The Bible describes being born again or regenerated as a moral change where we redirect our abilities. Regeneration is moral, not constitutional. "If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him" (1 Jn. 2:29). "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin" (1 Jn. 3:9). "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 Jn. 4:7). "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world..." (1 Jn. 5:4). "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not" (1 Jn. 5:18).

The phrases "*doeth righteousness*," "*commit sin*," "*loveth*," "*overcometh*," "*sinneth not*," "*keepeth himself*," all indicate the will of man. They describe the activity and exercise of man's will in the sphere of morality. To be born again, born of God, or begotten of Him, is to have a radical and complete change of moral character.

For a sinner to repent of his sins and believe the gospel and for a sinner to be born again is the exact same thing. Why is it that Jesus only told one man in secret to be "born again" (Jn. 3:3), when Jesus publicly told the multitudes to "repent and believe" (Mk. 1:15)? Unless we are willing to believe that Jesus only told one man how to be saved, we must accept that being born again and being converted are identical or synonymous in their meaning. Terms like "converted," "born again," and "regenerated," all refer to the moral change that occurs within a man when he is saved.

Since regeneration or salvation is a moral change, it must be brought about by moral means that deal with men as free moral agents. The means used in regeneration must be

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adapted and suited to the nature of man or respect the freedom of his will in order to bring about a moral change of man's character.

Anything that relates to morality relates to the faculty of free will. That is because anything that relates to morality relates to moral law and the moral law forbids and demands states of will. God cannot change man's moral character without changing the state of man's will. Therefore, salvation includes a changing of man's will and the means used to bring about salvation from sin must be means fitted to influence the will.

Anything that relates to morality relates to the faculty of free will.

Catherine Booth said, "The laws of mind are the same when operated upon by either God or man. This is not laying any necessity upon God any more than He has laid upon Himself. He has made us with a certain mental constitution, and therefore, He must adapt the conditions and means of our salvation to that mental constitution, otherwise He would reflect upon His own wisdom in having given it to us at the first. Therefore, when he purposes to save man He must save him as man, not as a beast or a machine!"⁶

One of the fundamental differences between men and machines or animals is free will. Machines and animals are both, in a sense, preprogrammed. Their responses and behavior is built in. Animals are governed by their instincts and machines are operated by another.

A man, on the other hand, is the author of his own activity. His behavior is self-determined. The power of self-causation, or the freedom of the will, is essential to moral agency. When God made man, He made us moral agents in His image. He did not make us to be machines or animals.

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And when God saves us, He does not save us as machines or animals. He saves us as men who have free will.

Conversion, therefore, must be by influence and not by causation. Conversion is a moral change; and therefore, must be brought about by influence instead of causation. If a being is forced by necessity to do something, then that action cannot be part of their moral character since it was not free. Their moral character cannot be determined by, or derived from, necessary or unavoidable actions. Moral character can only be formed by voluntary states of mind, or by deliberate choices of the will. Therefore conversion, as a moral change, must be brought about by influence; otherwise there would be no free will involved and consequently no moral change.

Moral character can only be formed by voluntary states of mind.

The Will or Character of Man Must Change

When God judges a man's moral character, He judges the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 26:1-2; 17:3; 44:18-21; 51:6; 139:1-2, 23; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; Matt. 6:5; 7:15-23; 2 Cor. 8:12). "I the Lord *search the heart*, I *try the reins*, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 17:10). And also, "...for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

The heart is a metaphor for the will and intention. Choices are made with the heart. It is out of a person's heart or will that sin is originated (Ps. 7:14; 58:3; Matt. 12:35, Lk. 6:45, Acts 5:4). That is why a person's heart must change at conversion (Eze. 36:26; Matt. 5:8). If God is going to change our moral character, He must change our heart or will.

Paul said "ye have *put off* the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9). And he said, "That ye *put off* concerning

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the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts..." (Eph. 4:22). Our choice or active role in being born again is taught in the phrase "*ye have put off...*" We are also told to "*put on the new man*" (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). This shows our personal volition in becoming a new person and living a regenerate life. Regeneration is the experience of becoming obedient to God in your heart. Regeneration is a moral change (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:17; 5:4; 5:18) and therefore, regeneration must include the will of man. Man was made sinful by choice; and therefore, man must be made holy by choice.

Regeneration
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Regeneration must be brought about by moral means, which regard and respect the will of man. Since regeneration is a change of our moral character and our moral character is caused by our will, the means that God uses to regenerate us or to change our moral character must be means that are in accordance with, or consistent with, our free will. If the moral character of man is going to be changed in regeneration, the will of man cannot be violated.

Regeneration requires consent and cooperation. A man's free will must be synergistically involved in his regeneration. God cannot change a man's character without the cooperation of the man himself. That is why God said, "I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged" (Eze. 24:13). This is because unless a man is willing to have his moral character changed, it will and cannot be changed. It is impossible for Omnipotence to change a man's moral character without the consent of his will because this would involve an intrinsic contradiction. Therefore, God and man both have an active role in regeneration. This is why the Bible says that God gives us a new heart (Eze. 11:19; 36:26),

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while also saying that men should make for themselves a new heart (Eze. 18:31). When a sinner's will is changed from being disobedient to obedient, both God and the sinner have an active role in bringing about that change. God's role is His gracious influence upon our will. Man's role is the yielding of and obedience of his will.

In order for reconciliation to occur, both of the conflicting parties must consent. That is why reconciliation between God and man requires a decision on man's part. Men are commanded: "be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). This implies that reconciliation is their choice and requires their consent. You cannot be reconciled to God while you are choosing to be at war with Him. You cannot be His friend while you are choosing to be His enemy. When a person is "not subject to the law of God," they are at "enmity with God" (Rom. 8:7).

The idea of reconciliation is the ceasing of enmity and hostility between two conflicting parties. The enmity and hostility between God and man is caused by man's rebellion against God. That is why reconciliation between God and man requires man's choice to cease his rebellion.

Rebellion is a state of the heart; it is a choice of the will. Therefore, the choices of man's will or the state of his heart must change in order for reconciliation with God to occur. Man must be brought into subjection to God and His law if reconciliation between God and man is going to take place.

Sin separates man from God (Isa. 59:2). Those who are breaking God's moral law cannot have a relationship with Him (1 Jn. 2:3-4). Consequently, those who are

The idea of reconciliation is the ceasing of enmity and hostility between two conflicting parties.

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breaking God's law cannot have eternal life because eternal life is to know Him (Jn. 17:3).

In fact, the wrath of God is against anyone who has sin in their life (Mal. 4:1; Rom. 1:18; 2:8-9; Eph. 5:6; Co. 3:6; Jude 1:14-15). God is not the enemy of some sin but the enemy of all sin! God does not have wrath against some sinners, but against all sinners! God is not against only some who have sin in their life, but God is against all who have sin in their life.

The reason that our world is full of pain, misery, and death is because our world is full of sin. Heaven will be heaven, a place of perfect bliss and blessedness, because there is no sin there. All the moral beings in heaven use their free will rightly. There will be peace and harmony in the Kingdom of God because everyone will be obedient to God. God will not allow anyone into heaven who is still sinning (Matt. 13:41-42; Rev. 21:27; 22:15). Only those who are obedient to God's commandments will be allowed into heaven (Matt. 7:21; 19:17; Rev. 22:14). The sin must stop before we die (Rev. 22:11). Those who die in their sins will not go to heaven (Jn. 8:21).

Death is not the Savior. Jesus Christ must save us from sin in this life or else we will never be saved from sin at all. If a man is in rebellion against God on earth, they would continue in that rebellion if they were in heaven. If they resist the influence of God here and now, they would resist the influence of God there and then. If a man doesn't want to live holy in this life, he never will live holy in the next life. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Rev. 22:11).

If a man wants to live sinful in this life, death will not change his moral character. Death is *physical* and, therefore,

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it has no tendency in and of itself to change a man's *moral* character. That is why conversion or repentance must occur before death. If God wants to have an eternal relationship with us in heaven, He must radically and completely change our will or moral character while we are on earth.

Those who are in heaven will be saints who don't want to sin but want to obey God. That is because they are those who choose to be saints even while they were on earth! They didn't want to sin while on earth, so they won't want to sin when they get to heaven. And further still, their decisions will forever be influenced by the sight of the damned and the wounds of the Savior. They will observe, for all of eternity, "the lamb that was slain" (Rev. 5:12), and regarding the wicked, the saints will see, "the smoke of their torment," which will "ascendeth up for ever and ever" (Rev. 14:11). There is a reason why the punishment of the wicked is public and why the wounds of Jesus never healed. These are powerful moral influences upon the minds of all the moral beings in heaven. These evident realities will keep saints in heaven from sinning. The sight of the damned will inspire saints to fear God and the sight of the Lamb slain will inspire saints to love God. And therefore, these eternal presentations to their minds will eternally inspire the saints to eternally obey Him. But their obedience must start in this life. It is only in this life that God has granted us the opportunity of repentance.

God Must Bring Men to Repentance

There is much confusion as to what repentance actually is. Biblical repentance is not merely feeling sorry for your sins (2 Cor. 7:10). Real repentance is to actually give up your sins (Acts 8:22; Rev. 9:20; 16:11). All of heaven rejoices when just one sinner repents (Lk. 5:7, 10). That is because heaven is full of benevolent beings; and they know

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that when sinners repent, the world becomes a better place and God can now pardon them.

God is benevolent. He wants the best for His universe and wants to exercise mercy and extent pardon. Therefore, He wants all men to repent (Eze. 33:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). When a sinner repents, when they depart from iniquity or forsake their sins, God will mercifully pardon them (2 Chron. 6:26-27; Jer. 18:7-10; Isa. 55:7; Prov. 28:13). Repentance from sin always comes before the remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38). Repentance comes before salvation (2 Cor. 7:10). Since God wants men to repent and be forgiven, God works to bring man to repentance. Repentance is man's own choice (Matt. 11:20; Acts 17:30); and therefore, the means God uses to bring about repentance must respect or regard man's will.

How does God bring about man's repentance? What means or method does He use to change a sinner's mind about his way of life? Because man is not a machine, he is not *forced* to repent. But because man is a free moral agent, he is *called* and *commanded* to repent (Matt. 9:13; 5:42; Acts 17:30-31). Minds are changed by being persuaded and pleaded with (Gen. 6:3; Jn. 16:8; Acts 14:2; 18:4; 2 Cor. 5:20).

Just as the "persuasion" of falsehood can even result in men choosing not to "obey the truth" (Gal. 5:7-8), minds are changed by the persuasion of truth (Jn. 8:32). As the devil uses deception to influence men to rebel (Gen. 3:4), God uses truth to influence men to repent. Man's degenerate character was brought about by the devil's deception, but man's regenerate character is brought about by God's truth. The means that God uses in saving souls is the truth. Regeneration is through revelation.

In the Old Testament we read, "Come now, and let us *REASON* together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as

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scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18). And also, "Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he *TEACH* sinners in the way" (Ps. 25:8). And again, "Then will I *TEACH* transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be *CONVERTED* unto thee" (Ps. 51:13).

God converts men by teaching them the truth. Sinners are converted through divine communication to their hearts and minds, not through the coercion of their wills. By divine design the knowledge of our mind influences our will. God gives men a revelation of their own character, a revelation of their danger, and a revelation of His good and just character in order to bring them to repentance. Through persuasion and preaching, God influences man's free will to submit to His own will.

We see this truth illustrated through the narrative of Nineveh. God was insistent in sending Jonah to this Gentile city to warn them about His plans of destruction (Jonah 1:2). Jonah, fearing that the city might repent, refused to go (Jonah 4:2). Jonah knew that the preaching of God's judgment might influence the city to repent. Instead of going to Nineveh, he went the opposite direction (Jonah 1:3). Instead of overriding, usurping, or suspending Jonah's free will to accomplish His purposes, God created circumstances through which Jonah would decide to go himself (Jonah 1:4; 1:17).

When Jonah finally arrived in Nineveh and preached God's judgment in the streets, the news gripped the hearts of the Ninevites to such a degree that we are told they believed God that He was planning on destroying them in forty days, and they turned from their sins in the hopes that God might change His plans and turn from His wrath (Jonah 3:5; 3:9-10).

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Nineveh must have been capable of obedience since God was going to punish them for their sin. And they were capable of repenting of their sin, since that is what they did. The preaching did not give them any new constitutional ability; but rather, it brought them to the point where they started to rightly use their ability of will.

Jesus said that Nineveh “repented *at the preaching...*” (Matt. 12:41). This shows that a moral change is brought about by moral means. Preaching is an influence; repentance is a response. The influence is truth presented to man’s mind; the response is man’s will yielding to or resisting that truth.

This chronological sequence of events is a perfect example of the truth that “by the *fear* of the Lord men *depart* from evil” (Prov. 16:6). The fear of the Lord is truth about our sin and truth about God’s judgment, which is presented to our minds. Departing from evil is the choice of our will to give up our sins. Truth presented to our minds influences the choices of our will. The fear of the Lord is an influence. Departing from iniquity is a response. We clearly see then that God brings sinners to repentance by presenting truth to their minds, which truth influences their wills. Repentance is not brought about by “cause and effect” but by “influence and response.”

Methodius said, “For the power is present with him, and he receives the commandment; but God exhorts him to turn his power of choice to better things. For as a father exhorts his son, who has power to learn his lessons, to give more attention to them inasmuch as, while he points out this as the better course, he does not deprive his son of the power which he possessed, even if he be not inclined to learn willingly; so I do not think that God, while He urges on man to obey His commands, deprives him of the power of purposing and withholding obedience.”⁷

The Rational Behind Public Proclamation

Man, as a moral being, is moved by motive not force. God does not govern moral beings the same way that He governs matter. God governs matter by *cause and effect*, but God governs minds by *influence and response*. In regeneration, God regards and treats men as moral beings. That is because that is what they are. Therefore, regeneration is not by cause and effect, or by force, but it is by influence and response, or by truth. The end must be accomplished by means, which are adapted to human nature or which are suited, designed, or calculated to influence the will of man.

All throughout the Bible we see God commissioning prophets and preachers to proclaim His truth in public. For what reason did He send them? It was for the purpose of converting sinners through the public proclamation of the truth. The truth is meant to make impressions upon our minds in order to influence our will. God

said that the reason that He sent Israel His prophets to proclaim the truth was because He wanted them to obey His voice and incline their hearts (Jer. 7:13; 11:8; 25:3-4; 26:5; 32:22; 35:14-15; 44:4-6). "Thus saith the Lord; stand in the court of the Lord's house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord's house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word: *if so be* they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil, which I purposed to do unto them because of the evil of their doings" (Jer. 26:2-3).

Preaching makes sense. Preaching has the natural tendency, as a means to an end, to influence men to change.

God does not govern moral beings the same way that He governs matter.

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God brings men to repentance, not through *cause and effect*, but through *influence and response*. That is why God speaks of men coming to repentance through preaching as a contingency instead of a certainty. The Bible says regarding John the Baptist, “The same came for a witness, to *bear witness* of the light, that all men through him *might believe*” (Jn. 1:7). Jesus said, “these things *I say*, that ye *might be saved*” (Jn. 5:34). Paul wanted “to *speak* to the Gentiles that they *might be saved*” (1 Thes. 2:16). It is through “the truth, that they *might be saved*” (2 Thes. 2:10).

The purpose of preaching or presenting truth to man’s mind is to *persuade* the decisions of his will. That is why the rich man wanted Lazarus to go and warn his brothers, believing that “they will *repent*” (Lk. 16:30), but Jesus said that “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be *persuaded*, though one rose from the dead” (Lk. 16:31). It is the truth which God has revealed through Moses and his prophets that ought to persuade man to repent.

The natural knowledge (*conscience*) and the natural ability (*free will*), which God has given men, made them justly accountable and responsible. Yet despite the natural knowledge and natural ability God has granted, mankind is still in rebellion against Him. Therefore, to bring us to repentance, God gives us gracious influence, which is the truth of the gospel.

This knowledge is gracious influence because it is completely undeserved. It is gracious because if God were to withhold it, there would be no injustice done. Men deserve hell because they have used their natural ability to disobey their natural knowledge. Therefore, any divine effort or influence to bring man to repentance unto obedience beyond this must be gracious. It was gracious for God to send preachers in the Old Testament, and it was gracious for God

to send preachers in the New Testament. The objective of this gracious influence, or divine revelation, is to bring sinners to repentance and faith.

Regeneration through Revelation

James B. Walker said, "Man's mental and moral constitution was the same under the New as under the Old Testament dispensation. The same methods, therefore, which were adapted to move man's nature under the one, would be adapted to do so under the other."⁸ Just as God brought sinners to repentance through the public proclamation of the truth in the Old Testament, so God brings sinners to repentance in the New Testament using the same means.

Through his preaching, John the Baptist was to "turn" "many of the children of Israel" "to the Lord their God" (Lk. 1:16). His public proclamations were to "*turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*" (Lk. 1:17). His public preaching was meant to have a profound impact upon his audience.

The public proclamation of the truth is such a powerful moral influence that it can actually turn people back to the Lord, to turn their hearts, and to transform disobedient men. It is no wonder that God uses public proclamation all throughout His activities within human history. It is no wonder that we see public preaching in both of the Testaments. It is because truth is the instrument suited to the nature of man, which God uses in bringing sinners to repentance. The moral influence of truth is the means God uses to turn transgressors away from their violations of His law and bring them back to Him.

As stated earlier, God's law is good and reasonable. That is why obedience to God's law is described in the Scriptures as being a wise and intelligent choice, but sin is

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described as being a foolish and unintelligent choice. The Bible says, “the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and *madness* is in their heart while they live...” (Ecc. 9:3). “And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and *doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a *foolish man*...” (Matt. 7:26) “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and *doeth them*, I will liken him unto a *wise man*...” (Matt. 7:24). God said, “O that they were *wise*, that they *understood* this, that they would *consider* their latter end!” (Deut. 32:29)

The objective of preaching is to declare truths that are calculated to be persuasive and influential.

Sin is unintelligent. Sin is breaking God’s law; and therefore, breaking God’s law is unintelligent. But obedience to God’s law is intelligent. Repenting of sin, therefore, is turning away from living an unintelligent life to living an intelligent life, since repenting of sin is turning away from disobedience to obedience. That is why repentance, or turning from sin, occurs after mental contemplation and reasoning. “Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; *Consider* your ways” (Hag.

1:5, 7). “And how, if he beget a son, that seeth all his father’s sins which he hath done, and *considereth*, and doeth not such like...” (Eze. 18:14), “because he *considereth* and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die” (Eze. 18:28) “Come now, and *let us reason together*, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18).

Man, as free moral agent with the power of self-decision or self-determination, is moved by motives and considerations, which are presented to this mind. The objective of preaching is to declare truths that are calculated to be persuasive and influential in order to bring before their

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minds such contemplations as to turn them from their sins and to turn them to God.

In order to come to Jesus Christ and enter the Kingdom of God, a person must experience spiritual education and enlightenment; they must undergo spiritual instruction and illumination. Jesus said that it is those who have “*heard and hath learned of the Father*” which decide to “*cometh unto me*” (Jn. 6:45).

Jesus told a parable about those who enter the kingdom of heaven and those who do not, saying, “*And five of them were wise, and five were foolish*” (Matt. 25:2). The decision to come back to God, or to go back to the Father, occurs after an intelligent awakening or a spiritual enlightenment. This is illustrated in the story of the prodigal son, “*And when he came to himself, he said... I will arise and go to my father...*” (Lk. 15:17-18). To yield your life to God, Paul said, “*is your reasonable service*” (Rom. 12:1).

Chrysostom said, “*God is not accustomed to make man good by necessity or force... but by persuasion.... Whence it is evident that our salvation or destruction depends upon our own wills.*”⁹ The means that God employs in getting sinners to repent of their sins and to turn back from Him are the means of truth, teaching, illumination, instruction, enlightenment, persuasion, reasoning, calling, commanding, exhorting, pleading, etc. These are means, which perfectly respect and regard the free moral agency of man; and are therefore, means that are calculated or suited to bring about a moral change within man.

It is very important that we understand how a moral agent operates and functions. Motives are presented to his mind, which he considers and he then consequently determines the choices of his will. Before the selection of the will occurs, the mind’s contemplation of motives takes place. Behind every choice is a motive; back of every decision is a

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reason. When one being seeks to influence the decisions of another being, he persuades and reasons with him by presenting motives to his mind for his consideration. These motives may or may not correspond with truth or objective reality, as the devil sought to motivate Adam and Eve to sin through lies but God sought to influence them through truth. In all such cases, these motives are given or presented as incentives to induce specific decisions in their will.

Thomas W. Jenkyn said, “It is by reasoning, and presenting motives, that we govern our own minds, and influence the minds of other men: and it is by the same means that God governs us.”¹⁰

Behind every choice is a motive; back of every decision is a reason.

This truth is seen all throughout the Bible. When God wanted to influence the decisions of Adam and Eve, He presented motives to their mind for their consideration. “But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it [decision]: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die [motive]” (Gen.

2:17). God sought to avoid their decision of sin by bringing to their attention the negative consequences of that possible course.

When the devil wanted to influence the decisions of Adam and Eve, he presented motives to their minds for them to contemplate. “And the serpent said unto the women, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof [decision], then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, and know good and evil [motive]” (Gen. 3:4-5). The devil sought to remove God’s influence over their minds and establish his own in trying to influence the decisions of their will.

When God wanted to influence the decision making of Cain, He presented motives to his mind for his

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contemplation. "If thou doest well [decision], shalt thou not be accepted [motive]? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him [decision]" (Gen. 4:7). The promise of acceptance ought to have persuaded Cain to do well, and the warning of sin at the door ought to have influenced Cain to be cautious and watch out for temptation.

When God wanted to influence the decisions of Israel, He presented their minds with motives. "Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse [motive]; a blessing if ye obey the commandments of the Lord our God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day [decisions]..." (Deut. 11:26-28). "See I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil [motives]" (Deut. 30:15) "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing [motives]: therefore choose life [decision], that both thou and thy seed may live [motives]" (Deut. 30:19). "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways [decision]; for why will ye die [motive], O house of Israel?" (Eze. 33:11) "Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions [decision]; so iniquity shall not be your ruin [motive]" (Eze. 18:30).

From these examples we clearly see that God's moral government over free moral beings is governed by the promise of rewards and the threat of punishment being presented to their consideration. These motives are given to them in order to influence the free decisions of their will.

When Christ wanted to influence the decisions of a man's will, He presented influential motives to his mind. Christ said, "...sin no more [decision] lest a worse thing come unto thee [motive]" (Jn. 5:14). The declaration of the

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negative consequence of a choice serves as a persuasion upon a man's mind for him not to make that choice.

When Pilate sought to influence the choices of Christ's will, he presented motives to His mind for His consideration. "Then saith Pilate unto him, Speak thou not unto me [decision]? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee [motives]?" (Jn. 19:10). But Jesus was influenced by another motive in his decision making. "... Jesus... who for the joy that was set before him [motive] endured the cross, despising the shame [choice]..." (Heb. 12:2).

Even when Moses sought to influence the decision making of God, he presented motives to His divine mind to contemplate and consider. When God was angry with Israel because they made a golden calf and He decided that He would destroy Israel and make a great nation out of Moses (Exo. 32:9-11), Moses reasoned with God and said, "Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth [motive]? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people [decision]" (Exo. 32:12). And we read that "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Exo. 32:14).

The decisions of a free moral agent are made after the motives in his mind are contemplated and considered. When God seeks to bring men to repentance and obedience, these are the means that God uses. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted [decision], that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord [motive]" (Acts 3:19). God influences the will of man by presenting motives for his consideration to his mind. The will of man then decides in accordance with or contrary to these influential considerations. He chooses to submit to or

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rebel against the truth or knowledge of his mind. In this way man chooses to be either wise or foolish; he chooses to be either holy or sinful.

During the ministry of Jesus Christ, we read, "Then began he to upbraid the cities *wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not*" (Matt. 11:20). The mighty works Jesus had done should have brought them to repentance. This is clear because Jesus went on to say, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if *the mighty works*, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, *they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes*" (Matt. 11:21). Had Tyre and Sidon seen His "mighty works," then "they would have repented..."

The mighty works of Jesus Christ, healing the sick and preaching the gospel, gave men a revelation of God. They gave sinners knowledge of God's heart and character. This manifestation of God's character was the influence that He used to try to bring them to repentance. Jesus rebuked these cities for not repenting, which implies that they had the ability, opportunity, and influences necessary to repent. Their problem was unwillingness not inability. It was through influence (*the mighty works*), which gave them revelation of God (*truth presented to their minds*), which ought to have brought them to repentance (*a change of will*).

God does not use causation or force to bring men to repentance. God brings free moral beings to repentance through influence, by presenting truth to their mind. Impressions upon the mind serve as influences upon the will. There are many influences or impressions that God uses to

God does not use causation or force to bring men to repentance.

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bring men to repentance, but *the greatest of all* is the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit presents the truths of sin and the Savior to the mind of man, and these truths are what influence man to change his ways and follow Jesus Christ. Irenaeus said that God sent His Son “as one who saves by persuasion, not compulsion, for compulsion is no attribute of God.”¹¹ God influences the will of man through the illumination of his mind. God regenerates the character of man through revelation of Jesus Christ. This is clear all throughout the Bible:

“No man can *COME TO ME*, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all *TAUGHT* of God. Every man therefore that hath *HEARD*, and hath *LEARNED* of the Father, *COMETH UNTO ME*” (Jn. 6:44-45).

“And ye shall *KNOW* the *TRUTH*, and the *TRUTH* shall make you *FREE*... Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin... If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (Jn. 8:32, 34, 36).

“Now ye are *CLEANE THROUGH THE WORD* which I have *SPOKEN* unto you” (Jn. 15:3).

“*SANCTIFY* them *THROUGH THY TRUTH*: thy *WORD* is *TRUTH*” (Jn. 17:17).

“To *OPEN THEIR EYES*, and to *TURN* them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are *SANCTIFIED BY FAITH* that is in me” (Acts 26:18).

“For though ye have ten thousand *INSTRUCTORS* in Christ, yet have yet not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have *BEGOTTEN* you through the *GOSPEL*” (1 Cor. 4:15).

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“For the grace of God that *BRINGETH SALVATION* has *APPEARED* unto all men, *TEACHING US* that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Tit. 2:11-12).

“Of his own will *BEGAT* he us *WITH THE WORD OF TRUTH*, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (Jas 1:18).

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted *WORD, WHICH IS ABLE TO SAVE YOUR SOULS*. But be ye *DOERS OF THE WORD*, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (Jas. 1:21-22).

“Seeing ye have *PURIFIED* your souls in *OBEYING THE TRUTH* through the Spirit. Being *BORN AGAIN*, not of corruptible seed, but of the incorruptible, *BY THE WORD OF GOD*, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Pet. 1:22-23).

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world *THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE* of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 2:20).

Men are born again through the word of God, having their lives changed, through the truth of the gospel. Regeneration is the moral change that occurs when a person hears, believes, and embraces the gospel with their heart. The Bible says that transformation is through the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). This is precisely why we must be full of the Holy Spirit to effectively preach the gospel (Lk. 24:47-49), and why preaching the gospel is so important (Rom. 10:14).

Preaching or persuasion is the moral means that God uses to bring about a moral change. It is the precious truths of the gospel that the Holy Spirit uses to bring sinners to repentance. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19). How did He love us? He loved us, and showed us His love for us, by laying down His life for us. Therefore, we

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love Him and keep His commandments because we believe that He laid down His life for us.

The Psalmist said, “Show thy marvelous loving-kindness, O thou that savest” (Ps. 17:7). And Paul said, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4).

Nothing shows the goodness of God as powerfully as the atonement of Jesus Christ does. Therefore, nothing could lead us to repentance as powerfully as the atonement of

Christ does. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (Jn. 12:32). It is the knowledge of Christ’s atonement, when presented to our minds, which influences or draws us to God. It is a revelation of Jesus Christ, of what He has done for us, that turns unwilling and disobedient sinners into willing obedient saints. It is the revelation of Jesus Christ that takes rebellious and wicked men and turns

Nothing
could lead us
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atonement.

them into submitted and holy people.

Here is this truth in logical syllogisms:

- Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10).
- The knowledge of the atonement begets love in us (1 Jn. 4:19).
- Therefore, through the knowledge of the atonement, “the righteousness of the law” is “fulfilled in us” (Rom. 8:4).

- The atonement begets love in us for Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 4:19).
- Jesus said that if we loved Him, we would keep His commandments (Jn. 14:15; 14:23).

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- Therefore, because of the atonement, we keep His commandments.

Your moral character consists in the state of your heart or in the obedience or disobedience of your will to the law of God. Since the atonement of Jesus Christ changes the state of your heart or since the atonement of Jesus Christ changes the state of your will towards the law of God, the atonement of Jesus Christ, therefore, changes your moral character.

The Greatest Moral Influence in the Universe

The strongest moral influence that could ever be exerted upon the will of man is the revelation of Jesus Christ and the knowledge of what He has done for us. There is no truth more powerful in the entire universe. Our rebellious hearts are subdued and our lives are subjected as we are brought to total submission and surrender to God through seeing that Jesus Christ died to save us from the penalty of hell.

Seeing His
love toward
us begets
love in us
toward Him.

By looking at the cross, we see how good God is and how evil we've been. Seeing His love toward us begets love in us toward Him. Seeing God's goodness, demonstrated at the cross, shows us how worthy God is to be served and obeyed. These truths presented, communicated, or revealed to our minds influences our will and decisions. Regeneration is when the Holy Spirit brings men to repentance and faith through the means of the truth of the gospel. That is the power of His saving grace.

God's grace is not a license to sin (Rom. 6:1; 6:14; Jude 1:4) but true grace is a teacher of holiness (Titus 2:11). Likewise, the atonement is not a license to break the moral law of God (Heb. 10:26-31), rather, through the atonement

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men are saved from their sin (Matt. 1:21; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 1:4; Titus 2:14).

While it was creation that made man *capable* of obeying God, it is Calvary that makes men *willing* to obey God. Through the suffering and death of Christ, God becomes the supreme object of our love, worship, and devotion. We start to live for His sake. The object of our life is to please Him and bring Him glory through living a holy and obedient life.

In the atonement of Jesus Christ, God has exhibited such qualities and attributes of His moral character that it so profoundly impresses the mind and influences the will that it has induced even His enemies to surrender, cease their rebellion, and love Him. This is because they have been subdued by the manifestation and revelation of His goodness, love, and mercy towards them.

The minds of men are so constituted by God that they cannot help but to approve of the moral qualities and attributes of God's character exhibited at the cross. Thus God manifests these qualities and displays them to the minds of men in order to win and inspire their affections and to move and influence their wills. God gives men good reasons to love Him. The atonement brings men to a place of affectionate and willing submission and obedience to God. It is because we have "*seen him*" and have "*known him*" that we choose to "*sinneth not*" (1 Jn. 3:6).

Harry Conn said, "The only means in all the universe to subdue the rebellious heart and uphold the moral government of God is the love shown for us on Calvary. It was the greatest and most profound event of all history. The death of the Lord Jesus did not render God merciful but was an expression of his mercy... It seeks to bring back wanderers by expressing God's love and forgiveness, and

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that salvation is free for all men if they choose to avail themselves of it.”¹²

Charles Finney said, "...the sinner has all the faculties and natural attributes requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought."¹³ "The Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to the soul. The truth is employed, or it is truth which must necessarily be employed, as an instrument to induce a change of choice."¹⁴ He said, "Truth; this must, from the nature of regeneration, be employed in effecting it, for regeneration is nothing else than the will being duly influenced by truth."¹⁵ He said, "Nothing is wanting to slay any and every form of sin, but for the mind to be fully baptized into the death of Christ, and to see the bearings of one's own sins upon the sufferings, and agonies, and death of the blessed Jesus."¹⁶ He also said, "the offer of mercy through the death of Christ, has a most sin-subduing tendency. It is such a manifestation to the sinner of God's great love to him, his real pity for him, and readiness to overlook and blot out the past, as tends to break down the stubborn heart into genuine repentance, and to beget the sincerest love to God and Christ, together with the deepest self-loathing and self-abasement on account of sin."¹⁷

The impact of the atonement upon man's heart and mind is clearly seen in this classic hymn:

"When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride"¹⁸

We also see the moral influence of the atonement illustrated in the hymn "Victory in Jesus":

"I heard an old, old story,
How a Savior came from glory,

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How He gave His life on Calvary,
To save someone like me.

I heard about His groaning,
Of His precious blood's atoning,
Then I repented of my sin
And won the victory."¹⁹

James Arminius said, "The instrumental cause of vocation is the word of God, administered by the aid of man, either by preaching or by writing: And this is the ordinary instrument. Or it is the divine word immediately proposed by God, inwardly to the mind and will, without human [operam] aid or endeavor: and this is extraordinary. The word employed, in both these cases, is that both of the law and of the gospel, subordinate to each other in their separate services... This vocation is both external and internal. The external vocation is by the ministry of men propounding the word. The internal vocation is through the operation of the Holy Spirit illuminating and affecting the heart, that attention may be paid to these things which are spoken, and that [fides] credence may be given to the word. From the concurrence of both these, arises the efficacy of vocation."²⁰

George Otis Jr. said, "The Bible tells us that it is "the *goodness* of God (that) leadeth thee to repentance" (Rom. 2:4), not... *force*. The love of God displayed on Calvary was the greatest possible force to subdue the human heart."²¹

God promised that He would "make a new covenant," which would be different from the old covenant, where God said, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:31-33).

While the old covenant *required* obedience; the new covenant *promised* it. But what means does God use to bring our hearts into obedience to His law? What is the defining

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distinction between the old covenant and the new covenant, which would produce this result in the new covenant? The answer is the atonement of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews makes this point clear in chapter ten. In the old covenant they would sacrifice animals, but “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should *take away sins*” (Heb. 10:4). But in the new covenant, we have a greater influence upon our hearts and minds, and that is the atonement of Jesus Christ. ““By the which will we are *sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ... For by one offering he hath *perfected* for ever them that are *sanctified*. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, *I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them*” (Heb. 10:10, 14-16). The means through which God creates an obedient people, who obey Him from the heart, is through the atonement of Jesus Christ. God actually subdues the hearts of His enemies through the sacrifice of His Son (Heb. 10:12-13). The atonement of Jesus Christ purifies our hearts and transforms our lives in a way, which the foreshadow sacrifices of animals could not do.

God actually subdues the hearts of His enemies through the sacrifice of His Son.

Christ Changes Our Position and Practice

The difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate are the states of their will and intentions. The unregenerate are described as having hearts that are “only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5), whose heart is “deceitful... and desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9), because they “set their heart on their iniquity” (Hos. 4:8). The unregenerate cannot say “I

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have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin” (Prov. 20:9).

On the other hand, God promised to give us “a new heart” so that we would keep His commandments (Eze. 11:19-20; 36:26-27). Those who are saved and will see God, who have been regenerated through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, are described as being “pure in heart” (Mat. 5:8), or as having “a pure heart” (2 Tim. 2:22) or as receiving a “clean heart” (Ps. 51:10).

Jesus contrasted the unregenerate in heart with the regenerate in heart when He said, “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Matt. 12:35). The defining distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate is the moral quality or state of their heart (*will, intention*) and consequently the moral characteristics or conduct of their lives. The unregenerate are selfish in heart or intention and are, therefore, sinful in life, while the regenerate are benevolent in heart or intention and are, therefore, holy in life.

Jesus Christ takes unrighteous men and makes them righteous. But it is not uncommon for people to quote Romans 3:10 and try to apply it to those who are converted. When the Bible says “There is none righteous, no, not one” it is talking about all those who don't know Jesus Christ. The context of this passage is usually ignored and that single passage is isolated. The context says, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11), “The way of peace have they not known” (Rom. 3:17), “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3:18).

Can it be said that the converted do not seek God? Or that those who are converted do not know the way of peace? Or that those who are converted do not have the fear of God? Christians *do* seek after God, they know the way of peace,

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and they have the fear of God. Therefore, Paul was describing the unconverted world, not describing the converted Church. The point Paul was making was not that both saved and unsaved men were unrighteous, but that “both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin” (Rom. 3:9). Therefore, both Jew and Gentile needed to be saved by Jesus Christ. Paul’s point was that “all *have* sinned” (Rom. 3:23), but not that those who are saved continue to live in sin.

The Bible tells us that the “*unrighteous* will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9). It also says, “And if the *righteous* scarcely be saved, where shall the *ungodly* and the *sinner* appear?” (1 Pet. 4:18) A person who is saved by Jesus Christ is called “righteous” in opposition to being an “ungodly” “sinner.”

I have known Calvinists who will defend their doctrine that says no man can live free from sin by quoting Solomon who said, “For there is not a *just man* upon earth, that *doeth good*, and *sinneth not*” (Ecc. 7:20). While this was no doubt true of Solomon’s generation, or during the time that he stated this, it is not true of all generations or of all times. The Bible says that Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a “*just man*” (Matt. 1:19). It also says that Joseph, the counselor who buried Jesus, “was a *good man*, and a *just*” (Lk. 23:50). And it says that those who are born of God and abide in Christ “*sinneth not*” (1 Jn. 3:6; 5:18). It is, therefore, possible to be a just and good man that doesn’t sin. This is possible especially under the New Covenant!

Calvinists have used the following verse to teach that even those who have been saved by Jesus Christ are rebellious, sinful, wicked, evil sinners. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 Jn. 1:8) Many have used this passage to teach that Jesus Christ does not save us from all our sins. They say that the

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grace of God cannot set us free from all sin in this life. This passage must always be looked at in context.

The entire book of First John must be consulted for a proper understanding and interpretation of this passage. The meaning of a verse can be lost or misunderstood when Scripture isolation is practiced. The immediate surrounding context and the rest of the epistle give us much clarity into this excerpt.

Those who isolate this passage usually twist its meaning to be contrary to the rest of the epistle, which is about moral perfection. “My little children, these things write I unto you, *that ye sin not...*” (1 Jn. 2:1). Clearly, the inspired writer did not mean to say that you cannot live free from sin, since his stated objective is to get people to live free from sin. John would not write his epistle so that we would “deceive ourselves” and so that “the truth” would not be “in us.” Why would John write them so that they sin not, if when they believe that they sin not, they are simply deceived and are without the truth?

The meaning of a verse can be lost or misunderstood when Scripture isolation is practiced.

The immediate context of 1 Jn. 1:8 promises not merely the pardon of sin but also cleansing from sin. There is a proper distinction made between forgiveness and cleansing. It says, “...to *forgive* us our sins, *AND* to *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9). This passage promises freedom, not merely from some sins but freedom from all sins, to cleanse us from *ALL* unrighteousness. If 1 Jn. 1:8 means that nobody can state that Jesus Christ has cleansed them from all sin, then saying that you have experienced 1 Jn. 1:9 makes you a liar. Their interpretation of 1 Jn. 1:8 would mean that believing in 1 Jn. 1:9 would make you deceived. Any interpretation of a passage, which

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contradicts another passage, cannot be a proper interpretation.

No matter what your definition of sin is, Paul clearly taught that we were "free from sin" (Rom. 6:22). And the Apostle John said, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:3-4). To interpret 1 Jn. 1:8 to say that even believers are sinful evil lawbreakers would amount to this: if a believer claims to keep God's commandments, they are a liar and the truth is not in them (1 Jn. 1:8), but if they claim to know God but do not keep His commandments, they are a liar and the truth is not in them (1 Jn. 2:4). So the truth would not be in them if they claimed to keep God's commandments, and the truth would not be in them if they break His commandments. If the Bible taught that everybody breaks God's commandments and that you cannot know God if you are breaking His commandments, then logically the Bible would be saying that nobody knows God! If believers break God's commandments and you cannot know God if you break His commandments, then believers do not know God! But believers do know God; and therefore, believers keep God's commandments, as the Apostle said.

If 1 Jn. 1:8 means that everybody always has sin in their lives, then according to 1 Jn. 3:6, we do not "abideth in him" and have "not seen him, neither known him." It would mean that everyone is "of the devil" according to 1 Jn. 3:8 and that we have not been born of God according to 1 Jn. 3:9.

If 1 Jn. 1:8 means that you are a liar if you state that you no longer break God's commandments, then the Apostle John is a liar because he says "we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 Jn. 3:22). According to this interpretation of 1 Jn. 1:8, this

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would make the Apostle himself “deceived.” It would mean that the Apostle was without “the truth,” because he claimed to “keep his commandments.” Any interpretation of the Apostle’s writing, which makes the Apostle himself deceived and without the truth, cannot be a true interpretation.

The Apostle said in 1 Jn. 2:8-10 that the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil is that the children of God do what is righteous, but the children of the devil do what is sinful. This could not be a proper or accurate distinction between the children of God and the children of the devil if 1 Jn. 1:8 means that everyone has present disobedience and rebellion in their life. It would mean that the Apostle John and all believers are children of the devil if everybody has sin in their lives. If nobody lives a holy life or a life free from sin, then according to the Apostle, nobody is born of God.

The many problems with interpreting 1 Jn. 1:8 to mean that everybody has sin in their life is clear. If 1 Jn. 1:8 does not teach that even believers are rebellious, evil, wicked, lawbreaking sinners, then what does it mean? The phrase “have no sin” does not mean “have no sin” in your present conduct, since believers have become obedient. But it means “have no sin” in your past. The converted and the unconverted cannot say that they “have no sin” in their past, since “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). This point is repeated, “If we say that we *have not sinned*, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:10). None can deny that they have sinned or disobeyed in the past, but Christians can say that they presently obey God.

The man spoken of in 1 Jn. 1:8 is the man who had not yet experienced 1 Jn. 1:9. That is, the deceived man who denies having any sin is the one who has not yet confessed their sins, been forgiven of their sins, and have had their sins

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cleansed out of their life. Verse eight is directed to, or specifically talking about, the man who has not yet been forgiven and cleansed as described in verse nine. Verse nine is written as the solution to the sin described in verse eight. The man in verse eight is the one who denies his need for what is offered in verse nine, that is, he denies instead of confesses his sins, and therefore, says he needs no forgiveness or cleansing. Hence, he denies his need of being converted and denies his need of Jesus Christ.

If anyone claims that they have never sinned or that they "have no sin," when they have not yet been forgiven and cleansed by Christ, then they are deceived. But if they confess that they have sinned, their sin can be both forgiven and cleansed out of their lives, so that they will walk in holiness and righteousness.

John Wesley said that this passage describes "Any child of man, *before* his blood has cleansed us" and that this person denies having any sin "to be cleansed from, instead of confessing our sins."²² This passage does not describe the man who has confessed his sins, been forgiven of his sins, and has been cleansed by the blood of Christ from all sin.

Adam Clarke said, "If we say that we have no sin - This is tantamount to 1 Jn. 1:10: If we say that we have not sinned. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and therefore every man needs a Savior, such as Christ is. It is very likely that the heretics, against whose evil doctrines the apostle writes, denied that they had any sin, or needed any Savior."²³

Charles Finney said, "This verse is immediately preceded by the assertion that the "blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Now it would be very remarkable, if immediately after this assertion the apostle should mean to say, (as they suppose he did,) that it does not cleanse us from all sin, and if we say it does, we deceive ourselves; for he

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had just asserted, that the blood of Jesus Christ does cleanse us from all sin. If this were his meaning, it involves him in as palpable a contradiction as could be expressed.... This view of the subject then represents the apostle in the conclusion of the seventh verse, as saying, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin; and in the eighth verse, as saying, that if we suppose ourselves to be cleansed from all sin, we deceive ourselves, thus flatly contradicting what he had just said. And in the ninth verse he goes on to say, that "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness;" that is, the blood of Jesus cleanseth us from all sin; but if we say it does, we deceive ourselves. "But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Now, all unrighteousness is sin. If we are cleansed from all unrighteousness, we are cleansed from sin. And now suppose a man should confess his sin, and God should in faithfulness and justice forgive his sin, and cleanse him from all unrighteousness, and then he should confess and profess that God had done this; are we to understand, that the apostle would then affirm that he deceives himself, in supposing that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin? This then appears to me to be the meaning of the whole passage. If we say that we are not sinners, that is, have no sin to need the blood of Christ; that we have never sinned, and consequently need no Saviour, we deceive ourselves."²⁴

Consider these syllogisms:

- When we are born again and God becomes our Father, we love Jesus Christ (Jn. 8:42).
- If we love Jesus Christ, we will keep His commandments (Jn. 14:23).

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- Therefore, when we are born again and God becomes our Father, we will begin to keep Christ's commandments.
- If we love Him we will keep His commandments (Jn. 14:15; 14:23), and love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10)
- Those who have been forgiven much will love much (Lk. 7:47).
- Therefore those who have been forgiven through Jesus Christ keep His commandments and fulfill His law.

Contrary to the idea that you cannot live free from sin in this life, the Bible describes the conversion or regeneration experience as liberation from sin in this life to live a righteous life in obedience to God (Rom. 6:22). Those who are born again can say "we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 Jn. 3:22).

I have met Calvinists who do not believe it is possible to overcome sin in this life by the grace of God because their lives are overcome by sin. But we are not to judge the Bible by our experience. We are to judge our experience by the Bible. If our experience does not line up with the Scriptures, it is our experience that is wrong, not the Scriptures. We should not bring the Bible down to our experience, but should bring our experience up to the Bible. The Scriptures say, "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness" (Rom. 6:18). "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

We should not bring the Bible down to our experience, but should bring our experience up to the Bible.

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There can be no moral change more dramatic and radical than the reversal of purpose of life that occurs at a genuine conversion to Christ. The course of our conduct or the direction and way of our life has been completely changed. When we are truly saved by Jesus Christ, we will no longer live a sinful life because the power of the gospel has radically converted our hearts and completely changed our character.

A gospel that does not save from sin is not a gospel at all. The true gospel, when it is believed and received in our hearts, completely reverses our lives, renews our minds, and regenerates our character.

Jesus not only saves our souls, but He changes our lives.

The Apostle John said "...the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from *all* sin" (1 Jn. 1:7). Jesus not only saves our souls, but He changes our lives. Jesus not only makes us righteous in our position but also makes us righteous in our practice. When we are truly born again, both our standing and our state are changed. God will not only "*forgive* us our sins," but He will also "*cleanse* us from *all* unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).

If Jesus only made us righteous in our position (*forgiveness*) but did not make us righteous in our practice (*bring us to repentance*), then Jesus would essentially be giving us a license to sin. God is too good and too wise for that. God changes those whom He saves. Those who do not allow God to change them are not allowing God to save them.

The Apostle John came against this deception that you can be righteous in position while remaining unrighteous in your practice. "Little children, let no man *deceive* you: he that *doeth* righteousness *is* righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 Jn. 3:7).

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True conversion is not when a person makes some weak “decision for Christ” at an altar, which does not change or affect his life. True conversion is when a person decides to bear his cross and follow the Lord (Lk. 14:27), when he chooses to forsake everything for Jesus Christ (Lk. 14:33). Nothing short of this radical decision is Biblical regeneration. Nothing short of this dramatic choice is true conversion.

We see in the Old Testament that sacrifices were not even acceptable to God unless the transgressor who was offering the sacrifice actually had a moral change or a change of heart and mind (Ps. 50:7-23; 51:16-19; Prov. 15:8; 16:6; 21:3; 21:27; Isa. 1:10-17; 56:6-7; 66:3-4; Jer. 7:21-26; 11:14-17; 14:10-12; Hos. 6:6-7; 8:11-14; 9:1-6; 12:9-11; 14:1-3; Joel 1:9; 13; 2:12-14; Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-27; Jonah 1:15; 2:9; 3:5-10; Mic. 6:6-8; Zeph. 1:7-13; 3:10-11; Hag. 2:14; Zech. 14:21; Mal. 1:6-14; 2:10-14; 3:3-4; Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Heb. 10:8).

A sinner is “carnally minded” (Rom. 8:6), which means he is fleshly purposed. His plan is to live selfishly for himself and his own pleasure. Repentance is a change of mind, which is a change of purpose or a change of plans. If the transgressor of the law did not have a change of mind or a change of plans on how he was going to live, his sacrifice was an abomination to God. “The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more, when he bringeth it with a *wicked mind*?” (Prov. 21:27)

God wanted genuine repentance. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17). A sacrifice does save someone who continues to be wicked (Heb. 10:26-31), but the atonement process itself was meant to be a dramatic experience to have a deep and profound impact upon the heart and mind of the one the sacrifice was for.

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Catherine Booth said, “It is to be feared that thousands are looking to Him to save them from the consequences of sin – that is, hell – who continue to commit sin; they utterly misunderstand the aim and work of the Christ of God. They do not see that He came not merely to bring men to heaven, but to bring them back into harmony with His Father; they look upon the atonement as a sort of make-shift plan by which they are to enter heaven, leaving their characters unchanged on earth. They forget that sin is a far greater evil in the Divine estimation than hell; they do not

The ultimate problem that God has is the sinner himself.

see that sin is the primal evil. If there were no sin, there need be no hell. God only proposes to save people from the consequences of sin by saving them from sin itself; and this is the great distinguishing work of Christ – to save His people from their sins!”²⁵

God's problem is not His moral law, since He gave it and it is good for all. Nor is His problem hell since He created it and it is necessary to support His law and promote the well-being of His universe. The solution to God's problem is not to do away with His law or to do away with hell. The existence of both precepts and sanctions are good and necessary. Nor is sin God's ultimate problem since it is the effect of a greater problem.

The ultimate problem that God has is the sinner himself. The sinner is the cause of sin. If it wasn't for the sinner, the sin would not exist. The sinner is the reason there is a hell. If there were no sinners in the universe, there would be no hell. God's problem is with sinners. Therefore, the solution to the problem is to change sinners.

God seeks to turn sinners into saints. God seeks to change the very hearts of men. God does not seek to merely save sinners from hell without changing their moral

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character. God's solution of salvation includes a real deliverance, not only from the penalty of sin, but the practice of sin.

While preaching open air on Texas State University in San Marcos, I asked a crowd of students, "Why did Jesus Christ die on the cross?" A girl passionately responded, "So we can keep sinning!" What a terrible misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the purpose of the atonement! Nothing more devilish is conceivable than to turn the atonement into an occasion for sin!

The design or objective of the atonement, as explained in the Bible, is the exact opposite of what this girl said. Jesus died to purify us from our sins, not to give us an excuse for sin or to encourage us in rebellion. Jesus Christ died to save sinners from their sinning, to transform rebellious sinners into loyal saints. The objective of the atonement was to reconcile the enemies of God to Him (Rom. 5:10).

God is not reconciled to man, but man is reconciled to God.

In reconciliation between God and man, it is not God who needs to change. God has done nothing wrong. It was man that had to be reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-22). In other words, God is not reconciled to man but man is reconciled to God. "And all things are of God, who hath *reconciled us to himself...*" (2 Cor. 5:18).

P. P. Waldenstrom said, "God had never come into any wrong relation to men, and therefore He never needed to be brought again into a right relation to them. On the contrary, men had come into a wrong relation to God, and they therefore needed to be brought again into a right relation to Him.... If an arm be wrested out of joint, and thereby comes into a wrong relation to the body, it becomes

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useless for the work for which it was created, and must suffer much pain. If it is to be healed, and to be freed from pain, and fitted for its work, it must be brought again into a right relation to the body.”²⁶ It was mankind who left God. Therefore, it is mankind who must return to God. We chose to go astray; and therefore, we must choose to come back.

W. E. Vine said, “Never is God said to be reconciled, a fact itself indicative that the enmity exists on man’s part alone, and that it is man who needs to be reconciled to God, and not God to man. God is always the same... He is Himself immutable...”²⁷

You cannot
be reconciled
to God while
you are still
at war
with Him.

The atonement did not change God in any way whatsoever. God was merciful and opposed to sin before the atonement, and God is merciful and opposed to sin after the atonement. Before the atonement, God had wrath for the impenitent and mercy for the repentant; and after the atonement, God has wrath for the impenitent and mercy for the repentant. The atonement did not give God mercy or make Him merciful. Neither did the atonement take away His wrath or pacify His anger. God’s character always stays the same (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; Jas 1:17).

God did not have a problem with any of His attributes, but He had a problem with man’s moral character. Therefore, the atonement is not something that changes the attributes of God, but something that changes the character of man.

In reconciliation, man must change. Men are the enemies of God because of their own sin. Therefore, the prime objective of the atonement was to make man holy and blameless. “And you, that were sometimes alienated and *enemies in your mind by wicked works*, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present

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you *holy and unblameable and unreprieveable* in his sight..." (Col. 1:21-22) God can only be reconciled to His enemies if the moral character of His enemy changes. Man must cease his rebellion against God in order to be reconciled because you cannot be reconciled to God while you are still at war with Him.

A classic hymn says, "*As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free.*"²⁸ Another classic hymn says, "In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, a wondrous beauty I see, for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, *to pardon and sanctify me.*"²⁹

This is a repeated theme all throughout the New Testament. The atonement of Christ is designed to turn sinners into saints, to deliver us from a life of sinning (Isa. 53:5; Matt. 1:21; Jn. 1:29; Acts 3:26; Rom. 8:4; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:25-27; Col 1:21-23; Titus 2:11-12, 14; Heb. 9:26; 10:10; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 Jn. 1:7; 3:5; 3:8; 4:19). "Who gave himself for us, *that* he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14). "And that he died for all, *that* they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). "JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21). "Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, *in* turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26). "And ye know that he was manifested *to* take away our sins" (1 Jn. 3:5). Christ died so "*that* the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:4). "Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; *that* he might sanctify and cleanse it with the watching of water by the word, *that* he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but *that* it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body

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on the tree, *that* we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). Christ died “*to* put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ” (Heb. 10:10).

When Calvinists and others say that we cannot live free from sin and be holy in this life, or that we will never be entirely obedient to God in this world, they are essentially saying that the atonement is a failure and is ineffective. Since the objective of the atonement was to make men holy, they are making "the cross of Christ... of none effect" (1 Cor. 1:17).

Dr. P. F. Bresee said, “There is one fact that stands out before and above every other in the Word of God: the blood of Jesus Christ is shed to make an end of sin, and to fulfill God’s own will and answer Jesus’ own prayer in the sanctification of the people”³⁰

The Scriptures say that Christians are saved unto obedience (1 Pet. 1:2) and unto good works (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14). This is because the atonement breaks and subdues our hearts, so that the cross brings us to repentance unto obedience (Rom. 2:4; 1 Jn. 4:19). The atonement so impacts our hearts and minds that we turn from our disobedience in humble, sincere, and deep repentance.

The *at-one-ment* is meant to make us *at-one* instead of *at war* with God. It does this by allowing God to set aside our punishment or suspend our penalty while also bringing us to a place of complete submission and total surrender to Him.

Moral character is determined by free will choices and moral change can only be brought about by moral influence. Therefore, since the *objective* of the atonement is to produce a moral change in man, the *nature* of the

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atonement must be that of a moral influence over man. In order for the atonement to change the moral character of man, it must be designed to be an influence upon man's will.

If the end is going to be accomplished by the means, the means must be fit to accomplish the end. If the means have no tendency to bring about the end, the end will not be accomplished by those means. The end determines the necessary means. The nature of the end determines the nature of the means, which are necessary to secure that end. These truths are self-evident. The objective of the atonement determines what the nature of the atonement must be. Since the objective of the atonement is to change and transform men, the nature of the atonement must be such as to accomplish this purpose.

None can deny that the atonement is a moral influence upon man, unless they deny that the atonement was meant to change the moral character of man. It cannot be denied Scripturally that the atonement was meant to change the moral character of men; and therefore, it cannot be denied Scripturally that the atonement is a moral influence over men.

All saints are conscious of the atonement having a deep impact and profound impression upon their hearts and minds, so much so that their lives have been radically changed. Therefore, it cannot be denied that the atonement is a moral influence over man without the consciousness and experience of all the Saints being denied. If the truths of the gospel, when presented to the mind of man, were not a moral influence upon the will of man, then there would be absolutely no tendency in the gospel to convert man; and consequently, there would be no connection at all between the gospel and man's conversion. Preaching the gospel to sinners would have no tendency to save them. It would have no connection with their salvation, unless the gospel was the

influence that God used to convert and save them.

A Greater Moral Influence than the Law

Pelagius said, "This grace we do not allow to consist only in the law but also in the help of God. God helps us through His teaching and revelation by opening the eyes of our heart, by pointing out to us the future so that we may not be preoccupied with the present, by uncovering the snares of the devil, by enlightening us with the manifold and ineffable gift of heavenly grace."³¹

James B. Walker said, "The atonement of Christ produces the necessary effect upon the human soul, in restoring it to affectionate obedience, which neither philosophy, law, nor perceptive truth could accomplish."³² He also said, "But the apostle preached CHRIST CRUCIFIED, an exhibition of self-denial, of suffering, and of self-sacrificing love and mercy, endured in behalf of men, which, when received by faith, became the power of God and the wisdom of God to produce love and obedience in the human soul..."³³

Something more than the law needed to be done in order to bring men to repentance towards God. We see in Romans chapter seven that the transgressor, when convicted by the law, is not necessarily converted but is rather in a state of misery and condemnation. A sinner is someone who already has the moral influence of the law through his conscience but sins anyway. Therefore, it was necessary for a moral influence greater than the law to bring men to repentance from sin unto obedience to God.

The display of God's goodness on the cross was necessary to convert those who are convicted by the law. The law convicts, the gospel converts. The law shows us our sins; the gospel turns us from our sins. The gospel makes men righteous, which is something that the law itself could not

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do. *“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh. That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom. 8:3-4).

The law gives us legal motives (fear of punishment and hope of reward), but these in themselves can be entirely selfish. That is why the law cannot convert a person from selfishness to benevolence. The law demands benevolence *from* man, but it has no tendency to produce benevolence *in* man. It is the gospel, the cross of Jesus Christ, which begets in us love for God so that we obey Him out of benevolence. The law did not make us righteous in our position or in our practice, but faith in Christ does both.

When I was a juvenile, I was locked up in a Detention Center in New Haven, CT. During one of my times there, I heard a preacher holding a meeting with all the other inmates. He asked everyone, “How many of you believe that when you die, you are going to heaven?” Almost everyone raised their hands.

He then began to explain that because of our sins, we were going to hell. All my life I had thought that I was going to heaven. Even when I was extremely violent and was selling drugs, I still thought that I was going to heaven. Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, being confronted with my violations of God’s law, I came under deep conviction of my sin.

After that my sin did not stop but actually got worse. I tried to drink and drug my conviction away. Just as the man described in Romans chapter seven, I was miserable under the conviction of the law. I had no peace of mind because my own conscience condemned me. It was not until I looked to Jesus Christ that I found freedom from guilt because I found freedom from sin.

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It was when I was in a Rehab Center that I started to read the Bible. I read about what Jesus Christ had done for me. Images of His suffering and death, of His wounds and His agony all on behalf of my sin, were presented to my mind. I began to love Him who first loved me. I decided to repent of all of my sin and to serve Him the rest of my life.

A true convert sees what sin has done to God and to His universe and he repents of his sins out of consideration and contemplation of that truth. False converts only want *forgiveness* of sin, but true converts want *freedom* from sin. False converts want *self-gratification*, but true converts want *God's glorification*.

When I got saved, I didn't want to sin anymore. If a person still wants to sin, their heart is still impenitent. But the work of the Holy Spirit was so great in my life that my heart was completely repentant. I wanted to live a loving life towards my neighbor and towards my God. I no longer wanted to hurt my neighbor or dishonor my God. I now wanted to promote the well-being of my neighbor and to promote the glory of God. That was the power of the grace of God and the cross of Christ in my life.

While it was the law that convicted me, it was the gospel that converted me. When the truth of the law is presented to the mind of man, this *convicts the conscience*. Then, after the law has done its work, when the truth of the gospel is presented to the mind of man, it *converts the heart*.

The work of the law and the work of the gospel are both absolutely necessary in the process of true conversion. But it is the gospel, not the law, which gives us the proper motives of true repentance. While the law might make us fear God for His justice, the gospel makes us love God for His mercies.

True repentance is not when a person repents of their sins out of *legal motives*, out of fear of punishment or hope

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of reward, but out of *gospel motives*, because they love Him who first loved them. In the former, a person seeks to please themselves; but in the latter, they seek to please God. It is the truth of the atonement that is adequate to bring about a genuine repentance in man.

The difference between true and false repentance is a matter of motive. A false convert may repent of sin merely because of what sin has *done to his life*, but a true convert will repent of his sin, not only because of what it has done to his life, but because of what his sin has *done to others and primarily to God*. A false convert is completely selfish in his repentance, so that he is not truly repenting of sin because he is not repenting of selfishness.

A true convert, on the other hand, repents out of love for God and others. His repentance is a real turning away from sin because it is an abandonment of selfishness. Sin is transgression of God's law. God's law demands benevolence and forbids selfishness. Therefore, sin is choosing to be selfish instead of benevolent.

Repentance is turning away from sin, which is turning away from selfishness. Therefore, repentance done out of selfish motives is no repentance at all, but only repentance done out of benevolent motives is real repentance from sin. Selfish repentance is itself sinful, because it violates the law of God. If salvation was entirely selfish, salvation itself would be entirely sinful. True salvation is an abandonment of selfishness, not merely turning from sin to God in order to escape hell and gain heaven, but turning to God because He is worthy.

Remember, God looks upon the heart of man when He judges man's moral character (1 Sam. 16:7; Ps. 26:1-2;

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17:3; 44:18-21; 51:6; 139:1-2, 23; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; Matt. 6:5; 7:15-23; 2 Cor. 8:12). The Bible says, "...for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

The heart is a metaphor for the will or intention. Moral character is not determined by outward actions but by the inward intention or motive of the heart. The Pharisees prayed, fasted, and did all their religious works to be seen of men (Matt. 6:5; 23:5), but their motives were all wrong. That is why they appeared to be righteous; but inwardly, they were full of iniquity (Matt. 23:28). Moral character is not that which is external to man, but that which is internal to him.

The moral character of a man does not depend upon his outward actions, but it depends upon the inward motive of the heart, which is behind his actions or from which his actions proceed from. The law in its essence demands love or benevolence, which is the intention of the will when the highest well-being of all is the end you are living for. It is the end that is chosen that determines a man's moral character. It is out of the heart, or the intention, that all other actions proceed from (Matt. 12:35, Lk. 6:45, Acts 5:4).

Regeneration is a change of heart, which is a change of intention (Eze. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; Matt. 5:8). While regeneration will result in an outward or external change, since a change of heart will result in a change of life, regeneration itself is in inward or internal change. God must change the intention or motive of man's heart if He is going to change man's moral character in regeneration.

Remember, the unregenerate are described as having evil and wicked hearts (Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9), but the regenerate is described as having "a new heart" (Eze. 11:19-20; 36:26-27), which is "a pure heart" (Matt. 5:8; Matt. 12:35; 2 Tim. 2:22). Their motive or intention in life has

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been changed. If there has been no change of motive or intention, there has been no change of moral character; because if they are still living for themselves, they are still breaking the law of God.

A sinner who prays, fasts, or even repents out of selfish motives has not yet had a change of moral character but is still a sinner because he is still in rebellion to the law of God. To obey the law of God out of selfish motives is not to obey the law of God at all, because God's law demands benevolence and forbids selfishness. To obey the law of God out of selfish motives is to actually disobey the law of God. To repent of sin out of a selfish intention is not to repent of sin at all, because sin is selfishness. Selfish repentance actually is impenitence.

Here are logical syllogisms:

- Your moral character is determined by your obedience or disobedience to God.
- God's law commands benevolence and forbids selfishness, which are both intentions of the heart.
- Therefore, your moral character consists in the intention of your heart in having either benevolent or selfish intentions.

- A man's character consists of his motives or intentions.
- Regeneration is a transformation of man's character.
- Therefore, regeneration is a transformation of man's motives or intentions.

If the intention of your heart does not change, your moral character does not change. A man is a sinner as long as he is selfish or supremely living for himself. Until he

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begins to love God supremely and love his neighbor equally, he is not obedient to God's law, his moral character has not changed; and therefore, he has not yet been regenerated or converted at all. As long as a man values his own well-being as *supremely* valuable, or as long as his own happiness is the *primary* pursuit of his life, he is unregenerate.

Suppose a sinner repents of his sins simply and solely to gain heaven and avoid hell, so that he can escape the pains of eternal punishment and enjoy the pleasures of eternal bliss. His moral character, or the motive of his heart, is no different than the sinner who indulges in all the pleasures of his flesh. Both are living primarily and supremely for themselves. Both are selfishly seeking their own happiness instead of loving God supremely and their neighbor equally.

While one is seeking his happiness as his ultimate aim *in this life*, the other is seeking his happiness as his ultimate aim *in the next life*, but their ultimate intention or primary purpose is identical. There has been no change of character or reversal of intention in his repentance at all.

True repentance is when a person abandons sin, not primarily for their own sake, but for the sake of God and His universe. While a sinner who repents no doubt is caring for his own soul, this cannot be the only or supreme concern if his repentance be genuine. His repentance, if unselfish, must include a care and concern for God and others. The truly repentant see how their sins have dishonored God and now they want to bring Him glory, as the commandment says to love God supremely. They also see how their sins have been contrary to the well-being of their neighbor and they now want to live benevolently, as the commandment says to love their neighbor equally. That is true repentance from sin or true abandonment of lawless living.

It is the atonement which so impresses the mind of man and influences the heart of man that this type of repentance is

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brought about. The atonement begets love in us for God and it inspires us to love others as Jesus did. It is through a revelation of the atonement that we are brought to true repentance from sin unto true obedience to God's law. It is through the atonement that we begin to genuinely and truly love Jesus Christ.

While a false convert comes to Christ merely to improve his life now on earth or to improve his life later in eternity, a true convert comes to Christ because he sees through the cross how Christ is worthy to be loved and obeyed. Therefore, Christ truly saves us from our sins themselves (Matt. 1:21), because He saves us from our selfishness and brings us to true submission to the law of God.

Paul told us that souls are won, not through the wisdom of words, but by the powerful influence of the preaching of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17). God brings men to repentance through the revelation of the truth. By presenting truth to the mind of man, God influences the will. That is why we must publicly preach Christ (Acts 5:42; 9:20; 17:3; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 2:12; 4:5; Eph. 3:8; Php. 1:15-16), why we must preach the truth of the kingdom of God (Lk. 4:43; 9:2; 9:60; Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23; 28:31), and why we see Paul publicly reasoning with men (Acts 19:8; Acts 19:9), particularly reasoning about the Christ (Acts 28:23). Paul himself was converted by a dramatic revelation of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-6; Acts 26:12-18).

Reflecting upon how Paul was so hostile towards the Church, he said that out of all the sinners Jesus saved, he is the chief (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul said, "*Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious...*" (1 Tim. 1:13), speaking of how wicked he *used to be*. This shows us the deep moral transformation that Paul underwent due to the revelation of Jesus Christ which he had on the road to

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Damascus. Even *the chief of sinners* had his moral character reversed and radically changed by a revelation of Jesus! But Paul said “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 16:19). This implies that he could have been disobedient to the vision if he wanted to, but he chose not to be. Paul allowed the revelation of Jesus Christ to influence his will and change his life, so that he chose to obey the Lord.

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We can see why preaching the gospel is absolutely essential in saving souls, because the regeneration of a person’s character comes through the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “In meekness *instructing* those that oppose themselves: *if* God peradventure will *give them repentance* to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). It is through the instruction of the truth that God brings men to repentance. But there is an “if,” not because there is any unwillingness on God’s part, but because there is a freedom of man’s part. Man may or may not obey the truth which God grants; therefore, God may or may not bring men to repentance through the truth. But we must preach the truth of the gospel to sinners because it is through those means that God can save their souls and change their lives.

The Bible says that if you *believe* on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be *saved* (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9). The salvation experience includes not only being saved from the penalty of sin, but also being saved from the practice of sin. Therefore, it is by *believing* on the Lord Jesus Christ that we are saved from the penalty *and* practice of sin.

Believing is not merely consenting to the truth with the mind or intellect, but also embracing the truth with the heart

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or will. True belief in the Lord Jesus Christ will not only change where you will spend your eternity, it will also change how you live your life here and now. It is through faith in Christ that our hearts are purified (Acts 15:9; 1 Jn. 3:3), our lives are sanctified (Acts 26:18) and we overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:4). We are saved from the penalty and practice of sin by our faith in Jesus Christ.

A Tale of Two Kings

While I was open air preaching at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, I illustrated the atonement by telling the students about the ancient king of the Locrians in Italy named Zalukas.

King Zalukas saw the problem of infidelity within his kingdom. He saw how the backbone of a strong society is a strong family and how adultery had the potential to destroy a society by destroying the family. When there is adultery, there could be children born out of wedlock. This breaks down the family unit.

Good families raise good children who become good citizens, but when the family unit is broken down, civilization is broken down. Dysfunctional families are more likely to raise dysfunctional children, and dysfunctional people contribute to a dysfunctional society.

When there is infidelity and adultery, this also leads to jealousy and hatred, which leads to violence and murder when a husband finds out that another man has been sleeping with his wife.

There are many social problems with adultery; and therefore, for the good of his kingdom, the king outlawed adultery. But laws are not respected or regarded unless they have consequences. Penalties give the law authority and influence. Therefore, the king assigned a very severe penalty for those who violated his law. Those who were found

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committing adultery would have both of their eyes removed by a hot poker!

A few people were found committing adultery and quickly the penalty was executed. This showed the kingdom that the king meant business. He surely regarded his law and meant to maintain it. It wasn't long until adultery literally ceased from his kingdom.

One day a man was brought before the king who had been committing adultery. It was the king's own son, the prince of the kingdom. The king was in a dilemma. On the

The authority and influence of his law depended upon the execution of the penalty.

one hand the king wanted to maintain his law. The authority and influence of his law depended upon the execution of the penalty. If he didn't execute the penalty, his kingdom would question whether or not the king really regarded his law or not. If the king did not execute the penalty, the kingdom would think that he gave a bad law or that he gave too severe a penalty. But on the other hand, the king cared about his son and was prone to forgive him. The

king naturally preferred to show his son mercy.

How could he do both? How could the king show mercy to his son but still uphold the authority and influence of his law throughout his kingdom at the same time? The solution which the king found to his dilemma was a painful one. The king had one of the eyes of his son removed out of his love for his kingdom; and in lieu of the other eye of his son, he sacrificed his own out of his love for his son. He substituted one of his own eyes for the eye of his son. In this way the king showed his care and concern for his kingdom by supporting the law and showed his care and concern for his son by making a personal and painful sacrifice.

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Through this sacrifice the king found a way to show mercy to his son by not executing the full penalty of the law upon him, while also expressing to his kingdom his regard for his law and thereby maintain the authority and influence of the precept.

His sacrifice must have made a profound impression upon the minds of all his subjects and upon the mind of his son. The subjects of his kingdom must have been profoundly impressed with the king's regard for the law. They would not dare break the law themselves, since they clearly saw the king's determination to uphold and maintain it. They also saw how good their king was and how worthy He was to be obeyed.

Upon the son, his mind must have been profoundly impressed with the love his father had for him. What remorse he must have had for his crime! His disobedience cost his father so much! Out of love and gratitude for his father, he would want to live a life pleasing to him. He would forever see the loss of his father's eye for the rest of his father's life. How could he ever commit adultery again after seeing what a great price his father paid? Seeing what his law-breaking cost his father would make him never want to break the law again.

I then explained to the students listening that God gave His universe a very good law for our own good. The law of God promotes the highest well-being of all. In order to give authority to the precept, God has given a severe penalty. The penalty for violating God's law is to burn in hell for all of eternity. That is eternal death.

At first there were angels who rebelled against God. They were quickly thrust out of heaven and are now waiting judgment day. This showed God's universe that God meant

The penalty for violating God's law is to burn in hell for all of eternity.

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business. It declared that God valued His law and meant to maintain it.

But then mankind sinned. Mankind was made in the image of God. Men were the crown of God's creation. God was prone to forgive mankind, but He must also maintain His law. On the one hand, the authority and influence of His law throughout His universe or kingdom depends upon Him making a proper expression of His regard for His law so that crime is discouraged. God must protect and promote the well-being of His kingdom. But on the other hand, God would prefer to forgive mankind by withholding or setting aside our penalty. How could God do both? How could God pardon disobedient men without encouraging the rest of His universe to sin? How could God remit our penalty of eternal hell but still uphold His law and maintain its authority and influence by manifesting His regard for His law? The answer is the atonement of Jesus Christ.

If God simply forgave mankind for their sin by His mere mercy, while the angels who rebelled were kicked out of heaven and are awaiting judgment, this would show an inconsistency in the character of God and would create uncertainty in His universe. Does God punish sin or not? Should His subjects respect and obey His law? The hosts of heaven would be uncertain as to whether or not they could sin with impunity. They might believe that they have a fifty-fifty chance of sinning and getting away with it. If our punishment is going to be set aside, something must take its place to show consistency in God's character and uphold His law.

When God offered His own Son to make atonement for our sins, He provided a sacrifice which would stand in lieu of our eternal punishment. Catherine Booth said, "The Divine law has been broken; the interests of the universe demanded that its righteousness should be maintained,

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therefore, its penalty must be endured by the transgressor or, in lieu of this, such compensation must be rendered as would satisfy the claims of justice, and render it expedient for God to pardon the guilty... Christ made such a sacrifice as to render it possible for God to be just, and yet to pardon the sinner.”³⁴

Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself so that we don't have to suffer the punishment of eternal hell. His suffering and death is a substitute for our penalty, so that our penalty can be remitted by God in the gracious act of pardon. Through the atonement, God manifests to His universe His regard for His law in a way even greater than the penalty of the law upon sinners would have. God showed His love for His universe by protecting their rights and interests by upholding the law while also showing His love for mankind by making such a personal and painful sacrifice on our behalf.

The atonement of Jesus Christ must have a profound impact upon all of the minds of the moral beings within God's kingdom. Upon the other subjects of His kingdom, or all of the hosts of heaven, they must be deeply impressed with God's regard for His law and with God's regard for their interest by seeking to maintain His law. This impression through God's sacrifice upon their minds is even greater than it would have been had the penalty been simply executed upon sinners. The atonement shows God's regard for the law even more than the penalty executed upon sinners would shown, because of Christ's dignity and because of Christ's willingness.

Now the other moral subjects in God's moral government would not dare break the law themselves since they clearly see God's determination to uphold and maintain it. And they see how worthy God is to be loved and obeyed because the manifestation of God's goodness is evident at the cross. The atonement accomplished the needed affect

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upon the rest of God's kingdom in an even greater way than the penalty of the law being executed upon sinners would have had.

The atonement of Christ maintained, not only the fear of punishment amongst God's other moral subjects, as the penalty being executed upon us would have, but also it gave them even greater motivation to obey God – because they see how worthy He is. Though the penalty might have caused His subjects to fear Him, the atonement must cause them to love Him. The penalty would have shown them God's justice, but the atonement shows them God's justice and His mercy. They behold the goodness and the severity of God. A fuller revelation or manifestation of God's character is revealed at the cross of Christ than what could have been revealed by the mere penalty of the law being executed upon the transgressor.

The atonement not only discourages sin amongst the other moral beings under God's moral government, but the atonement also has a very deep impact and profound impression upon us who are being pardoned. What remorse the atonement creates in us for our sins! Our wickedness cost our loving Father so much! Out of love and gratitude, those who have been truly converted have decided to live the rest of their lives in a way that is pleasing to Him.

Even for all of eternity, we will see the wounds in the Lamb that was slain. How difficult it is for us to walk the path of sin again seeing what a great price that was paid. Seeing how much our transgressions of the law cost God, we want to never break the law again. We begin to love the precepts of the moral law and respect the authority of the law because we begin to love the author of the law!

Those who love the Lord will hate evil (Ps. 97:10; Amos 5:15). They can say, "I love thy law!" (Ps. 119:97). We begin to love God and His character and come to abhor

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everything that is contrary to God and His character. We love Him because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). We love much because we have been forgiven much (Lk. 7:47). And those who love Him keep His commandments (Jn. 14:15; 14:23) since love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10).

A revelation of God's benevolent character and a manifestation of the loving heart of God, which was publicly shown and made known at the cross, is the converting power of the gospel. It is that precious and powerful truth revealed to the mind that brings the rebellious will of man into complete submission, unconditional surrender, and loving obedience to the good and reasonable moral government of God. This understanding gives us insight as to why true faith in Christ will purify our hearts (Acts 15:9; 1 Jn. 3:3), sanctify our lives (Acts 26:18), overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:4), result in good works (James 2:14-16), and works with a motive of love (Gal. 5:6).

Faith in
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Faith in Christ is a truly life changing thing! Now that we have put our faith in Christ, the rule of our life should be obedience. Hermas said, "That was sound doctrine which you heard; for that is really the case. For he who has received remission of sins should not sin anymore, but should live in purity."³⁵ Our life should no longer be characterized by sin. We should walk in habitual holiness out of our love for Jesus Christ and a desire to glorify God.

When it comes to the moral quality of your life, there are only two options. You are either trying to live a sinless life and want to go the rest of your life without sinning because you love Jesus and want to glorify Him, or you are content to live a sinful life because you love your sin and want to gratify yourself. Those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, whose hearts have been changed and

transformed by the power of the gospel, are no longer in the latter state described but are in the former category.

The Atonement as Objective and Subjective

The atonement solves all of God's problems in forgiving mankind. The atonement makes it possible for God to safely remit the penalty of the law by providing a substitute for our penalty and by bringing us to repentance through its moral influence. Christ's suffering and death brings pardon to our past and purification to our present. The

cross brings forgiveness of sins and freedom from sins. It saves us from the penalty and from the practice of sin.

The truth of the atonement is the greatest moral influence in the entire universe.

The atonement is both objective and subjective. As a governmental substitution, the atonement is objective. The atonement substitutes our penalty and upholds or maintains the moral law throughout God's universe, just as our penalty would have.

And the atonement confirms holy beings in their obedience towards God. As a moral influence, the atonement is subjective. Seeing what Jesus Christ has done for us and beholding the great goodness and kindness of God brings us to complete repentance so that we never want to sin again but always want to do that which is pleasing to Him.

Knowledge of the atonement draws sinners away from sin and unto God. Jesus said "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (Jn. 12:32). The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). The truth of the atonement is the greatest moral influence in the entire universe. No other truth could possibly influence our will to repentance and obedience as forcefully or persuasively as the truth of the atonement can. If a man is not brought to repentance by the truth of the

atonement, after it has been clearly and powerfully presented to his mind, than his case must be hopeless.

Men Absolutely Need Jesus Christ

John Owen said, "To suppose that whatever God requireth of us that we have power of ourselves to do, is to make the cross and grace of Jesus Christ of none effect."³⁶ Some have objected to the doctrine of man's natural ability by saying that if men are capable of obeying God, we would not need the atonement of Jesus Christ. This line of reasoning is fallacious. Does a criminal not need pardon because he was capable of obeying the law in the first place? Does a criminal not need pardon, because his crime was his own free will choice? A criminal's ability to be a law-abiding citizen does not make his necessity for pardon "*of none effect.*" In fact, it is because of man's ability to obey God that there is both the governmental necessity of the atonement and the moral necessity of the atonement. If men did not have the ability to obey God, there would be neither a governmental necessity nor a moral necessity for the atonement.

The governmental necessity of the atonement is rooted in the fact that we deserve punishment and our punishment cannot be set aside unless there is a substitute which upholds the law as the execution of the penalty would have. One of the fundamental reasons that men deserve punishment for their sin is because they are capable of not sinning in the first place. The penalty of the law is deserved by those who freely and personally violate the precept of the law. Therefore, man's ability to obey God does not nullify the governmental necessity of the atonement but is actually the reason for it!

We need the atonement because we deserve punishment, and we deserve punishment because we *didn't*

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obey God, not because we *couldn't* obey God. A sinner is a rebel who has chosen not to obey God, not a victim who didn't have the ability to obey God. If we couldn't obey God, we wouldn't deserve punishment for our disobedience and we, therefore, wouldn't need the atonement of Christ! It is not the affirmation of man's free will that poses a problem to the governmental necessity of the atonement, it is the denial of it that does.

No man is in the position of seeing his real need of God's mercy, which is offered through the atonement of Christ, until he first clearly sees that he rightfully deserves the wrath of God for breaking His law. No man can be convinced in his mind that he deserves punishment for breaking God's law as long as he is convinced that God's law is impossible and that he had no ability to keep it. Therefore, no man can see their need of Jesus Christ or of God's forgiveness as long as they believe that the law of God is impossible and they are not able to keep it.

Our ability to obey God is not at all contrary to our necessity for Jesus Christ. Rather, our mind's understanding that we can obey God is necessary for our mind's understanding as to why we need Jesus Christ in the first place. If a man thinks that God's law is impossible, he will justify himself for his disobedience and consequently condemn God. But if a person recognizes that God's law was not impossible and that he had the ability to obey it, he will justify God and condemn himself. Once in that state of mind, he is ready to see his need for pardon through the atonement.

The Bible is clear that there is no way for our penalty to be remitted other than through Christ's blood atonement (Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22). While man has the ability to obey God, our obedience does not have the ability to atone for our sins. Only the atonement of Christ substitutes our penalty, making our penalty remissible. Our repentance is not enough

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because God must publicly vindicate and uphold the law that we violated. And our obedience can never *make up* for our disobedience because we can never obey beyond our obligation. Therefore, man's natural ability does not in any way nullify the absolute governmental necessity for the blood atonement of Christ.

The moral necessity of the atonement is rooted in the fact that men could obey God but are unwilling to do so. Therefore, man needs moral influence upon his will to be brought to repentance and obedience. Nothing could possibly influence man's will as greatly and powerfully as the truth of the atonement can. Therefore, man's ability to obey God does not nullify the moral necessity of the atonement but is actually the reason for it!

Again, we need the atonement of Jesus Christ, not because we *couldn't* obey God but because we *didn't* obey God. Men need pardon through Christ's atonement because men have chosen to be criminals; we have chosen to violate the moral law of God! Only deliberate criminals need pardon. We need Christ, not because we were born incapable of obeying God, but because with our natural ability we have chosen to be sinners. "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). Each individual personally needs the atonement of Jesus Christ because each individual has personally chosen to go astray, to turn aside to his own way.

We also need Christ intimately in our lives to be our Lord because of His superior intelligence and goodness. We are not qualified to be our own Lords. Christ is *qualified* to govern our lives and we have a *necessity* for Him to govern our lives. Even for all of eternity, when we live sinless in heaven, we will still need Jesus Christ. He will always be

infinite and we will always be finite; and therefore, we will always be dependent upon God and in need of Him.

Our God given ability to choose, or to determine our own moral character, does not mean that we do not need Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. The Lordship and Saviorhood of Christ are not at all negated by our natural ability but are perfectly compatible with it.

Man Must Cooperate With God

While I was street preaching on Hollywood Boulevard in California, proclaiming damnation through sin and salvation through Christ, a man came up to me convicted of his sin and wanted to be saved. He apparently used to consider himself a Christian but realized he was a hypocrite because he had sin in his life, particularly sexual immorality. He confessed that he was a sinner, realized that he was going to hell, and he wanted God to save and forgive him. He asked me to pray with him.

If we continue in sin, it is our own fault because it is our own choice.

As I talked with him some more, I realized that he was expecting God to do *all* of the work. He was putting *all* of the responsibility of changing his life upon God, while God is putting the responsibility to repent upon him. I knew that this mindset of his would never work because our own choice must be involved in repentance. Our decision must be involved in becoming holy and in continuing to live a holy life. If he continues to have this mindset that God must do everything, he will blame God if he continues in his sinfulness, saying that God didn't do His part. If we continue in sin, it is our own fault because it is our own choice.

Regeneration or the new birth, which is a moral change in man, includes activity on God's part and our own.

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I explained to him that God will convict him of his sin, but he must choose to repent of it. I said that God will teach him and enlighten him, but he must choose to trust and obey it. When he is tempted, God will be there to comfort him and help him, but he must choose to overcome. The Holy Spirit will come to lead him and guide him, but he must choose to follow. We must cooperate with God. Our will is free to resist or obey the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). He understood my point and we prayed together that God would mercifully forgive him through Jesus Christ since he has a repentant heart. I then encouraged him that God would help him to overcome sin and live a holy life that was pleasing and glorifying to Him.

Jesus said, "Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matt. 23:26). For Jesus to tell men to clean themselves on the inside (*change their intention*), takes for granted that it is their choice and that they can do this. Jesus was actually filled "with anger, being grieved, for the hardness of their hearts" (Mk. 3:5). This indicates that the state of man's heart is man's own fault, that the state of his heart is something which he causes and which he has control over.

The Bible even commands men to make unto themselves a new heart. God said, "*make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die...*" (Ezekiel 18:31). "*Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved*" (Jeremiah 4:14). "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and *purify your hearts, ye double minded*" (James 4:8).

What does it mean to change your heart? To change your heart is to change your intention. It is to change the motives for all your actions. It means that you are no longer living for yourself or have a selfish motive but are now

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living for God and the well-being of His universe, thus having benevolent motives.

If our motive or intention is going to change, we ourselves must change it. Man must do his part. God tells sinners to “Repent, and *turn yourselves* from all your transgressions... *Cast away* from you all your transgressions” (Eze. 18:30-31). Our repentance is not something that God will do for us, but something that we must do for ourselves. God commands us to do it.

After repentance has occurred, the Christian life of walking in holiness is not something God will do for us, but it is something we must do for ourselves. We must choose to stay away from sin and not return to it, and we must choose to obey all the knowledge that we learn. God will enlighten our minds as we grow in the knowledge of the Lord; but as we grow in knowledge we must grow in obedience. The moment that we grow in knowledge and refuse to grow in obedience, we are in a state of backsliding. Therefore, to continue in holiness or to backslide from holiness is a matter of free choice.

If a man is going to live a life of holiness, he must choose to be holy. Just as God commanded men in the Old Testament to “*sanctify yourselves*” (Lev. 11:44; 20:7; Num. 11:18; Jos. 3:5; 7:13; 1 Sam. 16:5; 1 Chron. 15:12; 2 Chron. 29:5; 35:6), Paul said in the New Testament, “*let us therefore cast off* the works of darkness...” (Rom. 13:12) “*Let us cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh...” (2 Cor. 7:1) “...*let us lay aside* every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us...” (Heb. 12:1) And “If a man therefore *purge himself*...” (2 Tim. 2:21) These examples teach man’s choice and active role in the state of his moral condition.

Paul said about himself, “And herein do *I exercise myself*, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men” (Acts 24:16). James heavily

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emphasized man's role and responsibility when he said, "*Submit yourselves* therefore to God. *Resist* the devil, and he will flee from you. *Draw nigh to God*, and he will draw nigh to you. *Cleanse your hands*, ye sinners; and *purify your hearts*, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: *let* your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. *Humble yourselves* in the sight of the Lord" (Jas. 4:7-10). The Apostle John said that a Christian "*purifieth himself*" (1 Jn. 3:3) and, "Beloved, *let us* love one another..." (1 Jn. 4:7).

The will of a man is what determines his moral character; and therefore, his moral character cannot change without his will. Holiness and sinfulness are moral attributes, or the quality of a person's moral character. Hence, if we are holy or sinful, it is by choice. To repent unto holiness and then to walk in holiness is the choice of man, which is made under the influence of God.

We must
choose to
put our
body in its
proper place.

The Apostle Paul told believers, "For *if ye live* after the flesh, ye shall die: but *if ye* through *the Spirit* do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). Paul was saying that if we choose to live for our own self-gratification, we will not have life but will face the penalty of the law. In order to live and to continue to live, we ourselves have an active role. We must choose to put our body in its proper place. "But *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection*: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). Paul said, "I beseech *you*, therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that *ye present* your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is *your* reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). He also said, "*yield yourselves* unto God" (Rom. 6:13) and "*yield* your members servants to

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righteousness unto holiness” (Rom. 6:19). “And *they* that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). It is not that our flesh is crucified by another, but that we ourselves crucify our flesh. Whether we are going to be overcome by our flesh or if we are going to overcome our flesh is our choice to make.

Justin Martyr said that “each man by free choice acts rightly or sins...”³⁷ Clement of Alexandria said, “God does not crown those who abstain from wickedness by compulsion, but those who abstain by choice. It is impossible for a person to consistently live righteously except by his own choice. The one who is made ‘righteous’ by compulsion of another is not truly righteous... It is the freedom of each person that produces true righteousness and reveals true wickedness.”³⁸

The problem is that many, like the man I encountered on the streets of Hollywood, have been confused and think that our repentance and sanctification are God’s responsibility when the truth is that it is our own. God tells men to repent and live holy and it is, therefore, our responsibility and choice. Otherwise, if it depended entirely or solely upon God, it would be God’s fault if we do not repent and live holy.

But becoming a new creature and then walking in newness of life requires our choice since your moral character is whatever you choose it to be. The Holy Spirit does not make us new creatures who walk in newness of life without our will. The Holy Spirit makes us new creatures who walk in newness of life by influencing our will.

True salvation includes being saved, not merely from *the penalty of sin* through the governmental substitution of the atonement, but it also includes salvation from the *practice of sin* through the moral influence of the atonement, through the influence of its truth being presented to our

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minds by the Holy Spirit. Practicing sin is a choice of the will. Therefore, the choice of the will must change if practicing sin is going to cease. This type of true salvation is not a monergism where God alone is active but is synergistic where God and man must both do their part.

Gordon C. Olson said, "The early church leaders before Augustine had always affirmed that salvation was a synergetic activity of God and man, whereas Augustine sought to make it a Divine monergism..."³⁹

A. W. Pink, a student of Augustine's theology, said, "The new birth is solely the work of God the Spirit and man has no part in it."⁴⁰ This is contrary to the new birth that the Apostle Paul taught. Paul said about believers, "*ye have put off the old man with his deeds*" (Col. 3:9; Eph. 4:22). He also said that believers "*have put on the new man*" (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). God does not put off the old man for us, nor does God put on the new man for us, but we ourselves choose to do so under the influence of God. To be born again is to become a new man, personal volition is necessary in order to become a new man, and therefore, becoming born again requires personal volition.

The reason that everyone is not born again by the Spirit of God is because not everyone chooses to be. If monergism was true, everyone would be regenerated because God wants everyone to be saved. Since God wants everyone to be saved but many die unregenerate, monergism cannot be true.

Martin Luther, also a student of Augustine's teachings, said, "I say that man... when he is re-created does and endeavors nothing towards his perseverance in that kingdom; but the Spirit alone works both blessings in us, regenerating us, and preserving us when regenerate, without ourselves..."⁴¹ In other words, Luther said that man has no

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role at all in either regeneration or perseverance. God does everything. Man does nothing.

If we do not live the Christian life by free will, but God does everything (repents and perseveres for us), you wouldn't ever see a believer fall into sin. If the human element is not involved, if it is all Divinity, you would expect perfect sinless holiness from every Christian all the time without any exceptions. In synergism, the human element is involved but God works with it. If we fall away, we can blame only ourselves. If we persevere, we can thank God for His influence in our lives. But man has a very active role in both *getting saved* and in *staying saved*.

Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, the Apostle Peter, and the Apostle Paul were all asked the same question: what must *we do* to be saved? None of them gave the answer Augustine, Pink, or Luther would have. None of them said, "You must not and cannot do anything at all." Jesus was asked, "What good thing shall *I do*, that I may have eternal life?" (Matt 19:16). Jesus did not say, "You must do nothing!" He said, "...if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. 19:17).

We also see another dialog Jesus had. "Then said they unto him, what shall *we do*, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that *ye* believe on him whom he hath sent" (Jn. 6:28-29). John the Baptist was asked, "What shall *we do*?" (Luke 3:10; 3:12; 3:14). He told them to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance. He did not say, "You must not do anything!" Peter was asked, "What shall *we do*?" (Acts 2:37). Peter did not say "Make sure that you do nothing!" Rather, Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). When Paul was asked, "What must *I do* to be saved" (Acts 16:30), he did not respond with, "You cannot

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do anything to be saved! Make sure that you do nothing!” Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou will be saved” (Acts 16:31). It could not be any clearer from these examples that men must do something to be saved!

Jesus Christ taught that if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; or if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better to go through life without these than to have your whole body cast into hell (Matt. 5:29-30). Jesus was clearly teaching that we ourselves must do something about our sin if we were going to escape hell. The idea that we do not have to do anything to be saved or to escape hell is a notion which is completely foreign to the Bible.

John Fletcher said, “We have received it as a maxim that a man is to do nothing for justification. Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favor with God, should ‘cease from evil, and learn to do well.’ ‘Whoever repents, should do works meet for repentance.’ And if this be not in order to find favor, what does he do them for?... The express declarations of God’s word: - ‘To him that ordereth his conversion aright will I show the salvation of God.’ Is ‘ordering our conversation aright’ doing nothing? ‘Repent ye, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.’ Are ‘repentance and conversion’ nothing? ‘Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,’ I will justify you. Is ‘coming’ doing nothing? ‘Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Come now, let us reason together, and though your sins be read as crimson they shall be white as snow’ you shall be justified. Is ‘ceasing to do evil and learning to do well’ doing nothing? ‘Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.’ Is ‘seeking, calling, forsaking one’s way, and returning to the Lord,’ a

mere nothing? ‘Ask, and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock, and it will be open unto you.’ Be ‘violent, take even the kingdom by force.’ Is ‘seeking, asking, knocking, and taking by force’ doing absolutely nothing? Please to answer these questions; and when you have done, I will throw one or two hundred more of the like kind your way.”⁴²

Benjamin Franklin wrote, “Men must do something to be saved... The difference between the wise and the foolish was not that one class heard while the other did not, nor that one class believed while the other did not, but that one class did what was required in the teachings of Jesus, while the other did not. The whole matter turned on doing and not doing what the Lord commanded... The Lord requires man to do something in order to be saved... Any theory that leads men and women to disobey God is wrong. Any theory that leads men and women to do nothing, when God has commanded them to do something, is sinful.”⁴³

The Occasion and Cause of Repentance

If we are going to understand how both God and man have an active role in conversion, we must understand the difference between the occasion and the cause of repentance. The preaching of the gospel and the conviction of the Holy Spirit is the occasion of our repentance unto obedience, while our own free will is the actual cause of our repentance unto obedience. Though the preaching of the gospel and the conviction of the Holy Spirit are a moral influence upon the choices of our will, our choice to repent and obey is our own free choice.

The influence of God and the free will of man are both involved in true conversion, as Paul said, “*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered*

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you” (Rom. 6:17). We thank God because it is only by God’s divine initiation, divine interruption, divine interaction, and divine influence that men freely obey Him from their hearts. No man, independent of God or without God’s help, would ever freely obey Him from their heart. God impels or influences us, but He does not compel or force us. God invites and incites us, but our obedience is truly our own, free and not coerced. We freely obey God under His influence, under the “doctrine which was delivered you...”

No man, independent of God or without God’s intervention, initiation and influence, would ever freely obey Him from their hearts. On our own, we would continue our own way. That is why God influences us, or “worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure” (Php. 2:13). God influences us “to will and to do” and we must not resist that influence. When we yield to His influence and are saved or changed by it, we declare that we have been saved or changed by God.

God impels or influences us, but He does not compel or force us.

After Peter followed the angel of the Lord out of the prison of his captivity and rejoined the brethren, he “declared unto them how *the Lord had brought him out of the prison*” (Acts 13:17). Peter had made the choice to follow the angel and he was free to stay in the prison if he pleased, yet he could still say that the Lord brought him out. Likewise, salvation is when man is brought out of the bondage of sin. We make the choice to follow the Lord out of the captivity of our sins; and while it is our choice and we are free to stay if we please, we can still declare that it is the Lord who brought us out of the prison. He leads, we follow. He opens the gates, we walk through them. Man’s choice and role does not negate or nullify the saving work of God but is

completely compatible with the truth that “salvation is of the Lord.”

Man Cannot Boast

Though man’s free choice to repent is a necessary condition of salvation, it does not mean that a man has anything to boast of or glory in. In a war, one side is trying to pressure the other side to surrender. When one side waves the white flag of surrender, because of the pressure put on him by his opponent, the surrendering side is in a state of humility. The victor gets the glory.

The only thing that sinners deserve is hell.

Likewise, a sinner is at war with God. God pressures men to repent of their sins by the influence of the truth through the Holy Spirit. A repentant sinner is in a state of humility because he is the surrendering party. It is God who gets the glory because it is God who is the Victor.

James Arminius said, “Because the yielding of obedience is the duty of an inferior, therefore, for the performance of it humility is requisite.”⁴⁴ When a sinner repents, he is saying that God was right and he was wrong. By repenting unto obedience, we are admitting that God is of a superior intelligence and character and is, therefore, qualified to govern our lives, while we ourselves are not fit to do so. A repentant state or a state of submission and surrender is, therefore, necessarily a state of humility.

When we come to the Lord and return to obedience, we do not expect to receive any praise because we have only “done that which was our duty to do” (Lk. 17:10). We understand that our salvation is by God’s grace or unmerited favor, not by any work of our own which make us deserve salvation, so we cannot boast about ourselves (Eph. 2:8-9). The only thing that sinners deserve is hell, whether they

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choose to be impenitent or repentant. Therefore, the salvation of a sinner who chooses to repent is completely by grace. Those who have been saved have nothing to boast of except the grace of God.

When God healed a blind man through his faith, the man and the people glorified God who healed; they did not glorify the man who chose to believe. "And Jesus said unto him, receive thy sight: *thy faith hath saved thee*. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, *glorifying God*: and all the people, when they saw it, gave *praise unto God*" (Lk. 18:42-43). The faith was the man's, but the healing came from the Lord. In the same way, when we are saved by faith, it is God who is glorified, not us. The faith is ours, but the salvation comes from Him.

The Bible nowhere teaches that man is being glorified when he turns from sin to righteousness. In fact, when a sinner repents of his sins and begins to live a life of obedience to God, he has gone from dishonoring *God* to glorifying *Him*. God is glorified when men serve Him in holiness. The Bible says, "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2). Conversion from sin to righteousness, from choosing to serve self to choosing to serve God, is to change from dishonoring and defrauding God to glorifying Him and giving Him what He is worthy of. When this happens, man is in a state of humility and gratefulness, while God is the one that is being glorified.

We recognize that on our own, we lived in sin. Without God we were going our own way and doing our own thing. We were sinning all the time. We were sinning every day. When men choose to repent of their sins and begin to live a holy life, it is only because of the influence of God (Rom. 2:4). When we are converted, we are thankful to

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God for His work in our lives; because had He left us on our own, we never would have given up our sins.

God is described as actively pursuing our lost race because of His desire for our repentance. He is compared with a Shepherd who seeks after His lost sheep and celebrates when He finds it (Lk. 15:4-7), or as a woman who searches diligently for her lost coin and rejoices when it is found (Lk. 15:8-10). These illustrations show a person searching for something that they value, which they lost, and is filled with joy when it is found. God greatly values mankind and He has actively sought after us since our departure from His presence. All of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents (Lk. 15:10). This reveals something very precious about the benevolent heart of God and of His holy angels. The very first thing that God did when Adam sinned was to search for Him (Gen. 3:9). God has not stopped searching since then. Jesus said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10). God did not have to come after us. We left Him. If anything, we should have gone back to God. But without the intervention, interference, initiation, and influence of God, we never would have repented of our sins and returned back to Him because of our stubborn unwillingness.

We see the efforts of God to save men all throughout the Bible. God is trying to *save all* men (Jn. 3:16, 6:44-45, 12:32; 16:8; Mk. 16:15; Acts 17:30-31, 2 Pet. 3:9). That is why God gives *light to all* men (Jn. 1:9), why He is convicting all men (Jn. 16:8), why He is *drawing all* men (Jn. 6:44-45, 12:32), why He is *calling all* men (Matt. 11:28, 22:9; Lk. 5:32; Acts 17:30; Rev. 22:17) and why His grace has *appeared to all* men (Rom. 5:15; Tit. 2:11-12). Unfortunately, to the disappointment of God, many are unwilling to accept His offer of reconciliation (Isa. 30:9; 30:15-16; Jer. 8:5; Eze. 20:7-8; Matt. 11:20-21; 23:37, Mk.

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6:6; 7:30; 13:34; 14:17-18; 19:14; 19:27; Lk. 14:16-24; Jn. 5:40; Acts 7:51; 17:27; Rev. 2:21). God is doing everything that He can for men to know Him; so if men do not know Him, it is their own fault (Acts 17:26-27; Rom. 1:19-21). Instead of usurping man's free will, God is trying to save as many men as possible and bring them back to Himself through the means of *giving light, convicting, calling, and teaching*.

Free Will And Grace Are Compatible

Man, as a free moral agent, is influenced back to God through means which respect and address the freedom of his will, which means are the truth of the gospel presented to his mind by the Holy Spirit and preachers. Grace is God's influential operation upon the mind and will of man, through the teaching of the truth through the Holy Spirit, which is why the Bible talks about "the *word of his grace*" (Acts 14:3; 20:32), and the "*Spirit of grace*" (Heb. 10:29).

Sinners need the work of the Holy Spirit or the operation of grace, not to make them capable of returning to God, since God has already made us capable of obedience at creation, but to make men willing to return and obey God. The Spirit makes men willing to do what God has already made them capable of doing. If we understand this, we will not sacrifice the grace of God for the sake of holding unto man's free will, nor would we sacrifice man's free will to hold onto the grace of God. This has been the error of some who establish the grace of God and man's free will at an antithesis, creating a false dilemma.

Augustine eventually said, "I have tried hard to maintain the free choice of the human will, but the grace of God prevailed."⁴⁵ Augustine set the grace of God and the free will of man at odds with each other. He came to view the grace of God as that which brings a constitutional

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change, instead of a moral change. He started to view grace as a force rather than an influence. His theological system began to teach that man's constitution was crippled by the sin of Adam so that mankind no longer had free will; and therefore, man's constitution needed to be recreated in regeneration by God's grace before man would have the ability to repent, believe, or be converted. Hence, his view of man's nature and his view of the nature of regeneration put grace and free will at odds with one another. He thought that if man's will is already free, God's grace is not necessary.

The
affirmation
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necessitate
the denial
of free will.

But if men cannot obey God, it would not be an act of *grace* but would be demanded by *justice* that God gives them this ability if He is going to command them and punish them. It would be unjust for God to command or punish men without the ability of free will and, therefore, to regenerate their constitution would be an act of justice not grace.

The truth is that the existence of free will in man is by no means inconsistent with the necessity man has for grace, as Augustine supposed. The natural ability of man does not in any way at all negate or nullify the grace of God. Men use their freedom to sin. Therefore, grace or moral influence is necessary to bring them to obedience. This influence is "grace" or "gracious" because it is completely undeserved. God could withhold it without any injustice being done to man.

The affirmation of grace does not necessitate the denial of free will when grace is properly and Biblically defined and understood. Grace is defined by Thayer as God's "holy influence upon souls."⁴⁶ Strong's defines grace as "the divine influence upon the heart."⁴⁷ The Bible says, "For the

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grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, *teaching* us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world..." (Tit. 2:11-12). God's grace is the influence of illumination to change our moral character in this present world. Grace is God's divine teaching, which influences our will to choose rightly.

Grace is not a force that changes our *constitution* or a force that makes the incapable capable, but grace is the divine influence of God that changes our *character* - an influence, which makes the unwilling willing.

Grace is not a constitutional enablement. Grace is a moral influence. That means that grace does not enable our constitution; rather, grace influences our will. Man's will is influenced by divine grace in the illumination of truth. Through the presentation of the truth of the gospel to man's mind, he is divinely influenced to change his moral character, to love and obey God. This understanding of God's grace in regeneration is not at all at odds with man's free will given at creation.

Martin Luther said, "All the passages in the Holy Scriptures that mention assistance are they that do away with 'free-will', and these are countless...For grace is needed, and the help of grace is given, because 'free-will' can do nothing."⁴⁸ To set grace and free will at an antithesis is to create a false dilemma. Such reasoning is fallacious. The problem is that Luther thought that men needed the assistance of grace, not because they didn't *want* to obey God, but because they *couldn't* obey God. This is fundamentally flawed. If man is a free moral being who doesn't want to obey God, then the assistance or influence of

To put grace and free will at an antithesis is to create a false dilemma.

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grace is absolutely necessary to bring him to repentance and obedience and to keep him in such a state. To be *able* to obey God is a matter of our natural ability, but to *actually* choose to obey God is a matter of God's grace in our life.

If grace and free will truly were at odds with each other, this would create very serious problems. For example, if man's obedience depended *solely* upon God's grace and did not depend at all upon man's free choice, then if a man does not obey God, whose fault is it? It could not be man's fault since obedience doesn't depend upon his free choice. The fault would be *solely* God's since man's obedience would depend *solely* upon His grace. If men do not live holy lives through their own volition, but lived holy *entirely* by the grace of God, then it is not man's fault if he does not live a holy life, but the grace of God is *entirely* to blame.

If living a holy life of dedication to Jesus Christ was purely a matter of God's grace, or if man's volition had no involvement in it at all, those who are under God's grace would never sin at all. If they commit any sin at all, it would be a reflection of an insufficiency in God's grace rather than a reflection of their own free choice.

The truth is that when a believer lives holy, they do so by free choice under the influence of God's grace. But if they become unholy, they do so by free choice despite the influence of God's grace. Therefore, God's grace is not to blame if we are unholy, since our free choice plays a part in the matter.

You do not need to sacrifice the free will of man in order to affirm the grace of God. Neither do you need to sacrifice the grace of God in order to affirm the free will of man. To put grace and free will at an antithesis is to create a false dilemma. Free will is the ability of choice; grace is unmerited favor in influence and remission. The power of decision and the power of influence are completely

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compatible. A student's ability to learn does not negate his necessity for a teacher. Likewise, a man's ability to choose does not negate his necessity for influence, teaching, or guidance.

Charles Finney said, "Let it not be said then, that we deny the grace of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, nor that we deny the reality and necessity of the influences of the Holy Spirit to convert and sanctify the soul, nor that this influence is a gracious one; for all these we most strenuously maintain. But I maintain this upon the ground, that men are able to do their duty, and that the difficulty does not lay in a proper inability, but in a voluntary selfishness... The denial of ability is really a denial of the possibility of grace in the affair of man's salvation. I admit the ability of man, and hold that he is able, but utterly unwilling, to obey God. Therefore I consistently hold, that all the influences exerted by God to make him willing, are of free grace abounding through Christ Jesus."⁴⁹

God's grace actually takes for granted the free will of man. Influences require the existence of that which is being influenced. God's grace is His divine influence upon our will. Influence, as opposed to causation, can be yielded to or resisted. The Bible says that men resist the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). If God's grace can be yielded to or resisted by the human will, then the human will must be free. Therefore, God's grace takes for granted the free will of man.

Jed Smock said, "The Holy Spirit exerts grace to influence us to be willing. If we do not have the ability to obey than there is no grace."⁵⁰ He also said, "Man is able to obey, but unjustly and unwisely refuses to do so. The Holy Spirit influences us to obey but He does not enable or make us able to obey, or causes us to obey."⁵¹

The necessity for regeneration by God's grace and man's natural ability to obey God are by no means

contradictory. It is not an oxymoron to say that free moral agents need the grace of God to be converted or to be holy. If mankind did not have a free will, we would not need the grace of regeneration at all. The reason that men need to be regenerated by God's grace is because they are freely choosing to be sinners. If men are not freely choosing to be sinners, an influence to change their choice is not necessary at all. The necessity for regeneration by God's grace is because men are choosing to be sinners, that is, because of man's use of his free will.

New Character or New Constitution

The fact that the truth of the gospel is the moral influence that God uses in regeneration clearly shows that regeneration is a change of man's character and not a change of man's constitution. This is evident from the fact that the influence of truth cannot change a man's nature or structure but that the influence of truth can change his moral choices or direction of life.

If regeneration were merely a change of man's constitution, not the effectual influence of man's will, then God would not have needed to send Jesus Christ or have the gospel preached at all in order to regenerate our fallen race. This is because God could simply use His omnipotent power to recreate or reconstruct man's nature in an instant. God could regenerate our nature without Jesus Christ, or without the grace of the gospel, if regeneration were constitutional instead of moral.

Since the change of regeneration is brought about by the means of enlightenment and illumination, this proves that the change of regeneration is a moral change. Conviction, teaching, and preaching could have no tendency to bring about the change of regeneration if regeneration were a constitutional change and not a moral change.

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The entire idea of teaching a man presupposes that he has the ability to obey what is being taught. Teaching and preaching would be useless without the ability of the hearer to learn and apply or to hear and obey.

When men hear and actually obey the gospel, their moral character is radically changed. Their aim in life is completely reversed. They are no longer living for themselves; they begin to live for the Lord Jesus Christ. This is brought about by the grace or influence of God.

Contrary to the way Antinomians teach, the grace of God is not a license to sin as if you can be forgiven while continuing in wickedness. The grace of God is His unmerited favor, not only in the remission of sins, but also in His divine influence upon our choices. It is by grace that a sinner repents, and then it is by grace that they are forgiven, and then it is by grace that they live a holy and obedient life. The choice to sin is a choice to resist the grace of God. A life submitted to the grace or influence of God is a life of holiness and obedience. The fruit of God's grace in the life of a person is that they have a new moral character. The mark of God's grace in a person's life is that they live a holy life.

The choice
to sin is
the choice
to resist
the grace
of God.

The Bible says, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2) "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12). "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this

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condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4). “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy...” (Jude 1:24)

Calvinism, however, teaches that even the grace of God is insufficient to overcome sin in this life and that sin, therefore, must be greater than the grace of God. The Westminster Catechism says, “No man is able, either of himself, or *by any grace* received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God; but does daily break them in word, thought, and deed.”⁵² Essentially, Reformed Theology says that the power of God’s grace is trumped by the power of sin, so that not even by the power of His grace can the power of sin be broken.

However, the Bible says that when a man is regenerated by the Holy Spirit and transformed by His grace, they are a “new creature” (2 Cor. 5:17). This passage is describing a new character, not a new constitution. Our constitution remains the same, but our character has completely changed. The context is how we no longer choose to live for ourselves but we choose to live for Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:15).

The same is taught when Paul spoke about the “old man” (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:8-9). The old man is not a former constitution but a former character. It is referring to the way we used to live, to the selfish and wicked person that we used to be (Eph. 4:22). And when Paul spoke about the “new man” (Eph 4:24, Col 3:1-2, Col 3:12-14), this is not a reference to a new constitution but to a new character. It is referring to our new holy way of life, referring to the obedient person that Jesus Christ has made us into (Col. 3:10).

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Regenerate men are those who have “put off the old man with his deeds (Col. 3:9). They have “put off... the former conversation of the old man” (Eph. 4:22). And they have “put on the new man” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The phrase “put off” and “put on” signifies the volition of our will. It is our own choice. To be transformed in this way is a change of our choice and is, therefore, a change of our character. We “put off the old man with his deeds,” not “put off the old man with his constitution.” We cannot put off our nature or constitution by our choice, but we can change our deeds and character by our choice. We can “put off... the former conversation” or manner of living, not “the former constitution” or human composition.

It is our character and not our constitution that is changed or regenerated when we are converted and born again. Men must be born again or change their way of life because they have chosen to live a sinful life. Now through repentance men must choose to live a holy life. Jesus said that unless a man is born again, that is, unless they undergo a deep moral transformation, they cannot even enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3).

The difference between sinners and saints is not a constitutional difference. The difference is in character. The constitution that we have before conversion is the same that we have after conversion. The difference is how we use our constitution. A sinner uses his constitution or his constitutional abilities to serve himself and the cause of sin. A saint uses his constitution or his constitutional abilities to serve God and the cause of holiness. It is not that saints have a liberated will while sinners have a will in bondage, but that sinners use their free will to serve sin while saints use their free will to serve righteousness (Rom. 6:13, 16, 19).

Regeneration is not the constitutional change of a helpless cripple. That is, it is not that our will has been

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disabled and we are constitutionally unable to freely choose what is good and, therefore, we need to be enabled by grace in regeneration. Rather, regeneration is the moral change of a deliberate criminal. That is, sinners are using their free will to rebel against God and they, therefore, need the grace of God to influence them to submission and surrender. The Holy Spirit brings us to a place where we start to use our free will rightly.

The Holy Spirit brings us to a place where we start to use our free will rightly.

Regeneration is not the impartation of any new constitutional powers. It is the redirection of the constitutional powers man always has. Man already has the power of choice, but it is through the powerful influence of the truth of Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit brings man to a place of total submission and surrender to God. That is what true regeneration or true conversion is.

Catherine Booth said, “God did not require to make any change in the make of us. A scheme of theology has been thrust upon mankind which implies that God must alter human nature in order to save it. I do not mean altering it in its moral quality – making it righteous instead of sinful – but altering its constitution, saving us not as men and women, having all the capacities, propensities, and affections of humanity; that we must, so to speak, be reorganized before God can save us. If I understand the gospel, it makes no such assumptions, and comes to us with no such requirements.”⁵³

Some believe that sinners must be constitutionally regenerated before they can be morally converted. They say that a sinner is naturally or constitutionally incapable of turning to God and, therefore, the Holy Spirit must regenerate a person’s nature before a sinner can repent of his

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sins and believe the gospel. A person must receive *supernatural powers* in order to repent of their sins and believe the gospel, according to this Calvinistic view.

But if regeneration were a change of your constitution, and conversion occurred sometime after regeneration, then you could have a person who is regenerated but not yet converted. Therefore, you can have a person who is regenerated but not yet saved! A person is not saved when they receive the ability to repent and believe. Men are saved when they actually repent and believe. Those who are impenitent and unbelieving are never described in the Bible as saved but as condemned. If a person is regenerated before they are converted, then they are regenerated before they are saved; and therefore, you can be regenerate and still be damned!

The Bible, however, never represents the impenitent and unbelieving as regenerate. The Bible never represents those who are regenerate as lost but as found. Regenerate men are never described as damned but as saved. The very moment that a sinner is regenerated he is saved because regeneration is not distinct or difference from conversion.

If regeneration is a change of your constitutional nature instead of a change of your moral character, wouldn't two regenerate parents give birth to a regenerate child? If children inherit their nature from their parents, and their parents are regenerate in nature, then it stands to reason that the child would inherit a regenerate nature. But if regeneration is the moral change of a person's free will or the transformation of a person's moral character, then two regenerate parents would not give birth to a regenerate child because moral character cannot be inherited but can only be developed by free choice. Regeneration is a change of your character, not a change of your constitution; and therefore,

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two regenerate parents cannot and do not give birth to a regenerate child.

H. O. Wiley said, "Regeneration is a moral change wrought in the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit. This change is neither physical nor intellectual, although both the body and the mind may be affected by it. It is not a change in the substance of the soul, nor is it the addition of any new powers. Regeneration is not a metamorphosis of human nature. Man does not receive a new ego. His personal identity is the same in essence after regeneration as before. He has the same power of intellect, feeling and will, but these are given a new direction. God does not undue in the new creation what He did in the first creation. The change is, therefore, not in the natural constitution of man, but in his moral and spiritual nature. Furthermore, it is important to believe that the whole man, and not merely certain powers of his being, is the subject of this spiritual renewal."⁵⁴

The power of choice is a natural ability of man by virtue of his free will endowed by God at creation. Man's nature does not need to be regenerated or receive supernatural powers in order for man to have the ability or power of choice because man's nature already has this power and ability.

Just as a man's nature does not need to be regenerated to have the power of thought, since man already has the power of thought by virtue of his creation. Rather, man's thoughts are redirected in regeneration. Likewise, man's will is redirected in regeneration. It is not that man receives the power of thought or the power of decision at regeneration, but that man's power of thought and power of decision are redirected. Regeneration is not an experience where these faculties are created but it is an experience where the usage of these faculties is altered and changed.

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The proof that we have been regenerated or born again by the Spirit of God is that we live a new life. The truly regenerate will “walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). The evidence of our conversion is that we have left a sinful life for a holy life. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3-4). A Christian is not walking in constant submission to his flesh or living in continual obedience to sin. A Christian is walking in constant submission to the spirit, living in continual obedience to God.

A disobedient heart is an unregenerate heart. A heart that is obedient to God is a regenerate heart. The Bible describes those who have been regenerated as those who have undergone a dramatic change of character. “For we ourselves also *were* sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). “Among whom also we all *had* our conversion in times past in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and *were* by nature the children of wrath, even as the others... Even when we *were* dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph. 2:3, 6). The Bible says that we “*were* yet sinners” (Rom. 5:8), that we “*were* the servants of sin” (Rom. 6:17, 20), that we “*were* disobedient” (1 Pet. 3:20), and “such *were* some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11).

Clearly, a great moral change occurs when you are saved. Those who have been saved by Jesus Christ *used to be sinners* but now they are referred to as “*saints*” all throughout the Bible. The Bible says that those who are

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saved “*are sanctified*” in this life (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 2:11; 10:10; 10:14; Jude 1:1). When a man is truly converted to Jesus Christ, they are sanctified by their faith in Jesus Christ. We are not slowly sanctified, as if we slowly give our lives to Jesus or slowly repent of our sins. We are sanctified at conversion because we give our entire lives to Jesus Christ and completely repent of our sins. We do not decide to repent of lying this week and repent of adultery next week. We repent of all our sins at conversion. We do not give our lives to God here a little and there a little, but we give our lives to God in their entirety at conversion.

Throughout the Christian life we will continue to grow in knowledge; and therefore, grow in obedience. But at conversion, we entered into a state of total submission and surrender in our hearts. Our minds may be ignorant of many things, but our hearts are sanctified. The knowledge of our mind is limited, but the obedience of our heart is complete. When a man is truly converted, they submit to and obey all the knowledge which God has presently given them, not being in rebellion or hostility at all in our hearts towards the known or revealed will of God.

As we grow in knowledge, we grow in obligation. For example, the apostles were not obligated to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15) until they were told to do so. Prior to their knowledge of the great commission, they were not obligated to obey the great commission. It was the will of God for the gospel to be preached everywhere, but they were not under obligation to do so until God revealed His will to them. The moment that God reveals His specific will to us is the moment that we become obligated to that particular will. As we grow in knowledge, we grow in obligation; and therefore, we must grow in obedience.

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As Christians grow in knowledge and grow in obedience, they do not continually go from sin to holiness, sin to holiness, sin to holiness, in a vicious cycle that never ends. Rather, as they grow in knowledge and become more like Jesus, they go “*from glory to glory*” (2 Cor. 3:18). They go *from* an obedient state *to* an obedient state. It is not that they go from a sinful state to a holy state, since they were always in obedience to the knowledge that they had. But as they grow in knowledge and grow in obedience, they go *from* a state of holiness *to* a state of increased holiness.

Some groups teach that if a Christian does not admit that he is a filthy, rotten, dirty, wretched sinner, he must be nothing more than a proud, arrogant, self-righteous, Pharisee. This reasoning is of course fallacious as it is a false dilemma. There is a third alternative. That third alternative is that Jesus Christ has changed your life.

It certainly doesn't glorify the saving power of Jesus Christ to say that you were a sinner before you met Jesus and that you're still a sinner after meeting Him. It doesn't exalt Jesus to say that meeting Him hasn't changed your heart and life at all. To admit that your life has been changed by the power of His grace is to boast in Jesus Christ and glorify His saving power.

Jesus Christ is the Savior from sin because He actually saves men from their sinning. If He didn't save men from their sinning, the Bible cannot say that He saves His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). A sinner who is truly saved by grace will become a saint whose life is governed by grace.

The power of the gospel, the objective of the atonement, the nature of conversion, and the very heart of God is completely lost when it is taught that God does not completely and totally change our moral character at regeneration, but that we will remain wicked and sinful all

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the days of our lives until we die. If the devil can make men totally sinful in this life, no doubt God can make men totally holy in this life. The devil has brought total degeneration to mankind, so that we have lived sinful lives, but God is able to bring total regeneration to men, so that we live holy lives. This is what the Bible says. “Now unto him that is *able to keep you from falling*, and to present you *faultless* before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy...” (Jude 1:24)

Once a person is truly regenerated by the Spirit or converted by the gospel, they begin to live a holy life. “Whosoever is born of God *doth not commit sin*” (1 Jn. 3:9). “We know that whosoever is born of God *sinneth not...*” (1 Jn. 5:18). The life of those who are not born again is marked by disobedience to God’s law, but the life of those who have been born again is marked by obedience to God’s law. There has been an obvious and evident change of choice and character.

The Bible says, “*if we sin*” (Heb. 10:26), and “these things write I unto you, *that ye sin not*. And *if any man sin*” (1 Jn. 2:1). There is a world of difference between saying “believers *may sin at times*” and saying “believers *have to sin all the time*.” A believer might sin, but they don’t have to. Sin is an avoidable and free choice. Therefore, sin in our future is not definite but possible since we still have a free will.

If sin occurs at all in our life, it ought to be rare and not usual. It should be abnormal and not normal or temporary and not continual or permanent. Sin, if it occurs at all, ought to be the exception and not the rule. Holiness should be habitual. The overall characteristic of our life should be that of loving and following Jesus Christ. Our life should show the signs and evidences of being changed and transformed by the Spirit of God. Our habits, lifestyle, or

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practice is that which is glorifying to God and good for well-being of the world.

Natural Ability and Supernatural Power

I have heard it taught that men cannot obey God and, therefore, they need the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who enables and empowers them to do so. But it is worth noting that holy men obeyed God even before the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given (Gen. 6:22; 2 Kings 12:2; 14:1-3; 15:1-3; 15:32-34; 18:1-3; 22:1-2; 2 Chron. 24:2; 27:1-2; 28:1; Job 1:8; Lk. 1:6). There were many Old Testament kings that “did that which was *right* in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 12:2; 14:1-3; 15:1-3; 15:32-34; 18:1-3; 22:1-2; 2 Chron. 24:2; 27:1-2; 28:1).

Other men in the Old Testament, before Pentecost, also were obedient towards God. “Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). And the Lord said unto Satan, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (Job 1:8). “Zacharias.... And his wife... Elisabeth... were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:5-6). “And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them...” (Matt. 21:6). All of these acts of obedience occurred before Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given.

In fact, a sinner needs to forsake their sin and become obedient *before* they can even be filled with the Holy Spirit. “...the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that *obey* him” (Acts 5:32). Therefore, you do not need to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to choose to repent or to be able to obey God. Men have the ability to obey God before they are given the Holy Spirit.

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The Holy Spirit at Pentecost gave men supernatural power and ability to do supernatural things (Acts 2:17-18; 1 Cor. 12:4-11). And God gives grace, strength, or power to suffice for human weakness in persecution (2 Cor. 12:7-10). But God had already given men at creation the natural ability necessary to do natural things.

Obedience to God is a state of the will. The power to choose between obedience and disobedience is a normal or natural ability. This is a normal or natural function of the faculty of the will. It is not extraordinary for the will to function in this manner.

Obedience to God does not require supernatural ability or supernatural power.

Therefore, obedience to God does not require supernatural ability or supernatural power. It is not superhuman to obey God. But obedience to God does require supernatural or spiritual influence. The Holy Spirit does not give us gracious ability in regeneration but He does give us gracious influence. Sinners could obey God, but they don't obey God, and therefore, there is a necessity for the work of grace and the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

It is evident then that the natural ability of man does not negate or nullify the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings correction and conviction (Jn. 16:8), illumination, enlightenment, and instruction (Jn. 6:13, 15:26), guidance (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18), and encouragement and comfort (Jn. 15:26; Eph. 3:16). The Holy Spirit does not change our constitution by force, but He changes and develops our character by influence. The Spirit changes and strengthens our heart. He does not change our natural abilities but He changes how we use them. The Holy Spirit does not make men capable of obeying God; the Holy Spirit makes men willing to obey God. He does this by granting

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truth to their minds, by giving them knowledge of Jesus Christ, by manifesting a revelation of the gospel. We come to God and stay with God by looking at Jesus Christ, as it is written, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

Even though our ability to obey God is a natural ability, as opposed to a supernatural ability, that does not mean that our ability to obey God is in any way autonomous. We do not have ability without God or independent of Him. Free will is a faculty of our constitution given to us by our Creator. It is an element in our design given to us by our Designer. Free will is a gift from God, granted at creation, which we only start using properly at conversion under the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We have no ability "of our own," or "our own strength," but only that which we have received from our Maker.

A Sinner, a Christian, a Reprobate

The moral states of man have to do with the response of his will to the knowledge that his mind has. Whether a person is a sinner, a Christian, or a reprobate is determined by the response of his will to the knowledge of his mind.

First, a sinner is someone who disobeys the knowledge that he has, specifically *the knowledge of the law* (Jn. 9:41; Rom. 1:19-21; Jas. 4:17). Being a sinner is not a passive state, it is an active state. Sinfulness is not an involuntary state of our nature which we are helplessly born into. Sinfulness is a voluntary state of our will which we have all deliberately decided to have by disobeying the natural knowledge we have of God's moral law. Sinfulness is a selfish state of mind, which is contrary to the demands of our conscience.

Conscience is derived from two words: "con" and "science." Con means "with" and science means

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“knowledge.” Therefore, conscience actually means with-knowledge. A sinner is someone who disobeys his conscience. They choose contrary to the moral sense which they have. Therefore, a sinner is someone who sins with knowledge that it is wrong. And they are sinners for that precise reason.

Second, a Christian is someone who has been brought to repentance by *the knowledge of the gospel* (Rom. 2:4; 6:17; 1 Cor. 4:15; Tit. 2:11-12; Jas. 1:18; 1:21-22; 1 Pet. 1:22-23; 2 Pet. 2:20; 1 Jn. 4:19). So now they obey *the knowledge of the moral law* (1 Jn. 2:3; 3:22; 4:19), and they obey *the knowledge of the gospel* (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17). A Christian both believes and obeys the revealed truth with all of their heart. They used to be disobedient towards the knowledge of God which they had but they have now been brought to a place of obedience through the divine influence of God.

Third, a reprobate is someone who has fully and continually disobeyed and rejected *the knowledge of the law* and *the knowledge of the gospel*. They are someone who has rejected a great deal of light. The Bible says, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world *through the knowledge* of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20). And it says, “For it is *impossible* for those who were once *enlightened* and have *tasted* of the heavenly gift, and were made *partakers* of the Holy Ghost, and have *tasted* the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:4-6). A reprobate has disobeyed and hardened his heart against a great deal of light.

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The reason that a person who has rejected a great deal of light is reprobated is because it is the light that God uses as a means to bring us to repentance. If a person resists all the light that God uses to bring men to repentance, their cause is hopeless and their salvation is impossible. God wisely gives up on them, for why should He waste His time and energy anymore? Thus they are reprobated. God can do nothing more to save them.

They have reprobated themselves by hardening their heart so much against the truth, and God has reprobated them by ceasing to draw them through the increase and influence of the truth. The Bible says that God “gave them up” (Rom. 1:24, 26) and that He “gave them over” (Rom. 1:28), which means that He released them to their own course which they have chosen and withdrew His influence over them. They resist the truth and, therefore, God gives them over to a delusion (2 Thess. 2:10-12). The Bible specifically says that they resist and reject the “truth,” through which they “might be saved,” and they are, therefore, hopeless and abandoned. “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they *received not* the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And *for this cause* God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thes. 2:10).

Charles Finney said, “If the benevolence manifested in the atonement does not subdue the selfishness of sinners, their case is hopeless.”⁵⁵

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAN'S ABILITY TO OBEY THE GOSPEL

Augustine once said, "When, therefore, he [Christ] says, 'do this or do that,' he shows power, not nature..."¹ And he also once said, "Their fulfillment would not have been commanded, if our will had nothing to do in it."²

The will is the only real subject to a command, since a person only directly and absolutely has control over their will. A command is a demand or declaration as to what type of choice a moral being should or shouldn't make with their will. That which is commanded is a choice. If what is commanded is not a choice, the command is pointless. If we have no choice in the matter there would be no purpose in commanding us. Therefore, whatever is commanded is a choice or a state of the will.

Repentance Is Man's Choice

The first public message that Jesus heralded in public was "repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). This was a command to men. Jesus didn't say that God would repent and believe for them. Jesus didn't say, wait for God to give you the ability to repent and believe. Jesus commanded them to simply repent and believe immediately. He preached

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in such a way that we can logically conclude that he assumed that they were capable of doing this.

Jesus said that he came to call sinners to repentance (Matt. 9:13). This implies that repentance is a sinner's choice. If repentance was not their choice, calling them to repent would make no sense. Repentance is not merely feeling bad, since we do not have direct control over what feelings we have. But repentance is the choice of the will to stop sinning, since we do have direct control over our choices. Sin is man's choice; and therefore, repentance from sin is man's choice.

In light of this, it makes perfect sense for Jesus to call sinners to repentance. They are the ones who are choosing to sin. Therefore, they are the ones who must choose to stop sinning.

While I was open air preaching at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, a large crowd had gathered. Many of them were very open about their sin and were completely unashamed. I called them to repentance and warned them that without choosing to repent, they would perish.

One woman came out of the crowd, claimed she was an ordained minister, and mockingly told the crowd, "I repent on behalf of all your sins. You are all forgiven now." The crowd yelled and cheered, thinking that technically they were right with God now, even though they were planning on continuing in their sins.

I responded to all of this by saying that one person cannot repent for the sins of another person. Sins are personal and, therefore, repentance must be personal. I told the crowd that *not even God can repent for your sins*. There are some things which even omnipotence cannot do!

Sin is man's choice; and therefore, repentance from sin is man's choice.

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Omnipotence cannot perform intrinsic contradictions. Repentance is a free will choice, a voluntary determination of the heart not to continue in the sins that have been committed, and therefore, nobody but the sinner himself can repent of his sins.

A. W. Tozer said, "...we must of our own free will repent toward God and believe in Jesus Christ. This the Bible plainly teaches; this experience abundantly supports. Repentance involves moral reformation. The wrong practices are on man's part, and only man can correct them. Lying, for instance, is an act of man and one for which he must accept full responsibility. When he repents he will quit lying. God will not quit for him; he will quit for himself."³ He also said, "God cannot do our repenting for us. In our efforts to magnify grace we have so preached the truth as to convey the impression that repentance is a work of God. This is a grave mistake, and one which is taking a frightful toll among Christians everywhere. God has commanded all men to repent. It is a work which only they can do. It is morally impossible for one person to repent for another. Even Christ could not do this. He could die for us, but He cannot do our repenting for us."⁴

God said, "Repent, and *turn yourselves* from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. *Cast away* from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and *make you* a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die" (Eze. 18:30-31). And also, "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return* unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7) God "commandeth all *men* everywhere to repent..." (Acts 17:30).

All throughout the Bible we see that God commands *men* to repent. This means that repentance is man's own free

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choice. What does God command if He is not commanding our will or choices? A command is a declaration of what type of choice you should or shouldn't make. It is the will which is the subject of a command. God's command to repent implies that repentance is man's choice.

God does not *force* us to repent through some irresistible means, as if we were machines. Rather, He *calls* and *commands* us to repent because we are free moral agents whose decisions of will are self-determined (Matt. 9:13; Acts 17:30-31). Jesus said that he came to "*call*" sinners to repent (Lk. 5:42). The Greek word used for call means to "invite"⁵ or to "bid."⁶ God calls, but we must answer. He invites, but we must accept.

The Bible says that God "*leadeth thee to repentance*" (Rom. 2:4). God leads, but we must follow. We are "*taught of God to love one another*" (1 Thes. 4:9), but we are not forced by God to love one another because love cannot be forced. We are "*called... unto holiness*" (1 Thes. 4:7), but we are not *forced* to be holy because that would be an intrinsic contradiction. Calling, entreating, and beseeching sinners to repent and be holy takes for granted that repentance unto holiness is their choice that they can and must make.

Some object to the idea that repentance from sin is man's choice which they are capable of making because the Bible says, "Esau, who for one morsal of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: *for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears*" (Heb. 12:16-17). Does that mean that Esau wanted to repent of selling his birthright but he couldn't? The answer is no. If Esau had tears over selling his birthright, it is clear that he already repented of selling it.

This passage means that Esau sought his father with tears to repent of the pronounced blessing which Jacob stole,

but his father did not repent. He sought repentance *from his father* with tears. But despite the pleading and tears of Esau, Jacob his father did not change *his mind* about rejecting him from inheriting the blessing which Jacob had stolen. It is not Esau who is doing the repenting. It is Esau who sought repentance from his father.

It was not over the selling of the birthright that Esau repented, but over the loss of the blessing which Esau sought his father to repent of. There are two different events mentioned in Genesis and in Hebrews regarding this. The one was the birthright, the other was the blessing. After Esau *sold* his birthright to Jacob his brother, Jacob also *stole* Esau's blessing from his father Isaac. The birthright and the blessing were two different things.

The birthright, or "the right of the first born," was a "double portion" of the father's goods (Deut. 21:17). But *the blessing* was a pronouncement of blessing from the father (Gen. 27:1-41). Notice the distinction between the birthright and the blessing, "Esau, who for one morsal of meat sold his *birthright*. For ye know how that *afterward*, when he would have inherited *the blessing*, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 12:16-17). Albert Barnes said, "The 'blessing' here referred to was not that of the birth-right, which he knew he could not regain, but that pronounced by the father Isaac on him whom he regarded as his first-born son..."⁷

It was the loss of the blessing, not the birthright, which gave Esau tears. This is what Genesis records, "And when Esau heard the words of his father, *he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry*, and said unto his father, *bless me, even me also, O my father*" (Gen. 27:34). "Hast thou not reserved a *blessing* for me?" (Gen. 27:36) "And Esau said unto his father, hast thou but *one blessing*, my father? *Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice,*

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and wept" (Gen. 27:38). Esau sought repentance from his father with tears, but the answer he received was, "thy brother came with subtlety and hath *taken away thy blessing*" (Gen. 27:35). In this way, "he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (Heb. 12:17). It was his father which he "sought" to repent "with tears."

Clearly, the repentance mentioned is not in reference to the selling of the birthright, which Esau lost by choice, but in reference to receiving the blessing from his father, which Jacob stole by trickery. And the "tears" of Esau mentioned in Hebrews is in reference to the blessing not the birthright. Genesis does not record Esau weeping over the loss of his birthright which he willingly sold, but it does record Esau weeping over the loss of his blessing which was taken against his will.

Since repentance is a change of mind about a choice which you have made, Esau could not repent of losing his blessing because he never chose to lose his blessing. He could only repent of selling his birthright because that was his choice. Whether Esau ever repented of selling his birthright, the Scriptures do not say either in Genesis or anywhere else. But we do know that Isaac did not repent of giving the blessing to Jacob, even though Esau sought him with tears to repent. It is not that Esau could not repent of selling his birthright, but that Esau could not persuade his father to repent about the stolen blessing given to Jacob.

Adam Clarke said about the repentance mentioned in Hebrews 12:17 that "the word does not refer here to Esau at all, but to his father, whom Esau could not, with all his tears and entreaties, persuade to reverse what he had done."⁸ Albert Barnes said, "Way to change his mind,' That is, no place for repentance 'in the mind of Isaac,' or no way to change his mind. It does not mean that Esau earnestly sought to repent and could not, but that when once the blessing had

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passed the lips of his father, he found it impossible to change it.”⁹

The whole point of this passage in Hebrews is that we must be careful and take heed, to “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness spring up and trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsal of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (Heb. 14:14-17).

The usage of the story of Esau, when looked at in context, is to illustrate how we must not forfeit our own blessing to indulge our flesh because there will come a day when we may seek that blessing from God and cannot persuade Him to give it, just as Esau sold his birthright to indulge his flesh and then afterwards could not persuade his father to give him the blessing. It is not a perfect analogy, since Esau choosing to indulge his flesh was not directly associated with the loss of his father’s blessing, since the birthright was *sold* by choice and the blessing was *stolen* by deception. Still, the point the writer of Hebrews is making is that we can lose our blessing by indulging our flesh, and a day will come when God’s mind will not be changed.

This passage does not teach that repentance is not within man’s control. And to use it to teach that man’s repentance is without the realm of his control is to misuse and misunderstand this passage entirely. It would contradict all the many other passages in the Bible which clearly teach that repentance is in fact within man’s power.

It is also important to reemphasize here the distinction between the occasion of repentance and the cause of

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repentance. God is the *occasion* of our repentance because He gives us the opportunity, time, and influence to repent. The Bible says that God gives us the opportunity to repent when it says “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). The Bible says that God gives the time to repent when it says, “And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not” (Rev. 2:21). And the Bible says that God gives sinners the influence to repent by instructing them in the truth through preachers when it says, “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25).

But while God gives us the opportunity, time, and influence to repent, we ourselves must do the actual repenting (Eze. 18:30-32; Acts 17:30). We choose to repent out of our own free will, but we do so under the influence of God. The influence of God is the occasion of our repentance but our own will is the cause of our repentance.

God influences us but we must respond. God calls us but we must answer. God commands us but we must obey. Both God and man have their role. God said, “*Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well... Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord...* ” (Isa. 1:16-18). God reasons with us but we must make the reasonable choice to repent.

We know from the story of Nineveh that repentance is not something God will do for us, but something that we must do for ourselves. God was planning on destroying Nineveh but they repented. Therefore, God changed His mind or altered His plans in light of their repentance. “Who

God changed
His mind or
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plans in light
of their
repentance.

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can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not” (Jonah 3:9-10). It says that “God saw *their* works, that *they* turned,” which is their own activity, and then “*God* repented...” Both God and man had a role. God did His part by warning them. Then they did their part by turning from their sins. And then God did His part by turning away from His wrath and anger. God influenced them by presenting truth to their minds through preaching. And then they repented by changing the choices of their wills. And then God forgave them and altered the course of their future by changing His plans.

While it was the message God gave Jonah that brought them to repentance, their repentance was their own free choice. We know that repentance was not something that God did for them because it resulted in *God changing His plans*. If their repentance was a certainty because it was going to be brought about by God’s irresistible will, instead of a contingency because it was caused by their free will, God’s plan would not have been altered or changed at all.

It doesn’t help the dilemma for a Calvinist to say, “God was never really planning on destroying Nineveh in ninety days,” because God specifically said that He was going to destroy them then (Jonah 3:1-5). And God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). God specifically said that He did not do what He said He was going to. “God repented of the evil, *that he had said that he would do unto them*; and he did it not” (Jonah 3:10). God genuinely changed His plans when He saw how they repented. This must mean that their repentance was an uncertainty or a contingency, that it was their own free choice, and that it originated with them.

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God elsewhere says that if He plans on destroying a city, if they repent, He will change His plans about destroying them. "At what instance I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; *if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them*" (Jer. 18:7-8). This shows that repentance is their free choice which they themselves originate and not something brought about by His irresistible and eternal plan. Otherwise, man's repentance would be no occasion for God to change His plans.

The power of the human will, in creating and originating new choices, actually creates and originates new facts to add to reality. These new choices actually create or originate new knowledge that did not previously exist because such choices did not previously exist. The knowledge of the existence of these choices is new because the existence of these choices is new.

Reality is progressing and forming in a linear or sequential manner.

Reality is actually in the process of developing and is progressively unfolding. Reality is progressing and forming in a linear or sequential manner. The free choices of moral beings are determining the course and direction of the future. The Bible explicitly says that certain actions and events were decided or "*determined*" by men (1 Sam. 20:7, 20:9; 20:33; 25:17; 13:32; 2 Chron. 2:1; Est. 7:7; Acts 11:29; 15:2; 15:37; 20:16; 25:25; 27:1; 1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 2:1; Titus 3:12). "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, *determined* to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" (Acts 11:29). "For Paul had *determined* to sail by Ephesus, because he *would not* spend time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day

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of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16). Paul said, “But *I have determined this with myself...*” (2 Cor. 2:1) That means that he determined it of his own volition or free will. Clearly, God does not predetermine all of the choices of men but men themselves have the power of self-determination.

Therefore, the course of the future is not a foregone conclusion as if it was eternally fixed and certain. The future is presently flexible and changeable (Isa. 38:5; Matt. 26:53). God’s plans are not all eternal. The future and some of God’s plans are in the process of development and are subject to change as new choices are originated by the wills of moral beings.

When Nineveh repented, this new knowledge or these new considerations were immediately or intuitively brought to the mind of God. He changed the decisions of His will as necessary in correspondence with these new choices or new facts that were presented to Him. As He observes these new activities occurring, these new developments result in Him making new plans.

The new thoughts or considerations in man’s mind (*like truth from preaching*) can result in new choices in man’s will (*like repentance*), which would result in new thoughts or observations in God’s mind (*seeing their repentance*), which results in new choices in God’s will (*turning from His wrath*).

God said “*if*” they “turn from their evil,” then He will change what He “thought to do” (Jer. 18:8), speaking of what may or may not happen. This is because such a change in their choice is a contingency which may or may not become a reality. It is a possibility which might or might not become an actuality. It is clear that these new developments are caused by their own free will, not caused by some irresistible or eternal plan of God, since God’s plans change in light of them. If God planned their repentance, their

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repentance would not result in any change of plans on His part. But the plans of God do change in correspondence with the repentance of man, therefore the repentance of man must be caused by the freedom of their will, something which they themselves originate and bring to reality.

God said that they must “turn from their evil” because it is something that only they can do. Then God said “I will repent” which means He will alter or change His plans which he “thought to do...” The prophet Joel said the same thing, “And *rend your heart*, and not your garments, and *turn unto the Lord* your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and *repenteth him of the evil*” (Joel 2:13).

The nature of repentance necessitates that it be caused by the individual who is repenting. Repentance is a moral change in man and, therefore, it must be man's choice or caused by man's will. If repentance was not caused by man, it would not be a moral change within man.

If repentance was not caused by man, it would not be a moral change within man.

If someone else caused their repentance, it wouldn't truly be their repentance. Their repentance could only reflect a change of character in them if it reflects a change of choice made by them. A change of character is a change of choice.

Repentance, therefore, is not a choice that God can make for us. If man's repentance was God's choice, not man's choice, God would be responsible for all of the impenitence of the world. The reason that men would be impenitent is because God has not caused them to repent. But the Bible teaches that repentance is man's own choice, which is why Jesus rebuked men for not repenting. “Then began he to *upbraid* the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, *because thy repented not*” (Matt. 11:20).

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Melito said, "There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man."¹⁰ C. S. Lewis said, "we are... rebels who must lay down our arms."¹¹ George Otis Jr. said that our "entire personality is involved in the act of repentance. Our minds, enlightened through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, are able to perceive sin stripped of all pretenses. Emotionally we respond to this understanding with considerable revulsion, pain and sorrow. But the final and crucial stage involves our will in the actual severance and forsaking of sin. This stage will always follow if repentance is genuine."¹²

To command men, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Lk. 3:8; Matt. 3:8), and to tell them to "repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance" (Acts 26:20), both implies that it is man's choice, man's responsibility, and within man's ability or control to repent and bring forth fruits from that repentance. If it were not, it would make no sense to command them to do so.

Catherine Booth said, "But then another difficulty comes in, and people say, 'I have not the power to repent.' Oh! yes you have. There is a grand mistake. You have the power, or God would not command it. You can repent. You can. This moment lift up your eyes to Heaven, and say, with the Prodigal, 'Father, I have sinned, and I renounce my sin... God 'now commandeth all men everywhere to repent,' and to believe the gospel. What a tyrant He must be if He commands that and yet He knows you have not the power."¹³

The disciples of the Lord "went out, and preached that *men should repent*" (Mark 6:12). This takes for granted that repentance is a choice, specifically man's choice, and that man can make that choice. God's invitation to come is for all men (Matt. 11:28). As the Bible says "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the

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marriage” (Matt. 22:9). Jesus also said to the Church, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Why should we preach the gospel to all men, commanding them to repent and believe, unless all men are capable of this? It would be a waste of time and energy to call and command men to do that which they cannot do.

Apart from an understanding of free will, evangelism would seem like a vain activity. Evangelism, or calling all men to repentance, is only rational if all men can repent. To offer them hope through the gospel, when they cannot obey the gospel, is an offer that is nothing but a mockery! God would be insincere in commanding all to repent and believe unless they all could do it. God would be insincere in offering eternal life to all or in inviting all men to Heaven unless they could receive His offer and accept His invitation.

Why would God want all of the unsaved to hear the gospel unless once they hear it, they are capable of obeying it and being saved through it? If the call to obey the gospel does not imply that man can obey the gospel, then what in the entire Bible could ever imply that men could obey it? If the command does not presuppose ability, what text ever could presuppose ability? Nothing could imply the ability to repent and believe more than the commands to do so.

Irenaeus said, “If then, it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason did the Apostle have, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things, and to abstain from others? But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will (in whom likeness man was created), advice is always given to him...”¹⁴

Apart from an understanding of free will, evangelism would seem like a vain activity.

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The gospel requires that men give up their sins in order to be pardoned by God through Jesus Christ. Sin is the choice to violate God's law. Since we have already established that the moral law is not impossible but that sin is avoidable, then we can logically conclude that men are capable of obeying the gospel since they are able to give up their sins or capable of repenting as the gospel demands. Since sin is not unavoidable, repentance is not impossible; and therefore, man is able to obey the command to repent.

We can also conclude that since God wants all men to be saved, and men can only be saved by obeying the gospel, that God gives men the ability necessary in order for them to do that. Since God wants all to be saved through the atonement by repenting of their sins, why wouldn't God give all the ability to repent of their sins so that they could be saved through the atonement? If God truly wants all men to be saved, He would make it possible for all men to be saved.

Preaching the Gospel is pointless unless the hearers of the Word are able to be doers.

That is why the atonement has been made for all, why God is calling all men to repent, and why God sent the Church to take the gospel to everyone. God's command for the Church to preach the gospel to all people would be a useless command unless the hearers of the gospel were able to obey it. Preaching the gospel is pointless unless the hearers of the Word are able to be doers of the Word. The command to be doers of the Word, and not hearers only (Jas. 1:22), presupposes that those who hear the Word are able to obey it. That men are commanded to be doers and not hearers only implies that it is their choice to make or that it is up to them. Since men cannot do what they are not capable of doing, the evidence that the gospel can be obeyed from the heart is the mere fact that men have obeyed it from the

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heart (Rom. 6:17). Therefore, the repentance which the gospel requires is not impossible at all for men.

Impenitence is Man's Choice

The gospel requires repentance and faith from men. Repentance is the hearts choice to turn from sin and obey God. Faith is the hearts choice to embrace the truth and trust in Christ. Both repentance and faith are states of the will. Therefore, the gospel requires states of the will.

Under a good government, the command implies ability. Only under tyranny is this not true. God's government is good and, therefore, in God's government the command implies ability. We can conclude then that what the gospel requires of men, men are capable of doing. A sinner is capable of remaining in a disobedient state of mind or of having an obedient state of mind through repentance. A sinner is capable of rejecting the truth and not trusting in Christ, or of embracing the truth and trusting in Christ. If men were not capable of it, they would not be commanded to do it.

- The command of a good ruler implies the ability of the subjects.
- God, who is a good ruler, commands all men to obey the gospel when they hear it.
- Therefore, all men are able to obey the gospel when they hear it.

Men are even commanded to circumcise their own hearts (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4). Since they are commanded to do so, this means that it is their own responsibility and choice. To circumcise your heart means to repent or put off your sins (Col. 2:11). Therefore, to circumcise your heart means to repent of your sins but to have an uncircumcised heart is to have an impenitent heart.

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When Stephen was open air preaching, he said to the crowd “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). Stephen was rebuking them for disobeying a specific commandment, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut. 10:16).

Why would Stephen rebuke them for being uncircumcised in their heart unless they were capable of circumcising their hearts? Why rebuke them for breaking a commandment unless they were capable of obeying the commandment? Why rebuke them for having uncircumcised hearts unless having such hearts was their own free choice? Why would he rebuke them for resisting the Holy Spirit unless they were capable of yielding to the Holy Spirit? Unless they were capable of doing these things, why rebuke them for not doing these things?

You cannot rebuke a man for something which is not his choice.

Stephen seemed to take for granted or assume the ability of his audience. He blamed them for their impenitence which must mean that their impenitence was their own free choice. You cannot rebuke a man for something which is not his choice. A man cannot be blamed for that which is beyond his control or for what he cannot help.

As we have already seen, after preaching repentance and working miracles, Jesus began “to upbraid the cities wherein most of his might works were done, because they repented not” (Matt. 11:20). Jesus did not upbraid God because sinners did not repent, but Jesus upbraided sinners because they did not repent. That is because their impenitence was their will, not God’s will.

If their impenitence was not their own choice but was the Sovereign will of God, why be upset with them and

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blame them? Why would Jesus be frustrated with them for not repenting if they were not even capable of repenting? Unless they had the power of choosing to repent, and were freely refusing to repent, why would Jesus rebuke them? His frustration could only be logical, reasonable, or justified if they were capable of fulfilling His expectations but they were freely choosing not to. Jesus here assumed that they could have repented but simply didn't want to. As Michael Pearl said, "When you are angry towards a man for his degrading or offensive behavior, you are assuming he could have acted differently."¹⁵

Jesus said, "And I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not" (Rev. 2:21). Why would God give her time to repent, if she doesn't even have the ability to repent? Is it not clear that her impenitence was not God's fault, but her own fault? If God created her with the inability to repent, her impenitence would be His fault. But if God created her with the ability to repent, then her impenitence is her own fault. The blame of impenitence in this passage is clearly put upon her.

If God makes all men incapable of repenting and obeying, by either removing free will when Adam sinned or by withholding free will when He forms us, then God and not man is responsible for the disobedience and impenitence of the world. Either man is capable of repenting and obeying or else God is the ultimate reason for the impenitence and disobedience of the world.

However, God wants *all* men to repent (2 Pet. 3:9), He calls *all* men to repent (Acts 17:30-31), and *He blames them* if they do not repent (Matt. 11:20; 23:37; Mk. 6:6; Lk. 7:30; 13:34; 14:17-18; 19:14; 19:27; Jn. 5:40; Rev. 2:21). This presupposes that they have the ability to repent. You cannot blame a man for being that which he hasn't chosen to be, or for doing that which he hasn't chosen to do. Men are

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blamed for impenitence because the impenitent freely choose to be in such a state when they are free to be repentant if they wanted to be.

This is implied by the fact that those who refuse to repent of their sins will have to face the wrath of God. "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). To be "impenitent" means to be unrepentant. Just as those who repent change their mind about sinning, those who are impenitent still have a carnal mind. Their mind is still determined to sin. Impenitence is not a passive state but an active state. It is the will's active hostility or enmity against God. It is the will's active embrace of a sinful life. The reason that the wrath of God comes upon the impenitent is because they are capable of choosing to repent, but are instead choosing to be impenitent. They are justly accountable and punishable for their choice. How unjust it would be to punish men with eternal hell-fire for being impenitent if they were not freely choosing to be impenitent and had no power at all to repent!

Consider how God treats those who disobey the gospel. "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:17). Paul answers that question, "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 1:8).

Why would God punish men, for not obeying the gospel, unless they were capable of obeying it? Is God cruel and unjust as to command of them the impossible, only to punish them eternally in the lake of fire for their failure to do what He created them incapable of doing?

In a good government, not only does the command imply ability, but punishment for failure to obey commands

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implies man's ability. God is just, good, reasonable, and loving. Therefore, He commands what is possible and only punishes men for doing what was avoidable. Since God punishes those who do not repent (Eze. 20:8; Rom. 2:5), repentance must be within man's power and, therefore, impenitence must be a man's choice!

John Fletcher said, "It is offering an insult to the only wise God to suppose . . . that he gave them the gospel, without giving them power to believe it . . . With regards to repentance, 'Then he began,' says St. Matthew, 'to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.' Merciful Savior, forgive us! We have insulted thy meek wisdom, by representing thee as cruelly upbraiding the lame for not running, the blind for not seeing, and the dumb for not speaking! . . . Suppose a schoolmaster said to his English scholars 'Except you instantly speak Greek you shall all be severely whipped.' You would wonder at the injustice of the school tyrant. But would not the wretch be merciful in comparison of a Savior, (so called) who is supposed to say to myriads of men, that can no more repent than ice can burn, 'Except ye repent, ye shall all perish?'"¹⁶

Faith is Man's Choice

The gospel is not merely truth to be believed *with the mind*, but it is truth to be *obeyed with the heart*. The Bible says that those who "obey not the gospel" will perish (2 Thes. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17). This implies that those who are saved are those who obey the gospel. Obedience and disobedience are not states of the intellect but states of the will. Therefore, salvation requires a state of the will because salvation requires obedience to the gospel.

Obedying the gospel consists of turning from sin and putting your faith in Jesus Christ. No man can be saved

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without faith and faith is a personal choice. Faith is not merely a *passive state of the mind*; it is an *active state of the heart*. The devil himself believes in his mind but he rebels in his heart (Jas. 2:9). To believe with the mind but not to obey with the heart is nothing more than the devil's faith! Saving faith is the wills embrace of that which the mind affirms. Biblical faith is not only the *assent of the mind* to the *truths of the gospel* but also the *consent of the will* to the *demands of the gospel*. Gordon C. Olson said, "Saving faith is not merely an intellectual state... Saving faith is an act of the

Faith is not merely a passive state of the mind; it is an active state of the heart.

will in total commitment... Saving faith is always our own act..."¹⁷ Faith is the hearts active embrace and compliance with the truth.

Paul said, "... *let us* hold fast our profession" (Heb. 4:14). And he said, "*Let us* hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering" (Heb. 10:23). The command to "let us" indicates our own role, activity, or choice. Clearly, faith is deliberate. Believing is a deliberation of the heart. It is a personal volition of the will.

All throughout the Bible the word "heart" is commonly used as a metaphor to refer to a man's will. Heart is figurative or symbolic for a man's inner commitments, intentions, and choices. And the Bible says it is with the heart that men believe. "If thou believest with all thine *heart*" (Acts 8:37), and "believe in thine *heart*... for with the *heart* man believeth" (Rom. 10:9-10). To believe with your heart is not merely when your *mind conceives* the truth, but when your *will complies* with the truth. It is when your will embraces and obeys it. Faith is the inner trust and commitment of a man to be faithful and loyal to God. Faith, therefore, is a man's own choice.

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Jesus commanded men not only to repent, but to “repent *and believe*” (Mk. 1:15). This means that believing is a person’s choice just as repenting is a person’s choice. A command is a declaration of what you should or shouldn’t choose. Telling men to “repent and believe” is nonsense unless repenting and believing is their choice. “Jesus answering saith unto them, *have faith in God*” (Mk. 11:22). Unless faith in God was man’s choice, telling men to have faith in God is nonsense because it would be pointless and useless if it is not even up to them. Jesus charged his audience to “*believe the works*” that he performed so that they might believe in his relationship with the Father (Jn. 10:38; 14:11). Jesus told his hearers to “*believe on the light*” or the illumination which he had given them (Jn. 12:36). Paul told the jailer in Philippi to “*believe on the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 16:31).

To tell a man to believe presupposes that faith is a choice which they can make.

Irenaeus said, “all such expressions shew that man is in his own power with respect to faith”¹⁸ All of these examples show that believing is man’s choice and that it is within man’s ability to believe. To speak to men in this way or manner takes for granted that faith is a choice. If faith was not their choice, or if they were not capable of believing, commanding them to believe would be nonsense. To tell a man to believe presupposes that faith is a choice which they can make.

The fact that Paul “reasoned” with men and “persuaded” them to believe in Jesus (Acts 13:43; 17:2; 18:4; 18:19; 19:26; 24:25) further testifies to the fact that it is man’s own personal choice to make. If man had no role or choice in the matter, reasoning *with him* or seeking to persuade *him* in evangelism would make no sense at all. If

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the whole matter was “all of God,” it is not man that needs to be reasoned with or persuaded, but it is God Himself.

A Calvinist might say, “These are the means that God has ordained to save His elect.” But reasoning with men and persuading them to believe in Jesus Christ only makes sense, as the means God uses to save souls, if men have free will. This is because such means directly address them as free moral agents with the power of self-determination. It assumes that it is within their power to believe. Such efforts are direct appeals to their will; and therefore, faith is man’s own free choice.

If it really is a person’s own free choice to believe the gospel or not, why does the Bible say “as many as were *ordained* to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48)? This is a common proof-text of Calvinists who say that it is not man’s choice to believe but that God predetermines who believes and who doesn’t.

The Greek word used here for “ordained” however “includes no idea of pre-ordination or pre-destination of any kind”¹⁹ according to Adam Clarke. John Wesley said, “St. Luke does not say fore - ordained. He is not speaking of what was done from eternity, but of what was then done, through the preaching of the gospel.”²⁰

The word which is translated as “ordained” in this passage simply means “disposed.”²¹ Therefore this verse is saying “as many as were *disposed* or had such a *disposition* to eternal life believed.” As Adam Clarke said, it teaches the “disposition or readiness of mind of several persons in the congregation...”²² Their disposition to receive the gospel is contrasted with the disposition of the Jews just two verses before. We read, “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, it was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing *ye put it from you*, and *judge*

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yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46).

The meaning of the word used in verse 48 and the context of verse 46 helps us to properly exegetically interpret verse 48 consistently with the rules of hermeneutics, namely, interpreting a passage based upon the meaning of the original language and in light of the immediate context.

In light of this, this passage means that those who “judge” themselves “unworthy of everlasting life” did not believe, but those who “disposed” themselves “to eternal life believed.” Whether they believed or not depended on whether their heart rejected or accepted the gospel which was preached to them. Those who hardened their hearts did not believe, but those who softened their hearts did believe. What made the difference was the disposition which they choose to have in response to the message that was preached. Therefore, this passage should not be used to teach that it is not man’s free choice to believe, as it is implied all throughout the Bible that it is man’s choice to believe or not.

Still, Calvinists say that faith is a gift from God in such a way that it is not man’s free choice. This would make God responsible for all of the unbelief of the world. Unbelief would not be man’s fault because he doesn’t have the ability to believe and has no free choice in the matter. Augustine even admitted that God was responsible for the unbelief of the world because he believed that faith was God’s gift, not man’s choice. Augustine said, “Faith then, as well in its beginning as in its completion, is God’s gift... this gift is given to some, while to some it is not given.”²³ Man’s faith is not God’s to give, but Martin Luther said, “For as no one can give himself faith, neither can he take away his own unbelief. How, then, will he take away a single sin, even the very smallest?”²⁴ A. W. Pink said, “Faith is God’s gift, and the purpose to give it only to some, involves the purpose not

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to give it to others. Without faith there is no salvation... hence if there were some of Adam's descendants to whom He purposes not to give faith, it must be because He ordained that they should be damned."²⁵

In the Bible we see that God calls all men to believe the gospel and He blames them if they do not. If faith was God's gift, not man's choice, then all men would believe and God would not blame men for their unbelief. To teach that faith is God's gift is to accuse God of being partial instead of benevolent. And it is to accuse Him of being a tyrant instead of a reasonable and just Ruler, since you would accuse Him of withholding faith from most men because He doesn't want them to be saved, and then He blames and punishes them for not believing! It would be the height of unreasonableness, injustice, and cruelty to blame a man for that which was not his fault, or for that which he could not have avoided. Nothing could be conceived of as being more partial and unloving than to damn men that you could have saved if you wanted to.

Calvinists use Eph. 2:8-9 to support their doctrine that faith is not man's choice but is rather God's gift. "For by grace are ye saved through *faith*; and that *not of yourselves: it is the gift of God*, not of works, lest any man should boast." Referring to this passage, John Piper said, "Faith is a gift from God."²⁶

This verse, however, is not saying that faith is a gift and that it is not of ourselves, but that salvation is a gift and not of ourselves. Salvation is not something that we earn by our works but something we receive by a living and obedient faith. Paul is saying that we cannot boast since salvation is unmerited and undeserved; it is by grace. Even John Calvin did not interpret the "gift" of this passage as "faith" but as "salvation" in his epistle on Ephesians.²⁷

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Since we already saw that men are commanded to believe, and this command implies that it is their choice to believe or not, it is therefore contrary to sound hermeneutics to interpret Eph. 2:8-9 in such a way as to say that faith is not man's choice, since that would contradict other plain passages which teach that it is.

God gives the gift of salvation to those who choose to believe. Salvation, as in forgiveness and acceptance through Jesus Christ, is God's gift; but faith itself is our free choice. God inspires faith within us by giving us all the reasons necessary to believe. In this way he "*helps*" our "unbelief" (Mk. 9:24), but we ourselves must do the believing. He helps our unbelief but He does not irresistibly force us to believe. He presents the truth to our minds but we ourselves must yield to the truth and embrace it, we ourselves must choose to believe.

Jesus was once asked, "What shall *we do*, that *we* might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that *ye* believe on him whom he hath sent" (Jn. 6:28-29). To "*believe on him*" is something that "*we do*." This is what is pleasing to God, that is, this is the "works of God" which He accepts from us.

Catherine Booth said, "Faith is a voluntary thing. It is a thing you can do or leave undone, or God must have been unjust to have made a man's everlasting salvation or damnation to depend on what he has no power to do. You have not absolute power over your intellect, but you have power over your will."²⁸

A. W. Tozer said, "The day when it is once more understood that God will not be responsible for our sin and unbelief will be a glad one for the Church of Christ. The

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realization that we are personally responsible for our individual sins may be a shock to our hearts, but it will clear the air and remove the uncertainty. Returning sinners waste their time begging God to perform the very acts He has sternly commanded them to do.”²⁹

The Apostle Paul said, “How then shall *they* call on him in whom *they* have not believed? And how shall *they* believe in him of whom *they* have not heard? And how shall *they* hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Rom. 10:13-15). While it is God who presents the truths of the gospel to sinners by sending them a preacher, they themselves must do the believing. Paul’s whole line of reasoning, that man cannot believe the gospel unless he first hears it, presupposes that faith is a man’s choice to embrace the truth of the gospel when it is encountered and presented.

The very reason that I travel the nation preaching the gospel to sinners on the streets and on universities is because of my presupposition that they are capable of believing the gospel, or embracing it in their hearts, when it is perceived by their minds. If man’s faith was God’s choice, instead of man’s choice, it would make more sense to ask God to give them faith than to ask man to believe. But you never see anyone in the Bible asking God to give faith to others, but you see lots of examples of men in the Bible telling sinners to believe.

Unbelief is Man’s Choice

Like faith, unbelief is also a personal choice of the will. Unbelief is a sinners own fault, which he is to be blamed for. Unbelief is not merely a passive state of the mind. Unbelief is an active state of the heart. Unbelief is the hearts active rejection of the truth. Unbelief is the hostility of

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a person's will towards the truth that his mind perceives and affirms.

The Bible tells us to “*take heed*... lest there be in any of you an evil *heart of unbelief*” (Heb. 3:12). “Take heed” implies choice and “evil heart of unbelief” means that unbelief is not merely of the mind but is of the will. Unbelief is described as being deliberate. “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and *their eyes they have closed*; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matt. 13:15; Acts 28:27). This shows their personal and intentional choice. Their unbelief was volitional. Men purposely turn their ears away from the truth. The Bible says, “They...*stopped their ears*” (Acts 7:57). And it says, “...they shall *turn away their ears from the truth*” (2 Tim. 4:4). Unbelievers are those who “loved darkness rather than light” (Jn. 3:19). Unbelief is the wills active state of suppressing and rejecting the truth. Unbelievers are those who “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).

The Bible says, “Today if ye will hear his voice, *harden not your hearts*” (Heb. 3:15; 4:7). This command implies that a man chooses to harden his heart or not. It is a matter of our own personal choice whether we reject the word of God by hardening our hearts or if we receive the word of God by obeying in our hearts. It is something that we determine, which we have control over, which is why it is commanded of us not to harden our hearts.

We are also told in the Bible that men *refused* to believe in Jesus Christ. “The stone which the builders *refused* is become the head stone of the corner” (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17). That means that they deliberately rejected Jesus Christ in their hearts. They decided not to embrace the truth of Jesus Christ. Just as

faithfulness is obedience, faithlessness is disobedience. The Scriptures even contrast disobedience with believing. “Unto you therefore which *believe* he is precious, but unto them which be *disobedient*, the stone which the builders *disallowed*, the same is made the head of the corner” (1 Pet. 2:7). An unbelieving heart is a disobedient heart. It is the wills rejection of the truth that is revealed to the mind.

Jesus was frustrated with the world because of their unbelief. “He answereth him, and saith, *O faithless generation*, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?” (Mk. 9:19) Why be frustrated with men for not

Jesus blamed them for their unbelief, which means that it was their own fault.

doing what they cannot do? Why blame them for doing what they could not avoid, or blame them for not doing what cannot be done? Jesus’ frustration with that generation is justified and rational, if and only if they were capable of being a faithful generation but were choosing not to be.

Jesus even rebuked men for not believing, which implies that it is their choice to believe or not. Jesus “*upbraided* them with their unbelief and *hardness of heart*, because they believed not...” (Mk. 16:14). Jesus blamed them for their unbelief, which means that it was their own fault! And if it was their own fault, it therefore was their own free choice! It is a self-evident truth that they could not be blamed if it was not their own fault or free choice.

The Bible also says about Jesus, “Then he said unto them, *O fools*, and *slow of heart to believe* all that the prophets have spoken” (Lk. 24:25). Again, it would make no sense to rebuke men for not believing, unless faith and unbelief is their free choice. Their unbelief was their own deliberate choice, as implied in the rebuke “*slow of heart to believe...*” Jesus did not look at them in their unbelief and

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think, "Poor men. God has not yet granted them the gift of faith." He knew that their unbelief was their own fault, not God's fault.

We are told that Jesus "*marveled* because of their unbelief" (Mk. 6:6). If they were incapable of believing, or if God simply did not grant them faith, Jesus would not have marveled. There would be nothing to marvel at. Jesus marveled because they could have and should have believed, but they didn't. Jesus even commanded men, "be not faithless, but believing" (Jn. 20:27). Therefore, it is our choice to be faithless or believing. Whether we believe or whether we are faithless depends upon us.

All Men Can Seek & Know God If They Wanted To

The reason that men do not know God and do not have faith in God is not because they are ignorant of Him. God has given all men knowledge of Himself. The Bible says that God "*lighteth* every man that cometh into the world" (Jn. 1:9). The Greek word "lighteth" means to "enlighten" and "illuminate."³⁰ God has given all men knowledge of Himself. The Apostle Paul said, "Because that which may be *known* of God is *manifest in them*; for God hath *shewed* it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are *clearly seen*, being *understood* by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20). All men are "without excuse" for not acknowledging and serving God because no man is without the knowledge of God. If men had no knowledge of God, they certainly would have an excuse for not acknowledging and serving Him!

But the reason that men do not have a relationship with God is because they choose not to seek after Him. The

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Bible says, "...if ye seek him, he will be found of you" (2 Chron. 15:2). Jesus said, "...seek and ye shall find" (Matt. 7:7). Paul said, "That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us" (Acts 17:27). The knowledge of God, and knowing God, is available to everyone.

The problem is that "there is none that *seeketh* after God" (Rom. 3:11). Seeking is the volition of the will. "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, *will not* seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts" (Ps. 10:4). The reason that men do not know God is because they "will not" to know Him or even to think about Him. "And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that *stirreth up himself* to take hold of thee" (Isa. 64:7). God said that sinners "*refuse* to know me" (Jer. 9:6). Sinners choose not to know God. They purposely choose not to have a relationship with the Lord.

Unbelief is
a crime! An
unbeliever
is not an
ignoramus.

Just as God has granted mankind natural ability to do His will, God has granted us natural knowledge of Himself and of His will. That is why unbelief is a crime! An unbeliever is not an ignoramus who hasn't encountered the light or who cannot believe in God because of lack of knowledge. An unbeliever is a criminal who selfishly and foolishly rejects the light that he has! They choose to rebel against the knowledge that they possess. They run from the light!

God even punishes sinners for their unbelief. It would make no sense to punish men for not believing, unless believing or not is their own choice. But sin is always a choice. The "sin of unbelief" is the choice not to believe or embrace the truth or light that one has. Their condemnation is just because they chose darkness over the light (Jn. 3:19).

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The only thing that keeps men back from God is their own unwillingness of heart, not any inability of their nature (Isa. 30:9; 30:15; 30:16; Jer. 8:5; Eze. 20:7-8; Matt. 11:20-21; 23:37, Mk. 6:6; 7:30; 13:34; 14:17-18; 19:14; 19:27; Lk. 14:16-24; Jn. 5:40; Acts 7:51; 17:27; Rev. 2:21).

The Bible says, “*Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I*” (Isa. 48:16). “*Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of hosts*” (Zech. 1:3). “*Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*” (Jas. 4:8). Cornelius was a Gentile who sought after God with the limited knowledge that he had. Therefore, God gave him a further revelation by bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to him (Acts 10:1-48).

I once met a man on Mizzou University in Missouri who had heard us open air preaching and came up to us afterwards. He said that he grew up in Nepal in a Muslim family. His father was a leader in the Mosque. When he was younger he said it was his responsibility to rise up early, get into the prayer tower, and call the community to prayer.

During his teenage years he began to question whether Islam was true or if the truth was something else. He began to pray and to fast in the Mosque, praying and fasting continually because his soul was not satisfied. After much prayer and fasting he said that he had a vision. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him, whom he had known to be only be a prophet. Jesus said to him, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the father but by me.*” (Jn. 14:6) It was not until he came to the United States as a foreign student to study in college that he found a Bible and read that Jesus Christ had said the same thing two thousand years ago!

At the age of accountability, it is a person's individual responsibility to seek after truth and not to be

dependent upon his family or culture. Once that state of reason is reached, when their mind is developed and they have natural knowledge of God, those who do not know Him are those who do not know Him by choice. And those who do know Him are those who know Him by choice. Knowing God or not knowing God is a personal and free choice of the will for those who have the light of natural revelation developed in their minds.

A Relationship with God Is Man's Choice

It is an age old question, "What is the meaning of life?" This is an identical question to, "Why did God create us?" The answer to both questions is the same. The answer is: loving relationships. God wanted to love and enjoy us, for us to love and enjoy Him, and for us to love and enjoy each other.

It seems that all men know that loving relationships is what is really important and what life is really all about. When a person is on their death bed, who do they want to be around them? They want their loved ones to be there. If a person is on a plane, knowing it is about to crash, who do they call? They call their loved ones to tell them that they love them. The death of a loved one is the greatest tragedy that we can experience in this life because we are relational beings. We have been created and designed to love God and love each other, and to be loved by God and to be loved by each other.

Just as parents create children to have loving relational experiences with them; God created mankind for the very same purpose. Man was made for a relationship with God. Therefore, while men live without a relationship with Him, they are living unnaturally.

Man is naturally a relational being because man was made in the image of God. The three members of the Trinity

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have enjoyed a relationship amongst themselves for all of eternity. God is naturally a relational being and he did not depend upon the creation of man in order to have a relationship. But apparently, the pain of the cross cannot be compared to the grief of God's heart over His broken relationship with mankind, which is one of the reasons He endured such agony in order to restore that relationship.

In the beginning, man had a loving relationship with God. Everything was very good in the Garden and the Lord wanted it to stay that way. But through man's choice to sin, God's plan was interrupted.

Now God wants to bring man back into a relationship with Him. But in order to do that, He must turn us from our sins. If mankind had never chosen to sin, the relationship between God and man would never have been interrupted. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God..." (Isa. 59:2). The prodigal son was "dead" to his father because of his choice to leave, and he became "alive again" by his choice to return (Lk. 15:24). To be dead to God or alive towards God is, therefore, a matter of free will. Clearly, it is a decision of the will to have a relationship with God or not.

- Sin separates man from God.
- Sin is a choice of man's will.
- Therefore, man is separated from God through his own choice.

God's problem with mankind is that we have chosen to sin. Therefore, the solution to the problem is for God to get man to decide to turn from his sin. God is trying to salvage His fallen creation, to restore our rebellious race to a relationship with Him. In this reconciliation or restoration, He must not take away our free will; otherwise He could not accomplish that which He created us for – a mutual loving

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relationship. God, therefore, does not force us into a relationship with Him but He gives us the free choice to decide for ourselves to know Him or not.

While I was open air preaching at the University of Minnesota in Duluth, one of the students asked me "Why did God give us free will? Couldn't He have created a universe where there was no possibility of sin?" I explained that God did not want His universe to be full of puppets or robots. That is why God even gave the angels free will and allowed them to choose between loyalty and rebellion. As Justin Martyr said, "God in the beginning made the race of angels and men with free-will..."³¹ This is evident from the fact that angels and men were both free to sin. God highly values voluntary loyalty and devotion.

A loving
relationship
requires
mutual
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commitment.

I went on to explain that without free will, there can be no loving relationship. A loving relationship requires mutual consent and commitment. God created mankind to have a relationship with Him. The reason for our existence necessitates the existence of free will. Sure God could have created us without a free will, thereby avoiding all possibility of sin, but this would have also excluded any possibility of us doing what we were created to do! We could not have a real loving relationship with God!

Love is a free choice. God cannot make us love Him. God leaves that to our own free will. God actually commands that we love Him (Matt. 22:37). Therefore, love must not be some involuntary feeling that we have no control over, but love is a choice of our own will. If love were not a choice, it could not be commanded since only voluntary states of the will are the proper subjects of command.

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Steve Harrison said, "He made us free moral agents with the ability to chose who we would love. He could have made us like animals, driven only by instinct, but God took the risk of rejection for the prize of uncoerced love. He desires a response of love, a voluntary choice of friendship."³²

The salvation experience is when a person enters into a relationship with God. Eternal life is to know God (Jn. 17:3). A relationship between two people requires a choice or willingness between the two. God cannot enter into a loving relationship with man without man's choice.

That a loving relationship requires mutual consent is shown by the example of rape. When a man forces a woman into a relationship with him, it is not real love because there is no mutual consent. There can be no loving relationship when there is a *violated will*. Love must be a free choice or else it is not love at all. Since God wants to have a genuine loving relationship with man, He gives us the freedom of choice to know Him or not.

Love must
be a free
choice or
else it is not
love at all.

God made Himself very vulnerable with Israel. Instead of usurp their free will to force them into a loving relationship with Him, He granted them the freedom of choice to have a loving relationship with Him or not. "The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but

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went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord. And the Lord said unto me, the backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and will not keep anger forever” (Jer. 3:6-12).

God even subjected Himself to great heartache by granting Israel the free choice to have a loving relationship with Him or not. He said, “I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me, and with their eyes, which go whoring after their idols” (Eze. 6:9). God told Hosea to take a wife of whoredom to illustrate his relationship with Israel, because “the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord” (Hosea 1:2).

The fact that God granting Israel the choice to have a relationship with Him or not is clearly seen when God said, “I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face” (Hosea 5:15). God was stepping back, giving them the choice and opportunity to come after Him. He was not going to force them to know Him, nor seek after them anymore, but was waiting for them to come after Him. God wanted to have a relationship with them but He wanted it to be a relationship of mutual consent.

God has wanted to know men in a personal way but was unable to know them because they would not consent. God said, “... thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back...” (Eze. 23:35). “Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number” (Jer. 2:32). God said, “... they refuse to

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know me” (Jer. 9:6). Clearly, a personal relationship between God and man requires the personal choice of God and man.

We read about the “bride of Christ” and that there will be the “marriage supper of the Lamb.” What is a marriage but the union of two consenting individuals who have decided to enter into a loving and permanent relationship? The consent and willingness of Christ’s bride is clearly seen, since “his wife hath *made herself* ready” (Rev. 19:7).

I have heard Calvinists argue, “If you pray for God to save someone, you are assuming that salvation is solely God’s decision and is not man’s free will choice.” This line of reasoning is completely fallacious. When I pray for someone’s salvation, I am not praying for God to override their will, violate their will, or usurp their will. I am praying for God to draw men unto Himself by influencing their will. I am praying for God to send the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sin or to send a believer to them to give witness to the gospel.

God does not convert men through causation but through influence.

God does not convert men through causation but through influence. This is why we should “*Pray* ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38). Praying for God to save someone through public proclamation presupposes that truth is an influence upon man’s will and that the will of man can obey the truth that is presented to him.

When I pray for someone’s salvation, I am asking for God to reveal His good character to them and give them a powerful revelation of the atonement. If a man wants to enter into a relationship with a woman, he doesn’t give her a “date rape drug” to violate her will, but he woos her until she

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forms affection for him and chooses to enter into a relationship with him. God does not violate our will, but He woos us to Himself through the Spirit's revelation of His good character, until we freely choose to enter into a relationship with Him or not.

God is not like some selfish and brutal caveman who takes the women he wants by the hair to *drag* and force her into his cave. God is a benevolent gentleman who *draws* and woos the one that he wants through His kindness, to win her affection.

Conversion is Man's Choice

The way to Heaven and the way to hell are described as roads (Matt. 7:13-14). It is our choice which road we are going to walk on. We are commanded, "*Enter ye in the straight gate*" (Matt. 7:13). This implies man's choice in salvation. If we had no control over the matter, we would not be commanded to enter in at the straight gate. We are also told, "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate*" (Lk. 13:24). This means that we are to absolutely determine with our will to do so, that we are to energetically put forth the powers of our will.

The command to "Repent ye therefore, and *be converted*" (Acts 3:19) implies that conversion is man's choice. If whether or not a man is converted is not up to him, telling him to "be converted" would make no sense at all. The command to "be converted" only makes sense if it is up to man whether or not he is converted, or if conversion is his choice which he is at liberty to make. It is the height of absurdity to tell a man to do that which you know he cannot do, or to demand from them that which you know he has absolutely no control over. Lest we charge God with absurdity, we must admit that man determines whether or not

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he is in a converted state and that is the reason why God commands men to be converted.

What does it mean to be converted? What is the nature of conversion? True conversion is the choice of the will to live a new life, to turn from sin and turn to Christ. True conversion is the decision of the heart to no longer live a selfish life, but to live a holy life that is pleasing and glorifying God. The Bible says, "Lie not one to another, seeing that *ye* have *put off* the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9) "That *ye put off* concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts..." (Eph. 4:22) The phrase "ye have put off" and "ye put off" means that it is our own responsibility and our own choice. The words "deeds" and "conversation" implies our former way of life. We are also told to "*put on* the new man" (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). This also signifies our own activity or choice. Whether we are living the old sinful life or living a new and holy life is our own intentional choice. It is the result of our own personal volition.

True conversion requires the choice of the will to forsake all sin and everything else that you have been living for and to decide to make Jesus Christ the supreme interest of your life. "So likewise whosoever he be of *you* that *forsaketh* not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). It is "you" that must "forsaketh" all. This means it is your choice and responsibility. It is not something which God will do for you. Jesus also said, "If any man *come to me*" (Lk. 14:26), and "If any man thirst, let him *come unto me*, and drink" (Jn. 7:37). This describes our own personal role and activity in salvation. It was man who left God so it must be man who comes back or returns to God. As it is written, "return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity" (Hos. 14:1).

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Jesus said that if a person listens to him, they “hath *chosen* that good part” (Lk. 10:42). To listen to the teachings of Jesus is therefore a personal choice. Jesus emphasized man’s choice in many places throughout the gospels. The word “*will*” in all the following passages means to “choose,” “determine,”³³ “resolve,” and “purpose.”³⁴ Therefore, it is our choice to do the will of God or not because Jesus said, “*If any man will do his will...*” (Jn. 7:17). Jesus also taught that to preserve your life and consequently lose it or to give your life to the Lord and consequently save it, is your own choice. Jesus said, “For whosoever *will* save his life shall lose it, but whosoever *will* lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Lk. 9:24). All men are free to choose between these two possibilities. God lets us decide. Jesus taught that those who “go into the kingdom of God” are those who have had a change of will, since Jesus said they are those who originally “answered and said, *I will not*: but afterward... *repented and went*” (Matt. 21:28-31).

The Bible also records, “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man *will* come after me, *let him* deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23). The activity of man’s will in conversion is stated when Jesus said “if any man will” and then was emphasized when Jesus said, “*let him.*” No man is passively converted, or converted independent of his will, but conversion is actually the decision of the will.

A Calvinist will object and quote the passage which states, “Which were born, not of blood, *nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man*, but of God” (John 1:13). Doesn’t that mean that salvation does not include our free will choice? The answer is no. Proper Biblical hermeneutics would exclude this interpretation because the immediate context contradicts it. The very verse before it talks about a man’s choice in becoming born again. “But as many as

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received him, to them he gave right to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name..." (Jn. 1:12). That Greek word "receive" means to "to take, to choose, select."³⁵ Therefore, those who choose Him are the ones that are granted the right to become sons of God. Being born again, regenerated, or becoming a son of God only occurs when we decide to receive Christ.

John 1:13, however, is referencing our first birth. Our parents decided by their will to come together and have intercourse which resulted in our creation. This was "of blood" and "of the will of flesh" and "of the will of man..." But we were not born again, or brought into a relationship with God through our parent's decision to have intercourse. It is not through their will that we are born again.

If our parents were Christians, their loving relationship with God is not hereditary or transmitted to us. That was their choice and if we are going to have a loving relationship with God, we must choose too. A real intimate and loving relationship with God requires our own personal choice. A loving relationship with God cannot be inherited at our first birth. We must have a second birth, an experience in which we choose to enter into a loving relationship with God.

What is physical is hereditary, but what is spiritual is not. That is why Jesus said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (Jn. 3:6). Our parents brought about our first birth by their will, giving us flesh, but God brings about our second birth, bringing us into a spiritual and loving relationship with Him.

John 1:13 is not saying that *our will* is not involved in our salvation, which would contradict so many other passages, but is simply saying that *the decision of our parents* did not give us a relationship with God or produce in us that which occurs at the second birth.

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We must remember the sound rules of Biblical hermeneutics when interpreting the Bible. One verse does not cancel out many other verses. A single verse should be interpreted in light of the many other verses that deal with that particular subject, especially if the single verse isn't clear but the other verses are. An unclear verse does not override many clear passages. Therefore, this verse which may have various interpretations does not override or cancel out the many clear passages which teach that salvation does require man's choice.

The gospel appeal that Peter made, "*Save yourselves from this untoward generation*" (Acts 2:40) certainly takes for granted the role of man's choice in the salvation experience. Man's choice and involvement in salvation is implied when the Bible says, "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation*" (Heb. 2:3). Salvation is something which we can neglect or fail to tend to. The Bible says "*whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rev. 22:17). Therefore, salvation is a choice of the will.

The Bible says that those who are saved are those who have "*submitted themselves* unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). Paul's gospel appeal took for granted man's role and choice in reconciliation when he said, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did *beseech* you by us: we *pray* you in Christ's stead, *be ye reconciled to God*" (2 Cor. 5:20). Commanding men to "be ye reconciled to God" only makes sense if this were their choice to make. Paul also said, "*Let us* therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). The phrase "let us" clearly indicates man's role, activity, or choice in obtaining mercy from God. Paul even said that by continuing in the truth, you will "*save thyself*" (1 Tim. 4:16). Paul also said, "I declare unto you the gospel, which I preached unto

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you, which also *ye received...*" (1 Cor. 15:1) And he said, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which *I also received...*" (1 Cor. 15:3).

Clearly, Christians are those who chose to receive the gospel instead of reject it. The Bible says that men need to "receive" Christ (Jn. 1:2; 1:11), but some men *refused* to believe in Him and *rejected* Him (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Acts 3:14; 1 Pet. 2:7). Receiving and rejecting are states of the will. Therefore, receiving Christ or rejecting Him is a personal volition.

The Bible says, "For ye were as sheep *going astray*; but are now *returned* unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:15). Just as we went astray by choice, we have returned by choice. The Greek word "returned" in this passage means to "to turn one's self about."³⁶ Therefore, those who return to the Lord are those who turn themselves around.

Those who
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Clement of Alexandria said, "We...have believed and are saved by voluntary choice."³⁷ Origen said, "We have freedom of the will and that we ourselves are the cause of our own ruin or our salvation..."³⁸ Pelagius said, "Grace indeed freely discharges sins, but with the consent and choice of the believer..."³⁹ Even Augustine once said, "The beginning of our salvation flows from the merciful God; but it is in our power to consent to his saving inspiration."⁴⁰ And Erasmus said, "By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them."⁴¹

Continuing or Falling Away is Man's Choice

Man not only has the ability to embrace or reject the gospel before conversion, but man still has the ability to embrace or reject the gospel after conversion. Just as conversion is man's choice, so also continuing in a converted state is man's choice. The unconverted are capable of choosing to enter into a converted state and therefore, the converted are capable of leaving a converted state. Since conversion is not the removal of our free will, but is rather the redirecting of it, the possibility of backsliding remains.

Richard S. Taylor said, "Notice how confusing and self-contradictory it is to tell the sinner to repent, to act, as though he were partially responsible for his own salvation, then tell him that, once saved, he is eternally secure. It implies that man has responsibility before conversion but none after. It means that a person has ability to get into the kingdom but none to get out. It gives sinners a free moral agency, but denies it to Christians. A strange dilemma! Surely if a sinner is morally responsible to become saved he is just as morally responsible to remain saved. It is absurd to infer that conversion destroys freedom of the will, or marks the end of probation. Therefore in order to be logical we must affirm that if a sinner has a personal part to play in obtaining entrance into the kingdom, he also has ability to get out again, and if he has no ability to get out of the kingdom, then he has no personal ability whereby he may get in. In such case, why the need of warning, of exhorting sinners? of preaching at all? If it is entirely a matter of unconditional grace and divine sovereignty any of the time, then it is a matter of grace and sovereignty all the time; and if in any sense the individual is responsible for his salvation, then that responsibility is retained throughout the entire period of his probation."⁴²

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After we have decided to come to Christ, we must choose to abide in Him. Salvation is *attained* by turning from sin and turning to Christ, and salvation is *maintained* by staying away from sin and abiding in Christ. A person *gets saved* through repentance and faith, and a person must *stay saved* through perseverance. Salvation is not permanent without perseverance.

There are many passages that teach that men must choose to abide in Christ, remain in the faith, and persevere in holiness to stay saved. And that if one does not continue in these, they will forfeit their salvation. The Bible says, “But *he that shall endure* unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13). The one who will be finally saved is the one who must do the enduring. There are some who do not endure in Christ but have fallen away. “From that time many of *his disciples* went back, and walked no more with him” (Jn. 6:66). Instead of choosing to stay with Christ, they decided to go back and to leave Him. “Then said Jesus to the Jews which believed on him, *if ye continue* in my words, then are ye my disciples indeed...” (Jn. 8:31). The phrase “if ye continue” implies that you may not continue. Continuation in Christ is not a guarantee or a certainty. The reason that Jesus told men “if ye continue” is because it is they themselves who must do the continuing. It is their free choice. Jesus didn’t say that He would preserve them, but that they needed to persevere. Jesus taught, “*If a man abide not* in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (Jn. 15:6). In other words, you must choose to stay in Christ in order to stay saved.

Continuation
in Christ
is not a
guarantee or
a certainty.

This is why Paul “exhorted *them* all, that with *purpose of heart* they would *cleave unto the Lord*” (Acts

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11:23). To stay with the Lord requires the determination of our own heart. That is why Paul also “*persuaded them to continue* in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43). If staying in the grace of God was not their choice, or was an unavoidable certainty, there would be no need for Paul to persuade them. They need to be persuaded to continue in God’s grace only if continuing in God’s grace is their choice, and if it is an avoidable choice. “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and *exhorting them to continue in the faith*, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The only reason you would need to exhort a person to stay in the faith is if staying in the faith was their choice and if they could choose not to continue in the faith.

Paul said, “And you that were sometimes alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight: *If ye continue in the faith* grounded and settled, and *be not moved away* from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven...(Col. 1:21-23)

Falling away from the faith is warned about all throughout the Bible, and the objective of warning is that the one who is being warned might make the right choice. Since Paul warned Christians about falling away from Christ, this assumes that abiding in Christ is their own choice and that it is a choice which they may or may not make.

The possibility of falling away from the faith is what Paul warned about when he said, “Well; *because of unbelief they were broken off*, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed lest he also spare not thee*. Behold therefore the goodness and the severity of God: on them which feel, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if thou*

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continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:20-21).

With such an abundantly clear teaching in Scripture, it is amazing that men like Charles Stanley would say that "believers who lose or abandon their faith will retain their salvation..."⁴³ The Bible teaches that we must choose to believe in order to get saved, and that we must choose to continue in the faith in order to stay saved. As Paul said, "because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith." If a believers forsakes the faith and turns to atheism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Mormonism, Islam, or any other faith, they do not "retain their salvation" as men like Charles Stanley dream but are "broken off" from the life that is in Christ.

Just as the Bible teaches that our own choice and role is necessary in getting saved, so it also teaches that our own decision and activity is necessary in order to stay saved. Paul said, "But *I* keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, *I myself should be a castaway*" (1 Cor. 9:27). In other words, if Paul did not keep his body under subjection, he himself would become a reprobate! If even the Apostle Paul said that he was capable of losing his salvation, then anyone can lose their salvation!

That is why Paul warned believers, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but *if ye* through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13). Whether we live after the flesh and die, or if we mortify the deeds of the body and live, is a matter of our own free choice. Whether we live or die depends on our decision. Paul was saying that we ourselves must do something to stay saved.

That staying saved required our own choice, or that we must do something to retain or maintain our salvation,

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was a repeated topic and truth for the Apostle Paul. He taught that remaining in the faith is the responsibility of the Christian, so that it depends upon us.

Paul said, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth *take heed lest he fall*” (1 Cor. 10:12);

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, *if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain*” (1 Cor. 15:1-2);

“We then, as workers together with God, *beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain*” (2 Cor. 6:1);

“For now we live, *if ye stand fast in the Lord*” (1 Thes. 3:8);

“*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*” (1 Tim. 4:16);

“Therefore *we ought to give more earnest heed* to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should *let them slip*. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, *if we neglect* so great salvation (Heb. 2:1-3);

“But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, *if we hold fast* the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (Heb. 3:6);

“*Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God*. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, *if we hold* the beginning of our confidence *stedfast unto the end*” (Heb. 3:12-14);

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“*Let us labour* therefore to enter into the rest, lest any man *fall* after the same example of unbelief” (Heb. 4:11);

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, *let us hold fast* our profession” (Heb. 4:14);

“*Let us draw near* with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. *Let us hold fast* the profession of our faith without wavering...” (Heb. 10:22-23);

“And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. *See that ye refuse not* him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on the earth, much more shall not we escape, *if we turn away from him* that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:24-25).

The Bible does not teach that once a person is saved, they are always saved. Jesus spoke of those who “receive the word” and “for a while believe” but “in time of temptation *fall away*” (Lk. 8:13). You cannot fall away from the faith unless you were, at one point, actually in the faith.

Jesus also spoke of the servant who was forgiven of his debt but then later, because of his conduct, had his pardon revoked, had his debt reinstated, and was punished (Matt. 18:23-35). This shows that just because God has forgiven us does not mean that He cannot take his forgiveness back and hold us liable for our actions. This parable shows that those who were once forgiven can still be punished later and that those who are punished may have been, at one point, forgiven. There are souls in hell that, at one point, might have been genuinely saved.

The Bible repeatedly teaches that those who have been once saved can afterward fall away. The Bible says, “For *if we sin willfully* after that we have received the

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knowledge of the truth, there remaineth *no more sacrifice for sins*, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, *who hath trodden* under foot the Son of God, and *hath counted* the blood of the covenant, wherewith *he was sanctified*, an unholy thing, and hath *done despite* unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:26-31).

“Brethren, if any of you do *err from the truth*, and one convert him; let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19-20).

“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, *to turn from the holy commandment* delivered unto them (2 Pet. 2:20-21).

“Ye therefore beloved, seeing ye know these things before, *beware* lest ye also, being *led away* with the error of the wicked, *fall from your own stedfastness*” (2 Pet. 3:17).

“Let that therefore *abide* in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. *If* that which ye have heard from the beginning *remain* in you, *ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father*” (1 Jn. 2:24).

“Whosoever transgresseth, and *abideth not* in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that *abideth* in the

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doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 Jn. 1:9).

Dan Corner said, “There is still the free will of the individual and his personal responsibility that are involved after salvation. If these weren’t a consideration, then no Christian would ever fall into sin or stray off into false doctrine, since God will always do his part perfectly!”⁴⁴ If salvation were by irresistible grace or a divine monergism as Calvinists claim, then falling away would not be a possibility and you would expect a person to always be obedient to God after conversion. Yet we see that even after some men were genuinely converted, they fell into gross sin and some even departed from the faith completely. What does this reveal but the truth of free will?

We know that after God gave Saul “another heart” (1 Sam. 10:9), and after “the Spirit of God came upon him” (1 Sam. 10:10), that he made the choice to sin against God (1 Sam. 15:19-35). Saul did not lose his free will ability to sin when he received a new heart and received the Spirit of God.

King David was a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 14:13), yet after this we know that king David sinned (2 Sam. 12:13). We can clearly see that those who are righteous are still free to become wicked, just as those who are wicked are free to become righteous. “The righteous” have the freedom or ability to “turneth from his righteousness” and “the wicked” have the freedom or ability to “turn from his wickedness” (Eze. 3:20; 18:26-27; 33:18-19).

We also have the examples of Peter and Judas. Both Peter and Judas were disciples of the Lord. Therefore, they both left all to follow Jesus (Lk. 14:33). They both picked up their cross (Lk. 14:27) and even loved Jesus more than their own family (Lk. 14:26).

Judas and Peter were both picked by Jesus specifically to cast out devils, heal the sick, and preach the

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gospel (Matt 10:1-27). No doubt Jesus would not pick unsaved men for such a task! Jesus put his public approval upon these men when he picked them to be His Apostles and commissioned them to preach His gospel.

Jesus even said that Judas' and Peter's names were written in the Lambs book of life (Lk. 10:20), that they were one of His sheep (Matt. 10:1-4, 16), that they had received His truth (Matt 10:1-4, 8), that their Father was God (Matt 10:1-4, 20), and that they both had a throne in Heaven upon which they would judge Israel (Matt. 19:28; Lk. 22:30). Yet, at one point, Jesus called Judas a "devil" (Jn. 6:70) and even called Peter "Satan" (Matt. 16:23).

Peter came to deny the Lord three times (Matt. 26:34). Peter was in danger of going to hell because Jesus had warned "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mk. 8:38). And Jesus also said, "But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:33). If Peter had died in his sin, Jesus Christ would have been ashamed of him before all of Heaven and would have publicly denied him.

The fact that Jesus said to Peter "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat... *when thou art converted*, strength thy brethren" (Lk. 22:31-32) shows that Peter was no longer saved during his denial of Christ. The good news is that Peter had repented of his sin and was restored to Jesus Christ. Three times Peter denied Christ, so three times Christ asked Peter if He loved him (Jn. 21:15-17), thus restoring him from his backsliding.

Like Peter, Judas also decided to backslide from faithful devotion to Jesus. Judas began to steal money from the group (Jn. 12:6) and he even came to betray the Lord

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(Mk. 14:10). Jesus knew from the very beginning of Judas' plot that he would betray Him (Jn. 6:64). But the Bible says that Judas was, at one point, a trusted friend of Jesus (Ps. 41:9; Jn 13:18). This explains why Judas kept the money (Jn 13:29). If Jesus trusted Judas as a friend, Judas must have been trust worthy at that time. Betrayal implies, presupposes, or takes for granted former loyalty, friendship, or trust. If Judas was not formerly a loyal and trust friend of Jesus, he could not have betrayed Him. If Judas was not a loyal and trusted friend, who was a genuine follower of Him, He would not have chosen Him to preach the gospel, heal the sick, or cast out devils in the first place. Judas became a devil (Jn. 6:70), but he was not always a devil, for Jesus asked, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" (Mk. 3:23).

Dan Corner said, "Judas was once a saved man who preached the gospel, healed the sick, and then went astray and ended up in eternal fire..."⁴⁵ John Fletcher said, "Judas was sincere, when Christ chose him to the apostleship."⁴⁶

Chrysostom said, "Judas was at first a child of the kingdom and heard it said to him with the disciples, 'You shall sit upon twelve thrones' but at last he became a child of hell..."⁴⁷ Ambrose said, "For both Saul and Judas were once good...Sometimes they are at first good, who afterward become and continue evil; and for this respect they are said to be written in the book of life, and blotted out of it."⁴⁸

Through his transgression, Judas fell from his apostleship (Acts 1:25). Even though Jesus told Judas that He was shedding His blood for him (Lk. 22:14-20), in the end, it would have been better for him to have never been born (Mk. 14:21). Judas lost his apostleship and lost his

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salvation because he sinned and was not restored through repentance as Peter was.

Calvinists, on the other hand, have taught that Judas was not saved but was “doomed to destruction to fulfill the Scriptures.” The only actual prophecy about Judas are the one's given by Christ, which He gave shortly before the betrayal occurred, after He saw these events unfolding (Mk. 26:21). It is worth noting that there was absolutely no Old Testament prophecy about Judas at all which he had to fulfill. Not a single Old Testament prophecy ever mentioned Judas or Christ's betrayal.

There was absolutely no Old Testament prophecy about Judas.

Usually Acts 1:16 is referred to in an attempt to say otherwise, but a closer examination reveals that this is not the case. “Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus” (Acts 1:16). And what Scripture needs to be fulfilled? That somebody needed to betray Jesus? No! Peter said, “For it is written in the book of Psalms, let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his brishoprick let another take” (Acts 1:20). This was no prophecy about Judas' betrayal that needed to be fulfilled. The Scripture that Peter said needed to be fulfilled was that somebody need to take Judas' place. Therefore, “Matthias... was numbered with the eleven apostles” (Acts 1:26).

The Scripture Peter referred to was not a prophecy about Judas, as the original passages speak in the plural but Peter modified them to the singular. Ps. 69:25 says let “*their* habitation” be desolate, but Peter changes it to “*his* habitation...” It says “let none dwell in *their* tents...” Peter was not quoting from a prophecy about Judas, since he had

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to change the passage to apply it to Judas, and since he was actually merging two different Scriptures together. He referenced Ps. 69:25 about his habitation being desolate, and referenced Ps. 109:8 about another taking his office. Peter merged these two verses together and applied them to the current situation because there was a vacancy amongst the apostles that needed to be fulfilled.

What needs to be understood is that in Hebrew culture, they applied Scriptures to applicable situations just as a Christian might use a Psalm to describe their day, an experience they are going through, or to describe how they are feeling. The Hebrews used the Scriptures in the same manner. The Scriptures were indeed “fulfilled” in these situations, but not prophetically. They were fulfilled through parallelism. Scriptures were “fulfilled” by Judas through similarity or applicability.

These are known as “analogous fulfillments.” Hebrew writers would take Old Testament passages, which were specifically about Old Testament events, and apply them to New Testament events because of similarity. This is done by the Hebrew writer Matthew who applied Hos. 11:1 which talked about God calling Israel out of Egypt and he applies it to Jesus Christ in Matt. 2:15. Jesus also applied Ps. 41:9, which was talking about David’s betrayal by his trusted friend and counselor Ahithophel, and applied it to his own situation with Judas in Jn. 13:18.

It was not that these New Testament events were prophetic fulfillments of these Old Testament passages, but that these events did fulfill these passages through similarity or applicability. Another example is how Matthew applies the passage of thirty pieces of silver which is found in Zech. 11:12-13 and applies it to Judas’ betrayal in Matt. 27:9, when the original passage has nothing to do with Judas or the betrayal of Christ.

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Jesus, as a Hebrew, used the Scriptures the same way. Jesus Christ said, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition; *that the Scripture might be fulfilled*” (Jn. 17:12). Jesus did not say which Scripture it was that was fulfilled, but we know that since there were no prophetic passages regarding Judas in the Old Testament, the Scriptural fulfillment Jesus referred to must have been that of fulfillment through similarity or applicability.

Regarding the phrase “*that it might be fulfilled,*” Dr. S. T. Bloomfield said that “this Scriptural expression sometimes means that such a thing so happened that this or that passage would appear quite suitable or applicable to it...”⁴⁹ Moses Stuart said that “the New Testament writers often used Old Testament phraseology, which originally was applied in a very different connection. And they do this because such phraseology expresses, in an apt and forcible manner, the thought which they desired then to convey.”⁵⁰ Dr. Edward Robinson said, “The phrase is often used to express historical or typical parallelisms.”⁵¹

These type of passages are known as *ecbatic* as opposed to *telic*. L. D. McCabe explained the difference. He said, “The telic use implies purpose, determination, prediction, and foreordination, while the ecbatic use implies only consequence, parallelism, application, or mere illustration.”⁵² The betrayal of Judas was not therefore a foreordained event which was necessary in order to fulfill prophecy, but Judas’ betrayal was his own free choice which fulfilled Scripture through parallelism.

As already shown, the Scriptures plainly teach that Judas was a genuine disciple or follower of Christ who fell from his apostleship and lost his salvation through his sin. To teach otherwise is to simply misrepresent or misunderstand

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the Scriptures. Jesus Himself said that the Father gave Judas to Him but that He had lost him (Jn. 17:12). Judas chose to be a disciple (Lk. 9:23; 14:27), then Jesus chose him to be an apostle (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 6:70), but then Judas fell from his apostleship by his choice to transgress (Acts 1:25). Judas lost both his salvation and apostleship through sin.

As the Bible says, "He that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own soul; but he that despiseth his ways shall die" (Prov. 19:16). Paul said that if a believer violates their conscience, even by simply eating meat offered to idols when they believe it is wrong, that they commit "sin" and are therefore "damned" (Rom. 14:23). If a person chooses to do something which they believe is wrong in their conscience, even if it isn't wrong, it shows that their heart isn't right with God. They have a disobedient and rebellious will toward God.

Judas lost
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apostleship
through sin.

Whenever a man does what He knows or believes is wrong, His own conscience condemns Him. And if our own heart condemns us because we are in conscious rebellion, how much more does God condemn us because He is greater than our hearts and knows all things (1 Jn. 3:20).

That is why Paul said that those believers who do what they believe to be wrong are in danger of being among those who "perish" (1 Cor. 8:11). What can we conclude from this but that a believer can in fact lose their salvation through sin? Paul was clearly teaching that those who are saved can still become damned and those with eternal life can still perish, if they choose to sin and become sinful in their hearts.

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If salvation cannot be lost through sin, salvation is undeniably a license to sin. What is a license but permission to do a certain action with impunity? To have a license to sin is to be able to sin without fear of punishment. Therefore, if salvation cannot be lost through sin, or if a believer's soul cannot be damned for sin, then a believer has a license to sin. Only if we are still liable to punishment, or subject to penalty, can it be said that we do not have a license to sin.

While I was on the University of West Florida in Pensacola open air preaching, a student in the crowd said that God's grace and forgiveness in Christ was literally a license to sin and that we can sin every day without fear of hell. I responded by saying, "You lose your salvation every time that you sin." This is why you must repent every time that you sin.

If salvation
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But there are those, like this man named Bray, who falsely teaches that "A Christian who commits sin certainly does not lose his salvation..."⁵³ You cannot trust your wives or daughters around men who believe like that! While a friend of mine was preaching on East Carolina University in Greenville, NC, a local pastor also came out to the campus to open air preach the same day he was there. However, unlike what my friend preached, this pastor preached that even if a Christian were to rape a woman he would not lose his salvation! You certainly wouldn't want your wife or daughters to go to his church!

The Bible, in opposition to what that pastor said, warns that those who sin will be blotted out of God's book but those who overcome will not be blotted out. "And the Lord said unto Moses, whosoever hath *sinned* against me, him will I *blot out* of my book" (Exo. 32:33). "He that

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overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will *not blot out* his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:5). The man who stays saved is the one who overcomes sin, rather than being overcome by sin.

Paul said, “What shall we say then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law, but under grace? God forbid!” (Rom. 6:15). In commenting on this passage, Pelagius said, “If you sin, you will not be under grace... If you wish to be in the service of sins, you will begin to subject yourself to the judgment of the law, which exacts punishment against sinners: but if you obey righteousness, you are not under the law, but under grace.”⁵⁴

Who is it that receives the mercy of God? It is those who turn away from their sins (Isa. 55:7; Prov. 28:13; Acts 8:22). Who is it that receives the wrath of God? It is those who remain in their sins (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 2:8-9; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6). Anyone who is sinning is under the wrath of God because the wrath of God is impartial (Ex. 32:33; Deut. 10:17; Rom. 2:8-9; 2 Cor. 10:6; Col. 3:25; 2 Pet. 1:17; 1 Jn. 3:15; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Even if a believer returns to his sins, after he has repented of his sins, he is returning to the wrath of God. The Bible says that “the wrath of God” “commeth” “upon the children of disobedience. *Be not ye therefore partakers with them*” (Eph. 5:6-7). Because the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient, we should not be partakers with them in their disobedience, lest we too partake of the wrath of God.

While there can be no doubt that men are not saved by the merit of their obedience, there can also be no doubt that men are damned by the demerit of their disobedience. We are not made right with God by earning it through our

Anyone
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obedience to Him, but at the same time, we are not right with God while we are in disobedience to Him. The Bible says, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom. 1:18), and the Bible says, “indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon *every* soul of man that doeth evil” (Rom. 2:8-9). Paul even warned believers, “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath” (Rom. 2:5). If a believer sins and does not repent, but instead have an impenitent heart, they are storing up the wrath of God.

Consider the warnings the Bible gives against “whosoever.” The Bible says “*whosoever*” will be in danger of hell if they break the commandments and teach others to do so (Matt. 5:19); if they are angry with a brother without cause or calls them a fool (Matt. 5:22); if they commit adultery by looking with lust (Matt. 5:28); if they publicly deny Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:33); if they blaspheme the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:32); if they seek to save their life (Matt. 16:25); if they cause little children to stumble (Mk. 9:42); if they commit sin (Jn. 8:34-35); if they judge others in hypocrisy (Rom. 2:1); if they resist lawful government (Rom. 13:2); if they try to earn their salvation by their works (Gal. 5:4); if they are a friend of the world (Jas. 4:4); if they hate their brother (1 Jn. 3:15); if they do not abide in Christ and in His doctrine (2 Jn. 1:9); and if they love or make lies (Rev. 22:15). These passages do not warn “unbelievers” only, but specifically warns “whosoever” which means everyone.

This is why God chastens us if we are disobedient, so that we would not perish with the world. Paul said that “we are *chastened* of the Lord, that we should not be *condemned* with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32). This implies that if He did not chasten us, or if we did not listen to the chastening, we would in fact perish with the world. Make no mistake about

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it; it is possible for us to be condemned with the world if we do not heed the chastening of the Lord!

Someone might object and ask “Doesn’t God forgive us of our past, present, and future sins when we are converted?” The answer is no, as that would amount to a license to sin. God grants amnesty, clemency, or pardon through Christ’s blood for our *past sins* (Rom. 3:25; 2 Pet. 1:9), but He does not grant immunity or impunity for *future sins* (Jer. 7:10; Matt. 18:25-35; Rom. 6:1-2; 18:13; Heb. 10:26-31; Jud. 1:4). You cannot be forgiven in advance because you cannot be forgiven without repentance, and because you cannot be forgiven of that which you are not yet even guilty of!

When we repent, we are forgiven of all the sins that we are guilty of, but we do not have permission to continue in sin. If we sin, we can repent (Lk. 13:3; Jas. 5:19-20) and seek forgiveness (Matt. 6:12; 1 Jn. 1:9). In this way we can be restored (Ps. 51:9; Jer. 3:22; 4:1; Lk. 15:20; 22:32; Rom. 11:23; Jas. 5:19-20). A sinner *gains* salvation through conversion, a believer *retains* salvation through perseverance, and a backslider *regains* salvation through repentance. But if a believer returns to his sins and does not repent and seek forgiveness, they remain in a condemned state under God.

Only the narrow road leads to life while the broad road leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13-14). Therefore, those who forsake the narrow road and are once again walking on the broad road are no longer heading for life but are once again heading for destruction, unless they forsake the broad road and return to the narrow way. You will not find the destination of life if you abandon the road that leads there, and you will not avoid the destination of destruction if you continue to walk on the road that ends up there.

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Someone might say, "But I thought that there was now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus?" Yes, but you cannot cut a verse in half. There are qualifications as to who is in Christ and who has no condemnation. The rest of the verse says, "...who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1). This qualification makes a tremendous difference. If we are producing the fruits of the Spirit, we have no need to feel condemned since "against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:23), but if we are producing the works of the flesh, we ought to feel condemned because those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

Charles Finney said that "there is no condemnation to those whose faith secures in them, an actual conformity to the divine will. To all others, there is."⁵⁵ He also said, "There can scarcely be a more dangerous error than to say, that while we are conscious of present sin, we are or can be in a state of acceptance with God."⁵⁶ If a believer sins, they should not feel safe and secure as if they are right with God, but they should feel condemned and fear for their soul! Those who repent of their sins and persevere in the faith are secure and safe, but those who return to their sins or who depart from the faith ought to feel insecure because they are in grave danger. They should repent and ask God for forgiveness.

Which believer has never asked God for forgiveness since first coming to Christ? All of us probably have. But whenever a person confesses their sin, repents of their sin, and ask for forgiveness for their sin, they are assuming that they are not already forgiven. Charles Finney said, "...if Christians are not condemned when they sin, they cannot be forgiven, for forgiveness is nothing else than setting aside the penalty. And therefore, if they are not condemned, they cannot properly pray for forgiveness. In fact, it is unbelief in

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them to do so.”⁵⁷ Jesus actually taught us to pray in such a way as to take for granted that we are not forgiven of present or future sins. If a believer sins we are taught to pray “forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12). This implies that they are not already forgiven.

The Scriptures teach that sins are not forgiven in advance but must be forgiven through repentance as they occur; otherwise God has given us a license to sin. If we can now sin with impunity and immunity, or be forgiven while we continue to sin, than salvation is nothing more than having a license to sin and grace is the accomplice of iniquity.

Gordon C. Olson said that “man must repent and stop the flow of sin in order to be brought to the point where he is not under condemnation... If God forgave sin apart from repentance, man would be in the predicament of continuing ‘in sin that grace might increase’ (Rom. 6:1)... The Bible says nothing about the forgiveness of present or future sins, and everywhere implies, what our common sense affirms, that all sin brings condemnation and must be repented of and confessed before forgiveness can take place through faith in the atonement. We must repent, then, to be free from guilt and condemnation.”⁵⁸

Martin Luther, on the other hand, seemed to teach that Christ has given us a license to sin when he said, “Be a sinner and sin boldly... No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery thousands of times each day.”⁵⁹

Contrary to what Luther said, Jesus Christ taught, “But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that is not aware of, and shall cut him

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asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 24:49-51). The servants of the Lord Jesus Christ have not received a license to sin. Our master does not tell us that we are “eternally secure” or “once saved, always saved” while we continue to sin, but rather teaches that we are insecure or in grave danger whenever we find ourselves in wickedness.

Some Calvinists have thought that the Bible teaches unconditional eternal security because the Bible says, “ye were *sealed* with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13). But a seal can be broken. That is why the Bible says, “And *grieve not* the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 2:30). Since the Holy Spirit is our seal, we must not grieve Him. It is the Holy Spirit that leads us and guides us in the faith, so if we grieve away the Holy Spirit through sin and unbelief, our situation is hopeless.

Calvinists also have appealed to Paul’s statement to the Philippians to teach that “the perseverance of the saints” is a guarantee. Paul said, “being *confident* of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Php. 1:6). Paul was saying that he was *confident* in the Philippians because they were facing persecutions and were overcoming. Paul did not have this confidence for all believers. He said to the Galatians, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Gal. 1:6). Paul did not express to the Galatians the same confidence that he expressed to the Philippians. To take what Paul said to a specific Church in a specific situation, “that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,” and apply it to all believers in all situations, is to misunderstand and misuse this text.

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Calvinists also will appeal to the book of life for unconditional eternal security. They think that the elect, or the saved, have their names safely and securely written in the book of life even before they are saved, even before the creation of the world! But the names that have been “written in the book of life *from* the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8; 17:8), does not mean that the book of life was completed and finalized before creation as they have mistakenly assumed. The Greek word “from” actually means “since,”⁶⁰ as it refers to a “distance of time.”⁶¹ It means that the book of life has been in the process of being written over a “distance of time,” or specifically “since” the foundation of the world. It was started in Genesis and is completed in Revelation. Those persons whose names are not in the book of life by the end will be cast into hell and will not inherit the kingdom of God (Rev. 20:15).

The book of
life is in
the process
of being
written
and edit.

It was not that all who are going to be saved is already determined or presently certain. This explains how being blotted out of the book of life is a real possibility (Exo. 32:32-33; Deut. 29:20; Ps. 62:20; Rev. 3:5). The book of life is not complete or finalized right now if names are being removed from it or if names can still be erased. The book of life is in the process of being written and edited as the future is in the process of unfolding, developing, and changing. Therefore, the book of life is no grounds to affirm unconditional eternal security.

The words of Jesus have also been appealed to for “once saved, always saved” when He said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I will give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (Jn. 10:27-28). While it is true that no man on earth or demon in

hell can force you out of the hands of God, that doesn't mean that you are not free to walk out yourself. The Bible says, "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him... if ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chron. 15:2). God does not hold us captive or force us to be saved. Those who have been saved have freely come, and those who stay saved choose to freely stay. We are free to leave whenever we want. Who is it that Christ said shall never perish? Did he say those who depart from the faith will never perish? No. He said that those who "hear my voice" and "follow me" will have "eternal life" and "never perish..." If a person stops following Christ, they cannot hope to have eternal life but must fear damnation.

No being
is more
mistreated
or treated
more unjustly
than God.

God is supremely valuable and supremely good and is therefore worthy of our supreme affection and supreme devotion. This is what He demands and what justice demands, as the Scripture say, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mk. 12:30). To love God is the greatest commandment; therefore to fail to love Him is the greatest sin. No being is more mistreated or treated more unjustly than God. God is constantly and continually being defrauded of what He deserves.

He is rightfully a "jealous God" (Ex. 20:5), who will not tolerate idols in our lives. He is rightfully jealous for our affection and obedience as He is worthy of it. If a person does not love God supremely, but loves something else above God, they are an idolater and will go to hell not Heaven. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, *nor idolaters*, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals.... Shall

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inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10). We cannot have an open marriage with God, or an adulterous affair with the world, and expect to live in God’s house as if we were a faithful wife! The Bible says, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:15).

Joseph Alleine said, “...thou canst not be married to Christ except divorced from sin...”⁶² Our relationship with God is not an open marriage where he allows us to sleep around with the world. God rebuked Israel for playing the whore and committing whoredom (Jer. 13:27). He demands complete and perfect loyalty to Him. God even divorced Israel because of their unfaithfulness. “And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I put her away, and given her a bill of divorce...” (Jer. 3:8). God demands faithfulness and loyalty to remain in a right relationship with Him. Christ demands that we abide in Him in order to stay saved. If Christians go whoring after sin and the world, they too will be given a bill of divorce from the Lord.

I have heard it said, “If a person backslides, it shows that they were never saved to begin with.” But it is self-evident that only those who were in the faith are capable of falling away from it. You cannot fall away from the faith if you were never in the faith, and the Bible repeatedly speaks of those who have fallen away from the faith (Matt. 18:21-34; Mk. 4:17; Lk. 8:13; Jn. 6:66; Acts 1:25 w. Matt. 19:28; 2 Thes. 2:3; 1 Tim. 1:5-6; 1:19-20; 4:1; 5:15; 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:10; Heb. 3:12-15; 4:1-11; 6:6; 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Jud. 1:5). “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck...” (1 Tim. 1:19).

Do those who depart from the faith remain saved? The answer is no. How can a person who departs from the

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faith be justified by faith? If we are justified by faith, we are only justified while we have faith. If we cease to have faith, we cease to be justified. Therefore, the idea of staying saved after departing from the faith is nonsense. Yet there were men like J. F. Strombeck who say, “There is no need for continuous faith on the part of the saved person...”⁶³

But when Jesus said “whosoever *believeth*” will have “everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16) and that he that “*believeth*” will be “saved” (Mk. 16:16), He spoke in the continuous present tense. In other words, whoever believes and continues to believe will be saved and have everlasting life.

Whoever believes and continues to believe will be saved and have everlasting.

This is why the Bible repeatedly says that final salvation is conditional upon perseverance unto the end (Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Mk. 13:13; Acts 13:43; Acts 14:22; Heb. 3:6; 3:14; 2 Pet. 2:20). Jesus said, “he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 10:22). Paul said, “To them who by *patient continuance* in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” (Rom. 2:7-10).

Notice the compare and contrast. Well doing is contrasted with being contentious. Obeying the truth is contrasted with obeying unrighteousness. Working good is contrasted with doing evil. And eternal life is contrasted with indignation and wrath.

It is the former who will have eternal life and the latter who will be damned. Those who continue in well

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doing, who obey the truth, and who work what is good are those who receive eternal life. Those who obey unrighteousness and do evil will receive indignation and wrath. If a person does not continue on in well doing and in obedience to the truth, but joins those who obey unrighteousness and do evil, they will receive the wrath of God instead of receiving eternal life.

What is it that determines if we continue in the faith or not? Since men are told to persevere and continue on, it is evidently their choice to make. Perseverance is our choice to continue following the Lord despite all the hardships and persecutions. Without the choice of perseverance there will be no final salvation. Just as initial salvation requires our choice of repentance and faith, final salvation requires our choice of perseverance.

Contrary to what Martin Luther said, that "man... when he is re-created does and endeavors *nothing* towards his perseverance in that kingdom; but the Spirit *alone* works both blessings in us, regenerating us, and preserving us when regenerate, *without ourselves*,"⁶⁴ the Bible teaches that perseverance is our own free choice and responsibility which God will help us with but won't force to happen.

If a believer does not persevere in the faith and in a holy life, it is not God's fault but their own fault. That is because it is ultimately not up to God but it is up to them. If perseverance was guaranteed, or if it was impossible to fall away, telling men to persevere would make no sense since it is not their choice to make. Jesus' exhortation to persevere only makes sense if perseverance is man's choice, something which he may or may not do. Falling away or continuing on in the faith are, therefore, both possibilities because of man's free will.

Following Christ, staying faithful to Christ, or forsaking Christ are all decisions that we can make. Paul

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taught that men are sinners by choice, that men repent by choice, and that men can backslide by choice, all when he said, “For if *I* build again the things which *I* destroyed, *I* make myself a transgressor” (Gal. 2:18). This shows both our role in destroying the sin in our lives and our choice in reviving those sins, if we so choose. If we turn back to our sins, it is our own doing and not God’s doing, thus Paul said, “I make myself a transgressor...” If a person returns to their sins and does not persevere in the faith, they have nobody to blame but themselves, since perseverance is not something which God irresistibly causes us to do, but something that we must freely choose under His influence.

We can clearly see then that the Bible teaches that converting to Christ and continuing in Christ is our choice. We must get saved and remain saved through the determination of our will to repent, believe, and persevere unto the end. Salvation is attained, maintained, and at times even regained all by free choice. No doubt God helps us in all of this but He does not force us to do any of it. It is man’s free choice from start to finish and in between.

When Jesus turned to his Apostles and said “Will ye also go away?” (Jn. 6:67) The Greek word “will” actually means to “choose or prefer,”⁶⁵ “to will, have in mind, intent... to be resolved or determined, to purpose.”⁶⁶ Commenting on this passage, Cyprian said, “Therein preserving the law inviolate, whereby man is left to his liberty of choosing for himself either death or salvation...”⁶⁷

CHAPTER EIGHT

MAN'S NEED TO OBEY THE GOSPEL

As shown in the previous chapter, repentance from sin, impenitence against light, faith in Jesus, unbelief in God, a relationship with the Lord, conversion to Christ, faithfulness to Christ, and backsliding from the faith are all free choices of man's will. These are decisions which are originated by the faculty of the will, that is, they are created by the incipency of the will.

Those who repent are free to become impenitent, just as those who are impenitent are free to become repentant. Those who have faith are free to choose to have unbelief, just as those who have unbelief are free to choose to have faith. Those who have a relationship with God are free not to know Him, and those who do not know Him are free to choose to. Those who are converted to Christ are free to reject Him, and those who reject Him are free to know Him. Those who are faithful to Christ are free to backslide from the faith, and those who backslide from the faith are free to remain faithful.

Man's will is always involved in these experiences and man always retains the power of contrary choice when he is in any of these states.

Biblical Election & Predestination

Some might be thinking, “If salvation requires man’s free and personal choice, what about election and predestination?” The answer is actually simple. Many have turned an issue of simplicity into an issue of complexity. The reason that many fall into serious error on this topic is because they fail to consider the circumstances and culture which Paul was writing in. Historical context is a necessary consideration in proper hermeneutics. Men read the writings of Paul through the eyes of the Reformers rather than through the eyes of the Early Church.

The Lord predetermined to have a holy people from both the Jews and Gentiles.

In the days of the Early Church the Jews were considered the “chosen people.” The Gentiles, on the other hand, were not seen by many as being chosen by God. Many of the Jews were even outraged at the thought that God would seek after the Gentiles (Lk. 4:25-29), not remembering that Israel as a nation was

intended to be a light and a blessing to all nations (Gen. 22:18; 26:4; Isa. 42:6; 49:6; Acts 13:47).

Predestination, you could say, is God’s predetermined plan and destiny for nations. The Lord predetermined to have a holy people from both the Jews and Gentiles. The question during the time of the Early Church was not, “Has God predestined individuals?” But the controversial question was, “has God also to the Gentiles given repentance unto life?” (Acts 11:18) It was not that God predestined individuals to be saved or damned but that God also offers salvation to the Gentiles so that they too are chosen by God. God’s heart for the entire world and all

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nations is seen in the atonement (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 2:2) and in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15).

Paul's specific ministry was to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18; Gal. 2:7; Eph. 3:8). That is why we see Paul confirming to the Church of Ephesus that "He has *chosen us*" (Eph. 1:4). The Church in Ephesus was made up of Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:17). The Jews were not the only ones chosen by God, but the Gentiles also were. This was a revelation, or a mystery, not fully revealed until the time of the New Testament. "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery... Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister... that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:1-9).

In Eph. 2:11-19, Paul told the Gentile believers that God brought them into the commonwealth of Israel, whereas before they were alienated and were far off, now they are brought in by the blood of Christ. Christ removed the wall of separation which was the ordinances of the Law of Moses, such as the one which required circumcision, so that God can make twain one new man of both Jew and Gentile. Now the Gentiles are fellow citizens with the saints and the household of God. The election of both the Jews and Gentiles is a major theme all throughout Ephesians.

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Paul taught that salvation is “not to that only which is of the law,” which are the Jews, “but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham,” which are the Gentile believers. Therefore, Abraham “is the father of us all,” both Jew and Gentile (Rom. 4:16).

Since Paul’s ministry was to the Gentiles, we see Paul’s extensive defense of the election of the Gentiles all throughout Romans, especially in Romans chapter nine, ten, and eleven. “Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Rom. 9:24). Salvation was now made available to the Gentiles. “What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith” (Rom. 9:30). Clearly, Gentiles have also been chosen by God for salvation.

Election is
national,
not
individual.

God’s election of the Gentiles was always a part of His plan, that is, it was predetermined. “As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people, and her beloved, which was not beloved” (Hosea 2:23; Rom. 9:25; 1 Pet. 2:10). God’s heart had always been for all people. God has always planned to bless all nations (Gen. 22:18). “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8).

In Ephesians, Paul continually uses the words “us” and “we” in relation to being chosen by God. He never uses the words “I” or “you.” That is because election is national, not individual. The Jews and Gentiles were both chosen people, but God did not decide which individual Jews or which individual Gentiles would choose to be saved and become part of His elect or precious people. As Jed Smock

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said, "Election includes all Jews and Gentiles potentially, but no man unconditionally."¹

Many of the Jews thought that they were unconditionally elected to salvation because they were children of Abraham (Matt. 3:9; Lk. 3:8). We must understand that neither salvation nor damnation is hereditary but requires personal choice and is, therefore, conditional instead of unconditional. The cutting off of Israel and the grafting in of the Gentiles was not unconditional but conditional. The Gentiles were grafted in because they believed but Israel was cut off because they believed not (Rom. 11:20-23). Jesus told the unbelieving Jews, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). God is completely justified in this, as God "hath... mercy on whom he will" (Rom. 9:18). God has chosen to have mercy on those who choose to repent and believe, while God has chosen to condemn those who refuse to repent and believe in Christ. "For many are *called*, but few are *chosen*" (Matt. 22:14). That is because God only *chooses* to save those who obey the *call*.

The Bible explicitly says that men make themselves vessels of honor by choosing to purge themselves of their sins (2 Tim. 2:21). On the other hand, if men choose to persist in their sin, God makes them into vessels of wrath because they have fitted themselves for destruction (Jer. 18:4; Rom. 9:21-22). God does not do this eagerly but through "longsuffering" (Rom. 9:22), because He wanted them to repent (2 Pet. 3:9). But Israel had marred itself and fitted itself for destruction by persisting in sin and ultimately rejecting the Messiah. Therefore, God made them a vessel to receive His wrath. Israel cannot object to this since the potter has power over the clay (Rom. 9:21). God can use His own

wise judgment and just discretion in appointing some to eternal life (*believers*) and others to damnation (*unbelievers*).

God, who is the potter, was not at fault for the marred clay since the Lord originally intended to make Israel a different type of vessel. His original plan was not for them to be a vessel of wrath. “And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O House of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them” (Jer. 18:4-10).

The Lord originally intended to make Israel a different type of vessel.

God had an original plan but had to change His plans when the clay was marred. Making Israel a vessel of wrath was not God’s plan from the beginning. God made Israel a vessel for wrath but it was only because of their sinful choices. John Wesley said, “The vessels of wrath - Those who had moved his wrath by still rejecting his mercy. Fitted for destruction - By their own willful and final impenitence.”² Pelagius said, “By filling up the quota of their sins they became vessels worthy of wrath, and by their own doing they became vessels prepared for destruction.”³

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Someone might ask, "If Romans chapter nine is talking about God's predetermined plan for nations, and not necessarily individuals, why does it refer to Jacob and Esau who were individuals?" Actually, by choosing Israel over Esau, God was choosing one nation over the other. Jacob and Esau represented two nations. Jacob represented the Israelites and Esau represented the Edomites. "And the Lord said unto her, *Two nations are in thy womb*, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23).

Paul uses this scenario or example in his defense of the election of the Gentiles and the cutting off of the Jews to show or illustrate that God has the right and authority to do this. But Paul was not saying that Jacob was chosen unconditionally for salvation and Esau was chosen unconditionally for damnation. There is nothing in the Old or New Testament which states such a thing. In fact, the opposite is seen since Paul says that the chosen people were cut off and the Gentiles were grafted in.

Since Jacob was not chosen to unconditional salvation because Israel was cut off, we cannot assume that Esau was chosen to unconditional reprobation. It is a very strange and wild interpretation of Romans nine to say that God unconditionally and eternally choose Jacob to be saved and Esau to be damned. God choose the one and not the other to be the "chosen people" who would inhabit the promise land, be separated from the rest of the world, and from which the Messiah would come. But regarding their personal salvation it says absolutely nothing at all.

Regarding the words predestination and election, Jed Smock said, "Biblically these terms are primarily associated with the call of the Jews and Gentiles to join together, 'to make in himself of twain one new man (the Church), so

making peace,' between these two estranged people (Eph 2:15). These terms should not be associated with some fictitious Calvinistic notion, that God unconditionally elected before Creation certain individuals to eternal salvation and reprobated the rest of humanity to eternal destruction."⁴

When predestination is properly understood in Scriptural and historical context, this doctrine shows us that God wants everyone to be saved, both Jew and Gentile, and not that He has arbitrarily elected some individuals and capriciously reprobated other individuals for no other reason

than the good pleasure of His will. To take the doctrine of predestination and twist it to mean that God doesn't want everyone to be saved is to greatly distort the wonderful Biblical truth of predestination.

Had God known that they were going to sin He would not have created them.

The very idea that God's plan for the majority of the world is for them to sin and be damned is contrary to the entire truth of the Bible. While it may burst our theological bubble and preconceived ideas of God, when the Lord repented of creating mankind when He saw how they were continually choosing to sin, this implies that had God known that they were going to sin He would not have created them in the first place (Gen. 6:5-6). This explains why God did not create hell with mankind in mind (Matt. 25:41). God did not create men to sin and neither did God create hell for men.

Contrary to what John Calvin taught, that many men were "*made and formed*"⁵ for damnation, the Bible says mankind was created for the pleasure of God (Rev. 4:11) and that God takes no pleasure in sin or in the damnation of the wicked (Gen. 6:5-6; Ps. 5:4; Eze. 33:11). Therefore, mankind was created to live holy and not to be sinful. Men were made to have a relationship with God, not to be damned. Clearly,

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God did not create mankind to be sinful and damned but God created all of us for His pleasure, to glorify Him by walking in the beauty of holiness.

God's plan from the beginning was for Jews and Gentiles to live holy. God "hath chosen us [Jew & Gentile] in him before the foundation of the world, *that we should be holy and without blame before him in love...*" (Eph. 1:4) Holiness is the moral quality of a person's state of will and love is a personal choice. Therefore, what we have been chosen to is in no way contrary to our will or independent of our will, but our will must be involved. God did not choose for us to be holy or loving despite our choice, since this is impossible or an intrinsic contradiction, but He chose for us to be holy and loving by our free choice.

Biblical predestination, when it is properly understood, is not at all contrary to the free will or natural ability of man, nor is it contrary to the Biblical truth that salvation requires man's free choice. Election does not coerce anyone to obey the gospel; neither does election hinder anyone from obeying the gospel. The gospel is free to be obeyed by both Jew and Gentile. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17).

God's call to men to convert from death to life, from sin to holiness, from damnation to salvation, is a call which is made to all. God did not arbitrarily choose from all of eternity a few for Heaven and most for hell. God's decree regarding man's salvation is, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). He has left it up to our own choice.

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Calvinists will ask, “But didn’t Jesus say that you have not chosen me but I have chosen you?” Yes, in Jn. 15:16 Jesus said that. But *who* did He choose and *what* did He choose them for? Such qualifications make a world of difference.

The answer is that He chose twelve men for apostleship. When Jesus said that He chose them and that they did not choose Him, Jesus was talking about apostleship and not salvation. The Bible says, “...the *apostles* whom he had *chosen*” (Acts 1:2). Jesus already said, “If any man *will* come after me...” (Matt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23). To “will” in the Greek means to “have in mind, intend,” “to be resolved or determined, to purpose.”⁶ Those whom Jesus chose to be Apostles were among those who already chose to come after him. “And when it was day, he called unto him his *disciples*, and of them *he chose* twelve, whom also he named *apostles*...” (Lk. 6:13) Jesus chose, out of those who were already choosing to be his disciples, who would be his apostles. They chose to be his disciples but Jesus chose them to be his apostles.

Albert Barnes rightly understood this and said, “It refers here, doubtless, to his choosing or electing them to be apostles...”⁷ It was common for Christ to talk to his apostles in this manner. He said, “I know whom I have *chosen*” (Jn. 13:18). “Have I not *chosen* you twelve” (Jn. 6:70). And he said, “I have *chosen* you” (Jn. 15:19). Jesus did not talk to all of his disciples this way, but only to his twelve apostles. To take what Jesus said about His apostles and apply it to all believers is to terribly misunderstand or grossly distort the Word of God.

In order to teach an arbitrary and individual predestination and election from the Bible, Calvinists have to twist verses and give their own definitions to words. Calvinists have made much use of the word “elect” in their

theology. They use the word to teach that Christians do not have a free will but are irresistibly chosen by God to salvation. But the word “elect” itself does not necessarily imply an arbitrary choice on God’s part to coerce certain individuals to be saved. The Greek word for “elect” means “choice, select, i.e. the best of its kind or class, excellence pre eminent: applied to certain individual Christians.”⁸ “Elect” in the Greek can even be translated as “precious.”⁹

So when the Bible talks about the holy Church being the “elect” (Mk. 13:27), and even the holy angels as “elect” (1 Tim. 5:21), it means that they are the most precious, pre eminent, excellent, or the best of their kind. This is what the Scriptures means when it says that Jesus Christ was elect. “Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, *elect, precious*, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Pet. 2:6). The “elect” are those holy beings who are very precious and choice in the eyes of the Lord, as one may talk of “choice fruits” or “choice flowers” being the best and most precious of their kind. The Bible never describes sinful or unsaved men as “elect.” It is holy men, holy angels, and holy Jesus who are called elect or precious to God.

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Someone might ask “Why is one person saved while another person is not?” Some have blamed God in answering this question. Calvinists say God doesn’t want everyone to be saved. But if God doesn’t want everyone to be saved, why should we want everyone to be saved? If God doesn’t want that, neither should we. If we want everyone to be saved, but God does not, are we more benevolent than God is? Or if we want everyone to be saved, but God does not want everyone to be saved, wouldn’t that make us *ungodly* for wanting

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everyone to be saved? Imagine that! Being ungodly for having universal benevolence!

The law of God demands that we love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). But if we obey that command by wanting everyone to be saved, when God does not want everyone to be saved, then we are ungodly for obeying that command! We would be ungodly for obeying the law of God!

Yet at the same time, we are under moral obligation to imitate God. We are told to be holy and perfect as He is (Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16). If God doesn't want everyone to be saved, neither should we, or else we are violating our moral obligation to imitate His character. But at the same time, if we do not want everyone to be saved, we do not love our neighbor as ourselves. And therefore we are violating our moral obligation! This would put us in the dilemma or predicament of violating our moral obligation if we fulfill our moral obligation! In order to fulfill one of God's commandments, to be holy as He is holy, we would have to violate another one of God's commandments, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

If God does not have benevolence or good-will for all mankind, or if He doesn't want everyone to be saved, these are some very serious problems which would exist! Despite these dilemmas, Reformed Theology says that God does not want everyone to repent of their sin, believe the gospel, and be saved.

Martin Luther said, "As to why some are touched by the law and others not, so that some receive and others scorn the offer of grace...[this is the] hidden will of God, Who, according to His own counsel, ordains such persons as He wills to receive and partake of the mercy preached and offered."¹⁰ In other words, though *they* are invited, it is ultimately not *their* choice but God's. The reason some are

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saved and some are not, according to Luther, is not because some freely choose to receive the gospel and others freely choose to reject it. The reason is because God is *not sincere* in His offer and invitation, but has secretly willed some men to embrace the gospel and some men to reject it.

If such an ugly doctrine were true, it would make God responsible, not only for all the repentance and faith in the world, but also responsible for all the impenitence and unbelief in the world! But why would God even invite them if their acceptance of the invitation is not their choice? Why would you invite someone to accept that which you don't even want them to accept? Why would you invite someone to partake of that which you never intended to give them?

This is why John Wesley charged Calvinism's doctrine of predestination with "making vain all preaching, and tending to destroy holiness, the comfort of religion and zeal for good works, yea, the whole Christian revelation by involving it in fatal contradictions... a doctrine full of blasphemy... it represents our blessed Lord as a hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity, as mocking his helpless creatures by offering what he never intends to give, by saying one thing and meaning another."¹¹

The Bible teaches that God calls all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31) and He blames them if they do not repent (Matt. 11:20; 23:37; Mk. 6:6; Lk. 7:30; 13:34; 14:17-18; 19:14; 19:27; Jn. 5:40; Rev. 2:21). This implies that God wants all men everywhere to repent, that it is their choice to do so, and that if they do not repent it is their own fault. Therefore, it cannot be true that God does not want everyone to repent, or that He only gives repentance to the few He has arbitrarily chosen, or that it is God's fault that men do not repent.

The Bible says, "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh

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better things than that of Abel. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.* For if they escaped not who *refused* him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we *turn away* from him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb. 12:24-25). The Greek word “refuse” in this passage means, “...one excusing himself for not accepting a wedding invitation to a feast.”¹² As the Bible says that God “sent forth his servants to *call* them that were bidden to the wedding: and they *would not* come” (Matt. 22:3).

An invitation requires a response of the will. Those who are not saved are not saved because they “would not come,” not because they were not called or because God didn’t want them to come. God was sincere in His invitation. He wanted them to come and they were capable of doing so, otherwise they would not have been invited, but they were free not to come if they so choose. God has done His part in their salvation, but they have not done their part. As Jesus said, “And ye *will not* come to me, that ye might have life” (Jn. 5:40). They did not receive life because they “will not,” which means in the Greek that they did not “choose” or “determine,”¹³ or because they did not “resolve” or “purpose.”¹⁴

A gift, by definition, is that which can be accepted or refused.

Man is a free moral being and therefore God cannot save anyone against their will. This is evident from the example of when Jesus said, “Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often *would I* have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye *would not!*” (Lk. 13:34).

The Bible describes salvation as a gift that God offers to all to accept and receive (Jn. 1:11-12; Lk. 14:16-24; Rom 5:18). A gift, by definition, is that which can be freely

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accepted or refused. Salvation, as a gift, can therefore be freely accepted or refused. If men who hear the gospel do not accept God's offer of salvation, it is not because they *couldn't* but because they *wouldn't* (Matt. 11:20-21; 23:37, Mk. 6:6; 7:30; 13:34; 14:17-18; 19:14; 19:27; Lk. 14:16-24; Jn. 5:40; Acts 7:51; 17:27; Rev. 2:21). Though God offers salvation to all men, many men choose to reject God's gracious offer (Isa. 65:2; Lk. 7:30; 14:16-24; Jn. 1:10-11; Rom. 10:21; 2 Thes. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17). To their own damnation many men choose to resist His grace which He has offered to them (Gen. 6:3; Matt. 23:37; Lk. 7:30, 13:34; Acts 7:51). It is not true then that God has loved the elect by making their salvation unconditional, while he has hated the reprobate by making their damnation unavoidable. But God, in His benevolence has made salvation available to all but not all men choose to receive it.

While it is true that God hates sinners in the sense that He has a holy abhorrence or disgust of them because of their moral character (Ps. 5:5; Prov. 6:17-19), at the same time He loves sinners in the sense that He has a benevolent care and concern for them and wants their salvation (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 2 Pet. 3:9). God hates and loves sinners at the same time. The former is a state of His affections or sensibilities, but the latter is a state or committal of His will.

God not only hates the sin, but He hates the sinner who is the cause of the sin. This is in the sense that He is emotionally disgusted and abhorred by them for their wickedness. But at the same time, God loves them and wants them to repent and be saved because He regards the intrinsic value of their well-being.

Love is a committal of the will to promote the well-being of another person for their own sake or because their well-being is intrinsically valuable. God is a benevolent being (1 Jn. 4:8). That is why Christ died for us (Jn. 3:16;

15:13; Rom. 5:8). And that is why He calls all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31). That fact that God calls all men everywhere to repent shows us that, out of His love, He wants all men everywhere to be saved. He wouldn't call them to repentance if He didn't want them to repent.

The reason some are saved by the gospel and some are not saved by it is not because of predestination but because of free will. It is not that God unconditionally elected the one to be saved and unconditionally reprobated the other to be damned. It is not that God regenerated one so that they will have the ability to repent while he did not regenerate the other and therefore they didn't have the ability to do so. It is that God has created all men free and some choose to repent and believe while others simple do not.

At one point Augustine even admitted, "They that would not come [to Christ], ought not to impute it to another, but only to themselves, because, when they are called, it was in the power of their free will to come."¹⁵

Repentance For The Remission Of Sins vs. Justification By Works Of The Law

There are those who think, "If men need to obey the gospel, or repent of their sins, isn't that a works based salvation?" Antinomians will reject "repentance for the remission of sins" because they confuse it with "justification by works of the law." Antinomianism is a serious error that some have fallen into in our times. This is because they fail to consider the cultural and historical context of Paul when they interpret his writings.

The Early Church had a controversy with a group called "the Judaizers" who were teaching justification by works of the law. "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved"

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(Acts 15:1). In other words, they taught that Gentiles need to obey the law (*the Torah*) and become justified by performing works of the law (*circumcision*). Since Paul's ministry was to the Gentiles, he dedicated a large portion of his writings in Romans and Galatians, which were letters to Gentile churches, to write against the Judaizers.

You will notice that Paul continually named circumcision when discussing justification by works of the law in both Romans and Galatians. Paul said, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without *the deeds of the law*. Is he the God of the *Jews* only? [Those who had the Torah] Is he not also of the *Gentiles*? [Those who did not have the Torah] Yes, of the Gentiles also. Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the *circumcision* by faith, and the *uncircumcision* through faith" (Rom. 3:28-30). "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Cometh this blessedness then upon the *circumcision* only or upon the *uncircumcision* also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? When he was in the *circumcision*, or in *uncircumcision*? Not in *circumcision*, but in *uncircumcision*. And he received the sign of *circumcision*, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being *uncircumcised*: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not *circumcised*; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of *circumcision* to them who are not *of the circumcision only*, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet *uncircumcised*" (Rom. 4:6-12).

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Paul was arguing against the Judaizers who said you must be circumcised to be saved. Paul refuted them by saying that Abraham was justified before circumcision, before the law of circumcision was given, and therefore the Gentiles too can be justified by faith without the work of the law of circumcision. If Abraham was justified without the Torah and without being circumcised, but was justified simply for having an obedient heart of faith, then the Gentiles too can be justified without observance to the Torah or being circumcised, but simply when they have an obedient heart of faith and “walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.”

Paul said, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Gal. 6:15). “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). Paul continually and repeatedly referred to circumcision when discussing justification “by works of the law” and said that circumcision does not “availeth anything” and is “nothing” but what matters is “a new creature,” “faith which worketh by love,” and “keeping of the commandments.”

Paul said, “Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one *outwardly*; neither is that circumcision, which is *outward* in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one *inwardly*; and circumcision is that *of the heart*, in the spirit, and not of the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Rom. 2:26-29).

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Paul argued that the Gentiles did not need to experience an external change, or circumcise their flesh, in order to be saved. But they needed to experience an internal change, to circumcise their hearts by faith, in order to be saved. It is not external conformity to regulations that really matters but an inner heart of submission and surrender which does.

What needs to be understood is that Paul was not coming against the preaching of repentance in his epistles when he discussed justification by works of the law. In Galatia the Judaizers came and convinced the Gentile Church there that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul wrote his epistle to the Galatians to correct this error of the Judaizers. “Behold I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:2-4).

Paul was not coming against the preaching of repentance in his epistles.

Paul refuted the idea of the Judaizers that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and obey the Torah, but he was not preaching antinomianism or lawlessness. This is evident since Paul said, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Gal. 5:13-14). Gentiles were never obligated by God to obey the Torah, but they certainly are obligated to obey the moral law of God. The regulations of the Mosaic law were given to Israel in the Old Testament and are not to be applied to the Gentile Church of the New Testament. But the moral

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law of God transcends the Old Testament and the nation of Israel and is applicable and obligatory upon all men in both Testaments.

Paul's epistle to the Galatians was not a defense of antinomianism or a refutation of repentance from sin. Rather, it was a thorough rebuttal to the false gospel of the Judaizers. It was not that the Galatians were repenting of their sins and Paul thought, "Oh no! I better put a stop to this." Paul certainly would not have any problem with Gentiles repenting of their sins since his God given ministry was to bring the Gentiles to repentance (Acts 26:20). When Paul preached to the Gentiles in Athens, he told them that God was calling all of them to repent (Acts 17:30). Paul said that we needed to be circumcised, not in our flesh, but in our hearts (Rom. 2:28-29). The circumcision of the heart is when you put off your sins (Col. 2:11). Paul bemoaned those Gentiles in Corinth who had not repented of their uncleanness and fornication (2 Cor. 12:21). Paul explicitly said that we should not continue in our sins (Rom. 6:1-2), but that we should awake to righteousness and stop sinning (1 Cor. 15:34). Paul even warned the Galatians that if they lived sinful lives, they would not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). It was the Apostle Paul who said "after thy hardness and *impenitent heart* treasurest up unto thyself wrath" (Rom. 2:5), and that "repentance" leads "to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10). Clearly, Paul would not have had any problems with Gentiles repenting of their sins. Rather, Paul was upset that the Gentile Church in Galatia started to believe falsehoods from the Judaizers about the conditions of salvation.

A good example of how Gentiles find the forgiveness of sins is the story of Nineveh. The narrative records that the people *believed God* (Jonah 3:5) and *turned from their sins* (Jonah 3:8). When God saw this, He changed His plans and

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decided not to destroy them as He said He would (Jonah 3:10). These Gentiles did not need to adopt the Jewish customs, obey the Torah, or be circumcised in order to be pardoned. They were saved or found the mercy of God through simple repentance from sin and faith in God.

Jesus even said that sinners will be condemned if they do not repent the way Nineveh did (Matt. 12:41). Therefore, the way that Gentiles were saved through repentance and faith in the Old Testament is the same way that they are saved in the New Testament according to Jesus. Repenting of sin is required in both the Old and New Testament. Therefore, repentance is not the works of the law Paul preached against.

We know that Jesus Christ taught repentance (Lk. 13:3). Paul certainly would not have contradicted Jesus Christ since Paul was an *Apostle of Jesus Christ* (Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1). Paul explicitly said that men ought to listen to the wholesome words of Jesus (1 Tim. 6:3). Paul was by no means attacking the preaching of repentance when he wrote against justification by works of the law. Paul was attacking the Judaizers and their false gospel that Gentiles must convert to Judaism, be circumcised, and obey the Torah.

Paul uses the phrase “justification by works of the law” in reference to circumcision and the Torah, but Paul never defined repentance from sin as “justification by works of the law.” Peter had even warned that there would be men who would not understand the writings of Paul but would twist them to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:15-16). Whenever a person preaches repentance (*turning from sin*) as a condition of God’s forgiveness, lawless men will accuse them of preaching “works based salvation” and will appeal to the writings of Paul. The problem is that they fail to distinguish between “repentance for the remission of sins” (Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:3; Lk. 24:47) and “justification by works of

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the law” (Rom. 3:20). The former is taught by the Bible but the latter is condemned with an “anathema” (Gal. 1:8-9).

For example, when Paul said we were justified by faith a part from the works of the law, he was not contradicting, condemning, or coming against John the Baptist who said we needed to repent for the remission of sins. To define “repentance for the remission of sins” as “justification by works of the law” would set the Apostle Paul against the rest of the Bible! Failure to distinguish between justification by works and remission through repentance is an error of the worse kind.

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In a more elaborated, expounded, and exhaustive sense, justification by works of the law includes the idea that you can be pronounced innocent because you have never sinned (Rom. 3:20), the idea that you can atone for your own sins by your obedience (Acts 13:39; Gal. 2:21), the idea that you have to obey the Torah or Mosaic law and be circumcised to be saved (Acts 15:1; Rom. 2, 3, 4; Gal. 5:6; 6:15), the idea that you need to perform some type of work to earn your salvation or merit justification (Rom. 4:4; Eph. 2:8-9), or thinking that you are not deserving or bad enough for hell but are deserving or good enough for Heaven (Php. 3:9).

All of these notions are completely false and contrary to grace and mercy. But we must also understand that while we are free from obligation to the Mosaic Law and the ordinances of the Torah (Rom. 7:1-4; Gal. 5:1; 5:13; Col. 2:20-21; Eph. 2:15), we are not free from the law of Christ or the moral law of God (Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14; 1 Cor. 9:21). God is not a God of lawlessness or anarchy. Jesus did not come to overthrow the moral government of God. Being

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saved by grace does not mean that we are free to live immoral or lawless lives as the Antinomians teach.

But just as a student is no longer under his teacher once he has learned his lessons and has graduated, so once our faith in Christ makes us righteous, we are no longer under the *instruction* of the law because we are no longer living unrighteously (Gal. 3:24; 5:18-23; 1 Tim. 1:9-10). Neither are we under the *condemnation* of the law because we are now walking after the spirit or living obediently, instead of walking after the flesh or living disobediently (Rom. 8:1). So while we are no longer under the instruction of the law or under the condemnation of the law that does not mean that we are not under any moral obligation to the law of God. Paul explicitly told believers that they were under moral obligation to the moral law of God, or to the commandments of Jesus Christ (Rom. 13:8; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 5:14).

The law
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them.

While the Antinomians are greatly mistaken in thinking that we are free from any moral obligation, the Judaizers also had a great misunderstanding in thinking that we can be justified by obedience to the law. The law cannot justify transgressors, it can only condemn them. The law can only acquit those who have been proven to be innocent or guiltless. But since all have sinned, the law cannot justify anyone. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: *for* by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

The whole idea of a sinner being justified by the works of the law is both impossible and absurd. Justification, in the legal or forensic sense of the term, is to be pronounced innocent or guiltless in the court of law and being acquitted

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of all charges. But God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2). Therefore God cannot justify the wicked (Ex. 23:7; Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Nah. 1:3). God cannot pronounce the guilty to be innocent, as that would not be true. If God pronounced the guilty as innocent (*legal justification*) God would be lying. The only hope of the guilty is to be forgiven through Jesus Christ.

While the law condemns the guilty, God has the authority to forgive them. God can pronounce the guilty as “pardoned.” That is the difference between justification by works of the law and justification by grace. Justification by works of the law is when you are pronounced innocent, which is impossible for a sinner, but justification by grace is when those who are guilty and deserve punishment are pardoned and forgiven. Justification by works of the law is merited and deserved, while justification by grace is unmerited and undeserved.

God cannot pronounce the guilty to be innocent, as that would not be true.

Since we are obligated to love God and love our neighbor *all of the time*, if we miss even *a single second* in fulfilling our moral obligation, we have no *spare time* in which we can make up for that lost second, since we are obligated to love God all of the time. Therefore, present obedience can never atone for past disobedience. Our past disobedience must simply be forgiven by God’s grace and mercy through the atonement of Christ or else we must be condemned no matter how much we obey.

Therefore, even if those who were guilty became obedient, that would not be enough to atone for their sins. God’s law must still be upheld and they still deserve punishment. Even ninety-nine percent obedience cannot atone for just one percent disobedience, since you can never obey above or beyond your obligation. You are obligated to

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obey one hundred percent. Therefore, you can never make up for your disobedience by your obedience. Those who have sinned, even once, will never again be at one hundred percent and, therefore, can never be justified by the law. Clearly, the only hope for the guilty is to be forgiven through the atonement of Jesus Christ. If the guilty are to be forgiven or justified, it must be by God's grace or His unmerited favor.

In fact, it is my personal belief that heaven and the presence of God are so good that they can never be earned or merited by any being. Even if a person were to go their whole life without sinning they still would not deserve all the goodness that there is in heaven or have merited the blessed presence of God. Even they would have to enter heaven and His presence by the grace of God.

But it must be understood that while we are not justified by the works of the law but by grace, we are not forgiven without repentance from sin. Repentance for the remission of sins is when you change your mind about sinning. It is when you change your mind about breaking the moral law of God so that your penalty can be graciously and mercifully remitted. The Bible teaches that men need to change their mind about rebelling against God so that they can be pardoned by God's unmerited grace and undeserved mercy (2 Chron. 6:26-27; 7:14; Eze. 18:30-32; Jer. 4:14, 18:7-10). Repentance is a change of mind, *not a work*, which results in a change of life (Lk. 8:15; 2 Cor. 7:11; Heb. 6:9). This change of life is known as the fruit of repentance. The Bible says, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8), "Bring forth therefore

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fruits worthy of repentance” (Lk. 3:8), and “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

It is absolutely vital and imperative that it be understood that repentance itself does not merit anything. Those who repent of their sins do not now deserve to go to heaven. The repentant still deserve to go to hell but they are pardoned by God's grace and mercy. The Bible says, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and *turn from their wicked ways*; then will I hear from Heaven, and will *forgive their sin*, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). “Let the wicked *forsake* his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have *mercy* upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly *pardon*. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 55:7-8). “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and *forsaketh* them shall have *mercy*” (Prov.

We are capable of obedience, but our obedience is incapable of atoning for our sins.

28:13). It is very clear from these passages that repentance or forsaking your sins is not at all incompatible with or contrary to gracious forgiveness or merciful pardon, which is justification by grace, but that repentance from sin is in fact a condition of forgiveness. Those who repent do not merit, earn, or deserve justification, but they are pardoned by grace and mercy.

While man has the ability of repenting of his sins in order to be forgiven by God's grace and mercy, man does not have the ability of atoning for his own sins by his obedience, nor does man have the ability of earning his salvation by performing works. We are capable of obedience, but our obedience is incapable of atoning for our

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sins. A sinner is able to obey God's law, but God's law is not able to justify those who have sinned. We need God's grace and mercy which comes through the atonement of Jesus Christ upon all those who freely choose to repent and believe. Our ability to obey does not negate the necessity for God's grace and the atonement, and God's grace and the atonement does not negate the necessity for man's repentance.

The two great errors of antinomianism are that they fail to properly define repentance and grace. They define repentance as a work, which we have already seen that it is not, and they define grace as a license to sin. A Biblical understanding of grace, however, is not that it allows us to continue in our sins. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2) "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11-12). "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4). The Bible warned that false teachers would creep into the Church and would turn the grace of God into a license to sin, thus denying the Lordship of God and the Lordship of Christ.

One of the major problems of Antinomians is that they fail to distinguish between what is called "easy believism" and justification by faith. The Bible says that we are justified by faith (Rom. 3:28), but a faith that does not *change our lives* is a faith that does not *save our souls*. The

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faith that justifies is not a dead disobedient faith but a living and obedient faith (Jas. 2:14-16). We know that “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10), that “faith... worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), and that faith without love is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2). Therefore a faith that does not fulfill the law is nothing. True faith will be accompanied with love and therefore, true faith will fulfill the law. The Bible says “for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10). That is because true faith purifies your heart (Acts 15:9; 1 Jn. 3:3), sanctifies your life (Acts 26:18) and overcomes the world (1 Jn. 5:4). Anything less than that type of faith is not saving faith at all. Faith is not some mere intellectual ascent which leaves your life unaffected. Saving faith is life altering.

Consider these truths in logical syllogisms:

- Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10).
- Faith works by love (Gal. 5:6).
- Therefore, true faith will fulfill the law.

- Love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10).
- Faith without love is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).
- Therefore, faith that does not fulfill the law is nothing.

- We are justified by faith (Rom. 3:28).
- True faith is living not dead and will result in good works (Jas. 2:14-16).
- Therefore, we are justified by a living faith that will result in good works.

To have faith in God means that you choose to trust Him. To be faithful to God means that God can choose to trust you. Faith leads to faithfulness, that is, having faith will

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result in being faithful. Faith and faithfulness are necessarily connected, the former being the cause of the latter. If you trust God then you will do what He says. If you do what He says, then He can trust you.

To believe God but not to obey God is the faith of the devils (Jas. 2:19). God does not save a man who has dead faith or who has the devil's faith. God saves a man who has a living obedient faith. When we truly put our faith in God, when we truly trust Him by having confidence in His nature and character, we will do whatever He tells us to do (Heb. 11:1-40). If we have faith in God we will trust Him with our lives and submit whole heartedly to His Lordship.

Disobedience and unbelief insults God because it reflects distrust for Him and challenges and questions His intelligence and character. But obedient faith honors and glorifies God because obedient faith is confidence in His intelligence and character so that we will do whatever He asks of us. True faith is absolutely life changing. By faith the saints live and die, breathe and bleed, for Jesus Christ.

Moses was a man who really had confidence in God. He truly trusted the Lord. His faith radically affected his choices. It says that "*By faith* Moses, when he was come to years, *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. *By faith* he *forsook* Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he *endured*, as *seeing him* who is invisible" (Heb. 11:24-27). It says, "By faith... he... refused... choosing....by faith he forsook... he endured, as seeing him..." This shows us that there is a profound impact true faith in God will have on a person's choices. This is truly the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 16:26).

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A. W. Tozer said, “Faith and morals are the two sides of the same coin. Indeed the very essence of faith is moral. Any professed faith in Christ as personal Savior that does not bring the life under plenary obedience to Christ as Lord is inadequate and must betray its victim at the last. The man that believes will obey... Where real repentance is, there is obedience. To escape the error of salvation by works we have fallen into the opposite error of salvation without obedience.”¹⁶

True faith will not only justify your soul, it will also sanctify your life. A man of faith not only trusts the gospel of God but also trusts the law of God. A man of faith will not only get saved the way that God tells us to get saved, but he will also live the way that God tells him to live. Unbelief, which is a sin, will result in more sin. But faith, which is righteousness, will result in more righteousness.

Repentance Is Absolutely Required

While I was preaching outside the bars and clubs in Dallas, a woman in line for the club said, “I repent of my sins every night.” She continued to wait in line until she got into the club! Others said, “It is OK to party Saturday nights so long as you go to Church Sunday mornings.”

Clearly, many do not have a clear understanding of what Biblical repentance really is. Some think that repentance is merely asking God for forgiveness or feeling sorry for your sins. Feeling sorry for doing wrong is normal. God designed us constitutionally to feel sorry when we do wrong. Feeling sorry for our sins is not by choice, it is by nature. True repentance is the choice to actually give up your sins, to forsake your sins, to renounce your sins and determine to do them no more. The Bible makes a distinction between feeling sorrow for your sin and actually repenting of your sin. Paul said, “For godly *sorrow* worketh *repentance* to

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salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10). Sorrow is not repentance but sorrow leads to repentance, and repentance leads to salvation.

A person who feels sorrow for their sin but hasn't yet repented of their sin is not yet converted. True conversion is repentance from sin unto a holy life. If a person continues to live a sinful life, they have not yet repented and are therefore not yet converted.

I remember talking to one woman who claimed to be a Christian (*a Reformed Calvinist*) but she didn't believe that you could live a holy life. She said that even though she is a Christian and that she is converted, she is still wicked and evil all the time. She thought she was being humble when she said, “*I even sin in my prayers!*” I found her comments to be deeply troublesome because the Bible says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18). “The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayers of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29). “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight” (Prov. 15:8). “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination” (Prov. 28:9). “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Ps. 34:18). “...your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth” (Jn. 9:31). “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 Jn. 3:22).

The true
Christian life
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of hypocrisy
but a life of
holiness.

If a person is sinning all of the time, even sinning in their prayers, they are not yet truly converted or regenerated.

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The true Christian life is not a life of hypocrisy but a life of holiness. If Christians are wicked and evil and even sin in their prayers, they are no different than unbelievers who go out on the weekends to the bars and clubs to get drunk and sleep around and then go home and pray to God for forgiveness, while they are still planning on doing the same thing next weekend.

I've told sinners while open air preaching, "You might go home tonight, get on your knees and pray 'God, please forgive me' and the answer you get back is 'No!' God might refuse to forgive you! If your heart holds unto sin, God won't even listen to your prayers (Ps. 66:18). He saves those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit (Ps. 34:18). Why should God even listen to your prayers when all you want is a license to sin? It is not enough to just ask God for forgiveness or to feel sorry. You need to actually let go of your sins in your heart and determine to live the rest of your life without them!"

The Bible teaches that repentance is not optional for salvation, it is necessary. Repentance is not for mature believers, it is for rebellious sinners! When I was a violent, hateful, drug selling and drug dealing sinner, I knew naturally that if I wanted to be right with God, to have His forgiveness, and to have a relationship with Him, I could not persevere in my wickedness.

A man absolutely must make the choice to give up his sins in order to enter into a relationship with God. Turning from sin or abandoning a sinful life is a *sine qua non* of a relationship with God, as those who continue in their sins cannot have a relationship with Him at all. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isa. 59:2). "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and

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keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3-4).

There are many today who claim to know God and, at the same time, also claim that they sin every day in word, thought, and deed. To sin every day is to have a *habit* or *practice* of sin. Sinning every day is a *lifestyle* of sin. Such a person is *walking* in darkness. And the Bible says, “If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 Jn. 1:6). The cause of man’s spiritual separation with God is his sin or his choice to be sinful. Therefore God must deal with man’s sin, or effectually influence him to change the choice of his living, before He can enter into a relationship with man.

Since those who are breaking God’s moral law cannot have a relationship with Him (1 Jn. 2:3-4), they consequently cannot have eternal life because eternal life is to know Him (Jn. 17:3). Clearly, those who continue on in their rebellion and wickedness against God cannot have eternal life. Those who are presently sinning cannot be presently saved. In fact, the wrath of God is against anyone who is in sin or who is in rebellion toward Him (Mal. 4:1; Rom. 1:18; 2:8-9; Eph. 5:6; Co. 3:6; Jude 1:14-15).

The very reason that our world is full of pain, misery, and death, is because our world is full of sin. Heaven will be Heaven, a place of perfect bliss and blessedness, because there are no sinners and consequently no sin there. There will be peace and harmony in the Kingdom of God because everyone will be obedient to God.

Heaven would cease to be Heaven if God allowed sinners to enter in. Heaven would not be Heaven if it was full of sin! That is why God will “sever the wicked from among

To sin every day is to have a habit or practice of sin. Sinning every day is a lifestyle of sin.

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the just” (Matt. 13:49), why the righteous are saved but sinners are not (1 Peter 4:18), why the unrighteous will not inherit God’s Kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-10), or why God will not allow anyone into Heaven who is still sinning (Matt. 13:41-42; Rev. 21:27; 22:15). The Bible says that heaven will be full of “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23). In Heaven “Lord God Almighty” is the “King of saints” (Rev. 15:3). The Greek word “saints” mean the “morally blameless,”¹⁷ so Heaven will be full of those who are loyal and obedient to God, who choose not to sin anymore.

Since Jesus is our present Savior, and death is not the Savior, our sin must stop before we die (Rev. 22:11). The Bible says that only those who are obedient to God’s commandments will be allowed into Heaven (Matt. 7:21; 19:17; Rev. 22:14). The “lawless” will not inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt. 7:23; Lk. 13:27). Only those “strive lawfully” will obtain the crown (2 Tim. 2:5). For this reason the Apostle Paul ran his race, running in such a lawful way as to obtain the crown of life, subjecting his body lest he becomes a reprobate (1 Cor. 9:24-27). It is those who overcome temptation and endure in faithfulness while in this life that will receive “the crown of life” (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10). Men must become pure in heart and holy in life to see God (Ps. 24:3-4; Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14). Jesus said that unless a man is born again or undergoes a deep moral transformation, they cannot enter the Kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3). These are widely neglected and ignored Biblical truths!

The Bible says that men need to be “*worthy*” of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 10:37-38; 22:8; 2 Thes. 1:5), and that they need to be “*fit* for the kingdom of God” (Lk. 9:62). This is by total and complete devotion to Christ. Jesus described bearing your cross and following him as mere entry level into true Christianity (Lk. 14:27). He said a person must forsake all that they have to follow Him (Lk.

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14:33). Nothing short of this radical decision is true conversion. Paul said that repentance is an elementary foundation. Paul said, "...not laying again the *foundation* of repentance..." (Heb. 6:1).

If a man has never repented of his sins, they have never been forgiven or reconciled to God, have never been born again or regenerated by the Holy Spirit, have never obeyed the gospel or received Jesus Christ, have never turned from darkness to light or renounced their service and allegiance to the devil, and have yet to love Jesus Christ or glorify God. Even if a person holds unto just one sin and refuses to let it go, they are impenitent still and are therefore unsaved. But there are multitudes of people today who claim to be "saved" or to be Christians who have never forsaken or given up their sins!

While I was open air preaching on the University of Arkansas in Conway, I was heckled by an older woman who was cursing up a storm. She was very hostile toward our preaching. She said, "I am a Christian. And I am a sinner. But I know that I'm going to Heaven!" I said, "You can't take your sins to Heaven! You need to give them up! Give them up! Give them up!" She stubbornly refused and started chanting, "Leave our campus. Leave our campus." The problem was that she was unwilling to give up her sins. She didn't really love God. She just wanted to enjoy her sin now and then enjoy Heaven later.

Charles Kingsley said, "There is full, free, and perfect forgiveness for every sin when we give it up...But as long as a man does not give up his sins, the dark score does stand against him in God's books; and no praying, or reading, or devoutness of any kind, will wipe it out; and as long as he sins he is still in his sins, and his sins will be his ruin. Whosoever tells him that they are whipped out, he, too, lies, and contradicts flatly God's holy Word."¹⁸

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Many believe that they are under the grace and mercy of God while they continue in their wickedness even though the Bible repeatedly says otherwise. God says that it is an “abomination” to “justifieth the wicked” (Prov. 17:15). God said, “I will not justify the wicked” (Exo. 23:7). And the Bible says, “The Lord... will not at all acquit the wicked” (Nah. 1:3). The Bible says that God is “angry with the wicked every day” (Ps. 7:11). It also says that “the wicked will be cast into hell” (Ps. 9:17). We can conclude from these texts that we must give up our wickedness if we want to

escape the anger of God and the punishment of hell. As the Bible says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:6-7).

Justin Martyr said, “So if they repent all who wish for it can obtain mercy from God.”¹⁹ Sin will separate you from the mercy of God and put you under His

wrath. But repentance from sin will separate you from the wrath of God and put you under His mercy. It is true that “God accepts you as you are,” *if you are repentant*. But “God condemns you as you are,” *if you are impenitent!*

While I was traveling through Alabama I saw on a church sign, “God’s Not Mad At You... No Matter What!” I found out that the pastor of that church had a previous church where he committed adultery with his secretary. When the husband of the secretary found out he committed suicide. The pastor moved locations and churches because of the incident and now he pastors the church with the sign “God’s Not Mad At You... No Matter What!” The Bible explicitly says that God is angry with the wicked every day

Unrepentant
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put you under
His wrath.

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and that He will only turn from His anger if sinners turn from their sins!

Modern Christianity says, "God accepts you as you are." This is contrary to Jesus' teaching, "Except a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). Modern Christianity says, "God forgives you no matter what." This is contrary to the teaching of Christ that says, "...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:3, 5).

Antinomian theology, at its essence, attacks repentance and defends sin. One modern Antinomian said that you do not need to forsake your sins to be saved, that the Bible nowhere says you must repent of your sins to be forgiven, and that saying you must forsake your sins or repent is "damnable heresy." This man, at the age of forty one, was later arrested on felony and misdemeanor charges for having sex with a minor!

It is evident that wicked doctrine will lead to a wicked life. Those who are against the message of turning from sin have some type of sin in their life that they are unwilling to give up. They use their theology to protect and promote their wickedness and to comfort themselves in their impenitence. His false gospel helped him in his sin, making him comfortable instead of convicted. His false doctrine set him up for failure by encouraging him to sin.

If a man is not aiming at living a sinless life, he is aiming at living a sinful life. If a man is not committing to being sin free, he is consenting to being sinful. If a preacher does not preach "stop sinning," the only alternative is that they are preaching "keep sinning." If a man does not preach "go and sin no more," they are preaching "go and sin some

If a man is not aiming at living a sinless life, he is aiming at living a sinful life.

more.” A preacher who does not preach holiness, but actually preaches against it, is not a preacher for God but is a preacher for the devil. God said, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings” (Jer. 23:21-22).

Joseph Alleine said, “Should he [God] take men as they are, from the mire of their filthiness to the glory of heaven, the world would think that God was at no such great distance from sin, nor had any such dislike to it as we are told he hath; they would be ready to conclude that God was altogether such a one as themselves.”²⁰ He also said, “Regeneration and remission are never separated; the unsanctified are unjustified and unpardoned.”²¹

The salvation experience includes both justification and sanctification.

Those who are described as being “justified” in the Scriptures are also described as being “sanctified” and “washed” (1 Cor. 6:11). Those who will inherit the kingdom of God are “them which are sanctified...” (Acts 20:32) For example, the Bible says that sanctification includes being free from fornication (1 Thes. 4:3), that fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10), and therefore the unsanctified will not inherit the kingdom of God. A real salvation experience includes both justification and sanctification. Those who repent of their sinful lives in order to be forgiven will begin to live holy lives. When a sinner repents he actually becomes a holy saint. Without this repentance or moral transformation, there is no forgiveness or eternal life.

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Why would God grant eternal life to a sinner, or to someone who was still sinning? God doesn't want sin to be eternal! That is why Adam was removed from the tree of life in the beginning (Gen. 3:22). The Bible says, "...he that *doeth* the will of God *abideth for ever*" (1 Jn. 2:17). And Jesus said, "Very, verily, I say unto you, if a man *keep* my saying, he shall *never see death*" (Jn. 8:51). God does not give eternal life to disobedient men, lest their disobedience and their disturbance with the happiness of His creation be eternal!

Even just "one sinner destroyeth much good" (Ecc. 9:18). Therefore, all sinners must be confined and punished in hell for the sake of the well-being of the universe. The rebellious will be put in "everlasting chains" (Jude 1:6) in order to eternally restrain them. They will be cast into hell (Lk. 1:25), which is the "prison" of the universe (1 Pet. 3:19). They will remain there forever in torments (Rev. 14:11). God will be doing the universe a favor when He sends the wicked to hell! They will be confined lest they continue to corrupt God's creation and interfere with the happiness and well-being of the law abiding subjects of God. This is why the Bible says, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom *all things that offend, and them which do iniquity*; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:41-44). The wicked "shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. 25:46).

God only pardons and accepts those that are safe to pardon and accept. It is not safe for God to pardon and accept a criminal who plans on continuing in his life of crime. Why should God forgive us for breaking His moral law if we are committed to continue to break His moral law? If God's law is so good that He punishes transgressors, than

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God's law is so God that a return to obedience is obligatory upon man. If God truly hates sin so much that He punishes it with eternal damnation, why would God be willing to forgive us while we continue in our sins? If God's law is so important that Jesus Christ had to die for our transgressions, than certainly God must want us to give up our transgressions. If sin is so bad that it needs to be forgiven, than sin is so bad that it needs to be forsaken. It is a mockery for a rebel to ask the ruler for pardon while he plans on continuing his rebellion against him!

Is it not demanded by wisdom and benevolence that only those who are repentant be forgiven? Suppose a ruler was to pardon and release into the community all criminals whether they were reformed or not. Suppose all jails and prisons were unlocked and all those in captivity were released. Would not the community be endangered by such an unwise and unloving pardon? Imagine rapists who are pardoned, who *still intend* on raping! Or murderers being pardoned, who *still plan* on murdering! How cruel and foolish it would be to pardon a criminal who has not had a change of mind about crime, who does not intend on living lawfully, or who does not plan on acting differently.

If a ruler is to pardon a criminal at all, he must only pardon upon condition of repentance or else he is unwise and unloving. There is either something lacking in his head, or something lacking in his heart, or something lacking in both! That is why none can have the grace and mercy of our loving and wise God but those who have had a change of mind about disobedience to His moral law.

Catherine Booth said, "It is not that He does not love you, sinner; it is not that the great, benevolent heart of God has not, as it were, wept tears of blood over you; it is not that He would not put His loving arms around you this moment if you would only come to His feet and confess you were

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wrong, and seek His pardon; but, otherwise he may not--He cannot. The laws of His universe are against His doing so. The good, it may be, of millions of immortal beings is involved. He dare not, and He cannot, until there is a change of mind in you. You must repent. 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.' ... Then what is repentance? Repentance is simply renouncing sin--turning round from darkness to light--from the power of Satan unto God. This is giving up sin in your heart, in purpose, in intention, in desire, resolving that you will give up every evil thing, and do it now!"²²

Charles Finney said, "It has long been maintained by orthodox divines, that a person is not a Christian who does not aim at living without sin – that unless he aims at perfection, he manifestly consents to live in sin; and is therefore impenitent. It has been said, and I think truly, that if a man does not, in the fixed purpose of his heart, aim at total abstinence from sin and at being wholly conformed to the will of God, he is not yet regenerated, and does not so much as mean to cease from abusing God."²³

The word "repent" literally means "to change one's mind."²⁴ Therefore, to repent of your sin is to change your mind about sinning. Sin is transgression of the moral law. This means that to repent of your sin is to change your mind about breaking God's moral law. If a person has not changed their mind about breaking the moral law of God, they are unrepentant.

But when a person truly repents, they will not stay the same. A change of mind will result in a change of life. A change of plans will result in a change of direction. An inner change will result in an outer change. A change of heart will result in a change of action. A change of roots will result in a change of fruits. That is known as the fruit or result of repentance (Matt. 3:8; Lk. 3:8; Acts 26:20). If the fruits do not change, the roots are still the same.

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In a parable, Jesus talked about a man who responded to his father's request to work in the vineyard by saying, "I *will* not; but afterward he *repented*, and *went*" (Matt. 21:29). His change of will resulted in a change of action. If a man is planning on going north, but he changes his mind and decides to go south, his actions will reflect his change of mind. If he continues to go north, he must not have really changed his mind.

Likewise, when a sinner truly repents, when he truly changes his mind about the way he's been living, he will begin to live a different or new life. If he continues on in the old way of living, he must not have truly changed his mind or repented. But how we are going to live our lives is not a onetime decision or something that we decide once and for all, but it is a decision that we must make every day. This is why Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross *daily*, and follow me" (Lk. 9:23).

Rev. A. Sims wrote, "True repentance implies a knowledge of sin – sorrow for sin, and confession of it. But its chief characteristic is a turning from sin – from all sin – a turning to God. The person who truly repents, forsakes sin with abhorrence. Every darling idol is cast aside... Yes, gospel repentance stops a man from sinning."²⁵

Paris Reidhead said, "Repentance means making a 180-degree turn. It means changing your mindset from 'I'm going to do what I want to do,' to, 'Lord, I'm going to please you as long as I live.' It is a change of mind, a change of intention, a change of purpose, a change of practice."²⁶

Those who repent actually become holy. To repent means you choose to *give up your sins*. The Bible says, "I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and not have repented *of* the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed" (2 Cor. 12:21).

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“And I gave her space to repent *of* her fornication; and she repented not” (Rev. 2:21). “Neither repented they *of* their murders, nor *of* their sorceries, nor *of* their fornication, nor *of* their thefts” (Rev. 9:21). The object of the repentance is the sin, that is, the thing that is being repented of is the sinning.

The Bible clearly teaches that before God forgives sin, men must repent of their sins. Peter said, “Repent therefore *of this thy wickedness*, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22). Before the penalty of sins will be remitted, sins themselves need to be repented of. God even said, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and *if he repent*, forgive him” (Lk. 17:3). This principle of repentance before forgiveness is the principle of God’s moral government. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent.... *For* the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). “Repent, ye therefore, and be converted, *that* your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). The Bible teaches that repentance comes before eternal life. “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance *unto* life” (Acts 11:18). And the Bible teaches that repentance comes before salvation, as it talks about “repentance *to* salvation” (2 Cor. 7:10).

This is why Ray Comfort said, “Unless there is repentance, there is no salvation.”²⁷ We must repent of our sinful life unto an obedient life in order to be saved or forgiven. The Apostolic Constitutions said, “A sinner avoids destruction by repentance.”²⁸ The soul that God let’s live is the one “that hath *withdrawn* his hand from iniquity” (Eze. 18:8).

I know of some Antinomian groups who say, “You don’t need to repent before you can be saved, but you need to repent of your repenting.” They mistakenly define repentance as a work and falsely assume that those who repent of their sins are trying to earn their salvation.

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Therefore, they say that you must repent of your repenting in order to be saved by grace. But this is as opposite of the Bible as you can get. Paul said, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance *to salvation not to be repented of*” (2 Cor. 7:10). Notice that repentance comes before salvation, and we are not to repent of our repentance. No conceivable teaching can be more false than the teaching that you can have salvation before repentance, or that you must repent of repenting.

The man who has forsaken *all* his sins is the only one who has been “forgiven” of “*all* trespasses...” (Col. 2:13)

It is not enough for a person to forsake some of their sin; they must forsake all their sin.

God has wrath against “*all*” sin (Rom. 1:18; 2:8-9). That is why God says that we must turn from “*all*” transgression and cast away “*all*” our sins (Eze. 18:30-31). Paul said we must cleanse ourselves from “*all*” the filthiness of the flesh (2 Cor. 7:1). We are told to “lay aside *every* weight and sin” (Heb. 12:1).

It is not enough for a person to forsake some of their sin; they must forsake all of their sin. God’s wrath is against all sin. God commands us to repent of all sin. Jesus Christ died for all sin. All sin separates us from God and all sin leads to hell. If we could be forgiven without repenting of *all* sin, why do we need to repent of sin *at all*? Or if we could be saved while remaining or continuing in *some* sin, why couldn’t we be saved while remaining or continuing in *any* and *all* sin? If a person hasn’t repented of all sin, they haven’t repented of sin at all.

The truth is that unrepentant sin is unforgivable sin. Those who are in conscious rebellion against God are impenitent and are, therefore, unsaved and under the wrath of God. There is no security or salvation in sin. God only promises grace and mercy to those who give up their sins.

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God never promised grace and mercy to those who hold onto their sins. Those who choose to continue in their sins do not have the promise of God's mercy but rather the promise of God's wrath. The Bible says, "But after thy hardness and *impenitent heart* treasurest up unto thyself *wrath* against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:5). "But unto them that are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil..." (Rom. 2:8-9). God will only change His plans about destroying sinners if they change their mind about being sinners, that is, God will only repent of a sinner's punishment if a sinner repents of his sinning. God will only turn from His wrath if sinners turn from their sins (Jonah 3:10; Jer. 18:8; 26:13; Joel 2:13-14). There is forgiveness in Christ for those who forsake their sins, but there is no forgiveness in Christ for those who continue on in their sins.

You are either
a friend of
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be both.

A person must choose between their sin and the Savior. You are either a friend of sin or you are a friend of God, but you cannot be both. Sin and Christ are at odds with each other, so to be the friend of one is to be the enemy of the other. If you are a friend of sin you are the enemy of Christ, but if you are the friend of Christ you are the enemy of sin. Unrepentant sin in your life will separate you from the mercy of God. You must separate from your sin in order to have God's mercy. Sin brings the wrath of God but repentance brings the mercy of God.

No doubt lawless and impenitent men will continue to accuse preachers of repentance of being "Pharisees." This, however, is an abuse of Scriptures. The problem Jesus had

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with the Pharisees was not that they had repented of their sins and were living obedient towards God. The problem Jesus had with the Pharisees was that they had *not* repented of their sins and they were *not* truly living obediently towards God.

In his parable about the father commanding his two sons to work in his vineyard, Jesus compared the Pharisees to the hypocrites who said, “I go, sir; and went not,” but compared the “publicans and sinners” who “go into the kingdom of God” as those who “answered and said, I will not: but afterward... repented and went” (Matt. 21:28-31). In Jesus’ parable, the publicans and sinners are saved because they repented of their disobedience towards God, but the Pharisees did not repent of their disobedience and therefore they were not saved.

Regarding John the Baptist, Jesus said that “the publicans and the harlots believed him” but the Pharisees “repented not afterward, that ye might believe him” (Matt. 21:32). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they “repented not...” Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for “laying aside the commandment of God” (Mk. 7:7), because they “reject the commandment of God” (Mk. 7:9). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees by saying, “woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” (Matt. 23:13-29) Jesus didn’t rebuke them for obeying God, but for disobeying God. Jesus repeatedly rebuked them, not for their holiness but for their hypocrisy (Matt. 15:7; 22:18; Matt. 23:13-29; Mk. 7:5; Lk. 11:44). “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Lk. 12:1).

The Bible tells us that God is pleased when men actually live holy and righteous (Acts 10:35; 1 Thes. 4:1; Heb. 13:16; 1 Jn. 3:22), but God was not pleased with the Pharisees. That is because the Pharisees were not actually living holy and righteous. "But in every nation he that feareth

him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:35). The Pharisees, like the hypocritical Israelites of the Old Testament, had "righteousness" which in reality was nothing more than "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). Actual righteousness is "fine linen, clean and white" (Rev. 19:8) and is "accepted with him" (Acts 10:35). But hypocritical and dead religious works, which men consider righteousness, is "filthy rags."

The Pharisees honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him (Matt. 15:8). They appeared clean and righteous outwardly, but inwardly they were filthy and wicked (Matt. 23:25-28). Jesus rebuked them for being inwardly sinful! "Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt. 23:28). Jesus never rebuked anyone for repenting of their sins or for their obedience God. It is not obedience and holiness that needs to be preached against, it is sin. Clearly, Jesus Christ rebuked sin and preached repentance.

Jesus never rebuked anyone for repenting of their sins.

Repentance and Imputed Righteousness

God said to Israel, "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, *Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord*, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" (Mal. 2:17)

There are many today who think that they can be right with God while they are still practicing unrighteousness. They don't believe that they need to repent of their sins in obedience to the gospel in order to be right with God. These religious sinners will comfort themselves in their impenitence by telling themselves, "I am righteous

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before God in my *position* even while I am unrighteous in my *practice*.”

This type of theological excuse for impenitence is refuted by the Apostle John who said, “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that *doeth righteousness* is righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 Jn. 3:7). To believe that you can be righteous, while you are practicing unrighteousness, is a deception. Jesus didn’t die so we could continue to practice unrighteousness. He died that we would be righteous in our practice. As Paul said, “God sending his own Son.... That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3-4).

Backsliders in Israel were saying “The Lord seeth us not” (Eze. 8:12), and backsliders in the Church are saying the same thing today. I have heard many people say, “When God looks at me, He doesn’t see my sin. He sees the righteousness of Christ instead.” This type of talk, which ought to be shocking to our ears, is common place within the Church. This type of theological nonsense, which is a blatant denial of God’s omniscience, is refuted all throughout the Bible (Ps. 33:13-15; Prov. 15:3; Eze. 8:12; 9:9; Jer. 32:19; Job 34:21; Mal. 2:17; Heb. 4:13; Rev 2:2, 2:9; 2:13; 2:19; 3:1; 3:8; 3:15). “The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashioneth their hearts alike; *he considereth all their works*” (Ps. 33:13-15). “For the eyes of the Lord are in *every place*, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). “For the eyes of the Lord are upon the ways of man, and *he seeth all his goings*” (Job 34:21). “Neither is there *any creature* that is not manifest in his sight: but *all things* are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

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Jesus Christ did not come to somehow blind God or to take away His omniscience. God is not some fool in the sky who doesn't know what is going on. When God looked at the churches in Revelation, He did not say "I see the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. I look on you and see blameless perfection." He said to them, "I know thy works" (Rev. 2:2; 2:9; 2:13; 2:9; 3:1; 2:8; 2:15). And He said, "be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). But those who don't want to repent of their sins dream that God does not even see their sin anymore.

Charles Kingsley said, "I am sure I have seen people read books, and run about to sermons, in order to enable them to forget those Ten Commandments; in order to find excuses for not keeping them and to find doctrines which tell them that, because Christ has done all, they need do nothing... Do you think your sins are washed away in Christ's blood, when they are still, and you are committing them? Would they be there, and you doing them, if they were put away? Do you think that your sins can be put away out of God's sight, if they are not even put out of your own sight? If you are doing wrong, and do you think that God will treat you as if you are doing right? Cannot God see in you what you see in yourselves? Do you think a man can be clothed in Christ's righteousness at the very same time that he is clothed in his own unrighteousness? ... Be not deceived. God is not mocked. What a man sows, that shall he reap. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as Christ is righteous, and no one else."²⁹

Jesus Christ did not come to somehow blind God or to take away His omniscience.

In the story of "The Emperor's New Clothes," you have a man walking around completely naked and exposed while he thinks that he is wearing the finest suit there is.

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There are many professing believers today who are just like that man. They think that they are clothed in "the righteousness of Christ" and that God doesn't see them sin, all the while God sees them exactly as they are as nothing is hid from His eyes. Just as the emperor was deceived into thinking that he had the finest suit, there are sinners in the Church today deceived into thinking that they have the imputed righteousness of Christ.

George Otis Jr. said, "The theological doctrine of 'imputed righteousness' has been grossly distorted in our day. We are told that God looks at us through the blood of Christ and sees us as righteous, regardless of our actual state... Let's stop kidding ourselves. God sees us exactly the way we are. If we are living in obedience, He sees it. If we are living selfish, unholy lives, we can be sure he sees that too."³⁰

Nobody should try to comfort themselves in impenitence by appealing to imputed righteousness.

God repeatedly said in Revelation, "*I know thy works*" and "be zealous therefore and repent." When he looked at the churches He didn't say, "I see the righteousness of Christ." Therefore, nobody should try to comfort themselves in impenitence by appealing to imputed righteousness. The solution is to simply repent. People use the imputed righteousness of Christ as a replacement for repentance unto holiness.

The words of Jesus Christ are sometimes appealed to by Calvinists and Antinomians in order to allude to the need for "the imputed righteousness of Christ." Jesus said, "For I say unto you, that *except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees*, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). The immediate context of this passage explains what Jesus means

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when He said that “your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees...” He said, “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment: But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire*” (Matt. 5:21-22). “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a women to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*” (Matt. 5:27-28).

The scribes and the Pharisees were under the Law of Moses, but we are under the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is even stricter than the Law of Moses. In this way, our righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

To take this passage to teach that necessity for the imputed righteousness of Christ is to overlook the most basic principal of hermeneutics, namely understanding the meaning of a passage through the context of that passage. Jesus was not saying that we can be righteous in our position while we remain unrighteous in our practice, but that if we are going to enter the Kingdom of God we need to be made pure and obedient in our hearts.

To say that we need the imputed righteousness of Christ to be transferred to our account in order to be justified is to say that the grace of God and the atonement of Jesus Christ is not enough, or is not sufficient, for our justification. It is very important to understand that we do not need Christ's *imputed works of the law* to be transferred to our

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account in order to be justified. That would be justification by works of the law. But those who repent and believe are justified by God's grace through the atonement.

If God looked at our account and saw that it was spotless according to the law, or perfect in the sight of the law, there would be no grace in our justification. Justification by works of the law is when you are pronounced innocent because your record is spotless and perfect in the sight of the law. But justification by grace is when you are pronounced forgiven and pardoned even though your record shows that you are truly guilty and deserving of punishment. Justification by works of the law is deserved or merited, but justification by grace is undeserved or unmerited.

If God looked at our account and saw that it was spotless and perfect in the sight of the law, and He consequently justified us in light of that, then we are justified by the works of the law apart from grace. But if God looks at our account and sees that we are guilty, and He justifies or forgives us despite that fact, then we are justified by grace apart from works of the law. This is what is meant when it says that He "*justifieth the ungodly*" (Rom. 4:5). If God sees that we are guilty and deserving of punishment, then being justified by Him is truly by grace because it is undeserved and unmerited.

We are not justified by works or by merit, either from ourselves or from Christ. Christ died for us but He did not obey for us. To say that Christ needed to obey the law for our justification is to say that His suffering and death was insufficient to justify us. We do not need His obedience imputed to our account because His atonement is sufficient for our justification. We are pardoned by God's grace through the atonement so we do not need Christ's works of the law transferred to us in order to be justified. We are imputed righteous *through* Christ, but we do not receive the

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imputed righteousness *of* Christ. That distinction is understood when we have a Biblical understanding of what imputed righteousness is.

The New Testament word for “imputed” is “logizomai.” It is translated as “think” (2 Cor. 3:5; 10:2; 10:7; 10:11; 12:6; Phi. 4:8), as “imputed” (Rom. 4:11; 4:22-24; Jam. 2:23), as “counted” (Rom. 2:26; 4:3; 4:5; 9:8), as “reckoned” (Lk. 22:37; Rom. 4:4; 4:9-10), as “accounted” (Rom. 8:36; Gal. 3:6), as “reckon” (Rom. 6:11; 8:18), as “suppose” (2 Cor. 11:5; 1 Pet. 5:12), as “account” (1 Cor. 4:1), as “accounting” (Heb. 11:19), as “conclude” (Rom. 3:28), as “count” (Phi. 3:13), as “esteemeth” (Rom. 14:14), as “impute” (Rom. 4:8), as “imputeth” (Rom. 4:6), as “imputing” (2 Cor. 5:19), as “laid” (2 Tim. 4:16), as “numbered” (Mk. 15:28), as “reasoned” (Mk. 11:31), as “thinkest” (Rom. 2:3), as “thinketh” (1 Cor. 13:5), and as “thought” (1 Cor. 13:11).

When an individual is imputed righteous, it simply means that their sins are forgiven and they are thought of as righteous, esteemed as righteous, counted as righteous, reckoned as righteous, or considered as righteous. When a person is imputed as righteous they are treated as if they were righteous, treated as if they were never unrighteous, or are treated as law abiding citizens.

The Old Testament equivalent word for “imputed” is “chashab.” It is translated as “counted” (Gen. 15:5-6; 31:15; Lev. 25:31; Num. 18:30; Jos. 13:3; Neh. 13:13; Job 18:3; 41:29; Ps. 44:22; 88:4; 106:31; Prov. 17:28; 27:14; Isa. 5:28; 40:15; 20:17; Hos. 8:12), as “thought” (Gen. 38:15; 50:20; 1Sam. 1:13; 18:25; 2 Sam. 14:13; Neh. 6:2; Ps. 73:16; 119:59; Jer. 18:8; Mal. 3:16), as “think” (Neh. 6:6; Job 41:32; Isa. 10:7; Jer. 23:27; 29:11; Eze. 38:10), as “accounted” (Deut. 2:10-11; 2:20; 1 Kin. 10:21; 2 Chro. 9:20; Isa. 2:22), as “imagine” (Job 6:26; Ps. 140:2; Hos.

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7:15; Zec. 7:9-10), as “esteemed” (Isa. 29:16-17; Isa. 53:3; Lam. 4:2), as “reckoned” (Num. 18:27; 23:9; 2 Sam. 4:2; 2 Kin. 12:15), as “count” (Lev. 25:27; 25:52; Job 19:15), as “reckon” (Lev. 25:50; 27:18; 27:23), as “counteth” (Job 19:11; 33:10), as “imagined” (Ps. 10:2; Ps. 21:11), as “imputed” (Lev. 7:18; 17:4), as “account” (Ps. 144:3), as “considered” (Ps. 77:5), as “esteem” (Isa. 53:4), as “esteemeth” (Job 41:27), as “imagineth” (Nah. 1:11), as “impute” (2 Sam. 19:19), as “imputeth” (Ps. 32:2), as “reckoning” (2 Kin. 22:7), as “regard” (Isa. 13:17), as “regardeth” (Isa. 33:8), as “thinkest” (Job 35:2), and as “thinketh” (Psa. 40:17).

Therefore, to be imputed righteous is to be counted as righteous, to be thought of as righteous, to be esteemed as righteous, to be reckoned as righteous, to be considered as righteous, to be regarded as righteous, etc. But the word “imputed” does not mean transferred. It is a theological error to say that “the righteousness of Christ is *transferred* to our account.” If imputed means transferred, when God imputed an uncircumcised individual as circumcised (Rom. 2:26), it means that someone else’s circumcision is transferred to them! The obvious meaning is that they are simply *considered* circumcised, *reckoned* as circumcised, or *thought of* as circumcised, but not that someone else loses their circumcision so that it could be transferred to another.

Some have represented the doctrine of the imputed righteousness “*of Christ*” as the gospel itself. But if this is the gospel, neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever preached it! The Scriptures abundantly talk about imputed righteousness, but it never talks about the imputed righteousness “*of Christ*.” That is why John Wesley said “It is nowhere stated in Scripture that Christ’s personal righteousness is imputed to us. Not a text can be found which contains any enunciation of the doctrine.”³¹

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Biblical imputed righteousness is when you are forgiven and treated as if you had always been righteous even though you haven't been. When Paul was discussing imputed righteousness, he described this state by quoting Psalms 31:1-2. "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God *imputeth righteousness without works*, saying, blessed are they whoses iniquities are *forgiven*, and whose sins are *covered*. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will *not impute sin*" (Rom. 4:5-8). To be imputed righteous without the works of the law, according to David and Paul under the inspiration of God, is when your iniquities are covered and your sins are forgiven.

Imputed righteousness is when you are treated as if you had never sinned, as if you had always lived righteously. It is unmerited by any works. This state of acceptance with God is completely undeserved. But as we already saw, you must give up your sins to be forgiven. There is unmerited forgiveness that we receive through the atonement of Christ when we have a living obedient faith, but nobody is imputed righteous or forgiven while they continue to practice unrighteousness or do not cease from their wickedness.

Asbury Lowrey said, "This passage [Rom. 4:5-8] deserves special attention, as it explains all those text that seem to favor, and have been construed to support the theory of the imputation of Christ's active and passive righteousness to the sinner. Here it is manifest that justification, imputation of righteousness, forgiving iniquities, covering sins, and the non-imputation of sin, are phrases substantially of the same import, and decide positively that the Scripture view of the great doctrine under consideration, is an actual deliverance from the guilt and penalty of sin: from which it follows, that the phrases so often occurring in the writings of Paul – the righteousness of God and of Christ – must mean God's righteous method of

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justifying the ungodly, through the atonement and by the instrumentality of faith – a method that upholds the rectitude of the Divine character, at the same time that it offers a full and free pardon to the sinner.”³²

Charles Finney said, “The doctrine of a literal imputation of Christ's obedience or righteousness is supported by those who hold it, by such passages as the following: Rom. iv. 5-8.—"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputed righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." But here justification is represented only as consisting in forgiveness of sin, or in pardon and acceptance. Again, 2 Cor. v. 19, 21. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Here again the apostle is teaching only his much-loved doctrine of justification by faith, in the sense that upon condition or in consideration of the death and mediatorial interference and work of Christ, penitent believers in Christ are forgiven and rewarded as if they were righteous.”³³

Albert Barnes said, “It is not that his righteousness becomes ours. This is not true; and there is no intelligible sense in which that can be understood. But it is God's plan for pardoning sin, and for treating us as if we had not committed it; that is, adopting us as his children, and admitting us to heaven, on the ground of what the Lord Jesus has done in our stead... But if the doctrine of the Scripture was, that the entire righteousness of Christ was set over to

them, was really and truly theirs, and was transferred to them in any sense, with what propriety could the apostle say, that God justified the ungodly?... the whole scope and design of the Psalm is to show the blessedness of the man who is forgiven, and those sins are not charged on him, but who is freed from the punishment due to his sins. Being thus pardoned, he is treated as a righteous man.”³⁴

We can clearly see that imputed righteousness in the Bible is nothing more than being forgiven and treated as righteous, even though we have lived unrighteous. And as we have seen already, forgiveness of sin only comes after we forsake our sins. Imputed righteousness is therefore in no way contradictory to, or incompatible with, the truth that a man must freely choose to obey the demands of the gospel, particularly the gospel demand to repent unto obedience.

Man's Repentance and The Finished Work of Christ

It is not enough for a person to merely change their *beliefs*. In order to be forgiven, a sinner must also change his *behavior* (2 Chron. 7:14; Prov. 28:13; Isa. 1:16-20; 55:6-7; Hos. 10:12; Eze. 18:30-32; Jer. 4:14; 18:11; 21:8; 26:13; Matt. 4:17; 6:12; 11:20; Acts 2:38; 2:40; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30). True conversion is not just a change of what we believe but also a change of how we plan on living.

A. W. Tozer said, “Any interpretation of free grace which relieves the sinner of responsibility to repent is not of God nor in accordance with revealed truth.”³⁵

I have met some who believe that you do not need to repent of your sins so long as you “trust in the finished work of Christ.” They say, “It is finished.” And therefore, we do not need to choose to repent to be saved. Their view of the atonement makes man's choice to repent completely unnecessary. Their view of the atonement nullifies the

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necessity of a sinner to give up their sin and obey the gospel. Any view of the atonement which makes it a license to sin, so that we are forgiven in advance, without repentance, or while we continue in our sins, is a false atonement view.

At the University of Iowa in Iowa City a student asked me, “Didn’t Jesus die for all of our sins? Why then do we need to stop sinning?” They view the atonement as a means through which we could enjoy our sin in this life and then enjoy Heaven in the next life. To them, the atonement was not a means through which we could be pardoned if we forsake our sins, nor was it a measure meant to bring us to repentance. Their view of the atonement is nothing more than a license to sin.

This type of view must break the heart of God who gave His Son that He might save us from sin (Matt. 1:21), not help us continue in sin! As the Bible says, “Unto you first God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). As we saw in a previous chapter, Jesus died to make men holy!

God is good and would never help sin to exist or continue! Sin is the worst thing in the entire universe! God is infinitely against it with all of His Holy Being! Jesus did not die so that we could choose to continue in our sins and be protected with impunity or immunity. Jesus did not die to overthrow the moral government of God and help mankind’s revolt against the Lord. His atonement was not meant to be an accomplice, encourager, or supporter of sin. The atonement was not meant to contribute to the moral decay of our race and make this world even worse than before He came. Very simply, Jesus did not die so that we could be saved without repentance or to make it unnecessary for man to change.

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The truth is that the blood of Christ does not cover those who continue in their sins. The Bible says, “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins...” (Heb. 10:26) Only those who forsake their sins find mercy and have their sins covered by the blood of the atonement. As we have already seen that the Bible says, “Let the wicked *forsake* his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have *mercy* upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly *pardon*. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are you ways my ways, saith the Lord” (Isa. 55:7-8). And also, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and *forsaketh* them shall have *mercy*” (Prov. 28:13).

Jesus is not
the author of
eternal
salvation to
those who
disobey Him.

Somehow it is passed on as good news that, “Because Jesus died for our sins, we do not need to repent of our sins.” But it would not be good news to God’s universe at all if God gave sinners a license to be sinful, or if men were forgiven while they continued in their sins, or if sinners were going to heaven while they remain in their rebellion! The Bible says that Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that *obey* him” (Heb. 5:9). Jesus is not the author of eternal salvation to those who disobey Him!

The difference between those who build upon the rock and those who build upon sand is that the former are obedient to Jesus Christ and the latter are disobedient to Him (Matt. 7:24, 26). Those who continue in their disobedience are not safe and secure on the rock of Jesus Christ. Those who do not submit to the Lordship of Christ are not covered by the Saviorhood of Christ.

A. W. Tozer said, “Christ’s savior hood is forever

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united to His lordship. Christ must be Lord or He will not be Savior. To teach that Christ will use His sacred power to further our worldly interests is to wrong our Lord and injure our own souls.”³⁶

Joseph Alleine said, “All of Christ is accepted by the sincere convert: he loves not only the wages, but the work of Christ; not only the benefits, but the burden of Christ; he is willing not only to tread out the corn, but to draw under the yoke; he takes up the commands of Christ, yea, the cross of Christ. The unsound convert takes only half of Christ: he is all for the salvation of Christ, but he is not for the sanctification; he is for the privileges, but appropriates not the person of Christ; he divides his offices and benefits of Christ.”³⁷

The preachers who says that a sinner can be forgiven of his sin without first forsaking his sin are preachers who, like the false prophets of the Old Testament, do not speak “right things” but speak “smooth things” (Isa. 30:10). They say, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11).

A proper view of the atonement, however, shows how atonement is not at all contrary to repentance or man’s obedience to the gospel but is perfectly compatible with it. Those who have such a view of the atonement as to make repentance or man’s obedience to the gospel unnecessary do not understand the atonement at all. What then is the proper view of the atonement of Christ?

In order to understand the atonement, we must understand the punishment for our sins, that is, we must understand the penalty of the law. Many have failed to properly understand the nature of the atonement because they failed to understand the penalty of the law. If we fail to properly define the penalty of the law, we will fail to properly define the nature of the atonement.

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The Bible teaches that the penalty for our sins is eternal hell fire. It says, “And these shall go away into *everlasting punishment*” (Matt. 25:46). And it says, “Who shall be *punished with everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thes. 1:9). This is why Ray Comfort said, “What then is the punishment for sin? It is everlasting damnation.”³⁸ And John Owen said, “All mankind have by sin fallen under the penalty threatened unto the transgression of this law... which is eternal death...”³⁹ Clearly, the penalty for our sins is not physical death but eternal death.

Some have supposed physical death to be the penalty for our sin. This is a mistake since even infants die before they have a chance to sin, animals die and they have never sinned, and since even Christians physically die though they have been saved from the penalty of their sins. Therefore, physical death is not the penalty for our sin but eternal death is! That is why the “wages of sin is *death*” is contrasted with “*eternal life*” (Rom. 6:23). The wages of sin is eternal death.

While physical death is a natural consequence of Adam's sin (1 Cor. 15:22), and spiritual death is a natural consequence of our own sin (Isa. 59:2; Rom. 5:12; Col. 2:13), it is eternal death that is a direct punishment for our personal sin (Matt. 25:46; Rom. 6:23; 2 Thes. 1:9). The Bible says, “And as it is appointed unto men once to *die*, but *after this the judgment*” (Heb. 9:27). Notice that it is after physical death that men will be judged and will receive the penalty of the law. Therefore, physical death itself is not the judgment or the penalty of the law, since the judgment and the penalty comes after physical death. After the wicked face Judgment Day they will face eternal damnation; and therefore, eternal damnation is the penalty of the law. The sentence for violating law always comes after the court session.

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It is impossible to understand the purpose of the atonement without understanding the purpose of the penalty of the law. To ask “Why did Jesus have to die,” and to ask “Why is the penalty of the law executed upon sinners,” are questions with the same answers. What then is the purpose of the penalty of the law in the moral government of God? The answer is that the threatened penalty of the law is meant to be a deterrent to sin, operating as a moral influence upon the minds of all free moral agents. This is why God publicly announces the penalties for violating His law and why He publicly executes the penalties upon transgressors.

God, in His love, is personally reluctant to execute penalties.

God does not execute the penalty of the law for any *personal or vindictive reasons* (Eze. 18:32; 33:1; Lam. 3:32-33; Heb. 12:10). God says “I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth” (Eze. 18:32). And the Bible says, “For he doth not afflict willingly” (Lam. 3:32). In His love, God is personally reluctant to execute penalties and He takes no personal pleasure in it.

Therefore, there must be another reason why He executes them.

God in His love not only cares for the transgressor, but he also cares for the community that was sinned against. God executes the penalty of the law, not for *personal reasons*, but for *governmental reasons* (Dan. 6:14-16; Esther 1:15-22; Ecc. 8:11; Rom. 11:20-22; 1 Cor. 10:5-6; 2 Pet. 2:6; Jude 1:7). Hell is referred to in the Bible as a “prison” (1 Pet. 3:19). This shows its governmental relation or its governmental role in God’s universe. When laws are not *enforced* through penalty, laws are *disregarded* by moral beings. As the Bible says, “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Ecc. 8:11). It is

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the execution of the sentence against evil which influences or discourages men from doing the evil. If the sentence against the evil is not executed, they are encouraged to do it. This shows the governmental reasons for *executing* penalty – to *discourage* disobedience. And it shows the governmental problems with forgiveness or *remitting* the penalty – it would *encourage* disobedience.

In the story of queen Vashti, she publicly disobeyed a command from the king (Esther 1:12). But her disobedience was not merely against the king, it was against the good of the entire kingdom. There was a governmental concern amongst the princes. “Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the providences of the king Ahasuerus, for this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all the women, and that they shall despite their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, the king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not” (Esther 1:16-17).

The public example of punishment discourages law-breaking.

Disobedience is a public example which would encourage others to do likewise. To disobey the law is to endanger the well-being of an entire community. Therefore, the public example of punishment is necessary to counteract the influence or spread of disobedience. Whereas, the example of disobedience encourages law-breaking, and thereby endanger the well-being of a community, the public example of punishment discourages law-breaking, and thereby promote the well-being of the community. Just as the precepts of law are necessary for the well-being of a community; the sanctions of the law are a governmental

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necessity for the well-being of a community, because the sanctions are what support the precepts.

The governmental purpose in executing penalties is clearly seen in the story of Daniel and the lion's den. "Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, that no decree nor statue which the king establishes may be changed. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of the lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee" (Dan. 6:14-16).

Nothing could be any clearer than that king Darius executed the penalty of the law, not because he was personally vindictive or unmerciful, but out of a governmental concern. The strength and stability of his government had always rested upon the certainty his subjects felt that the penalty of the law would always be executed. If the certainty of the execution of the penalty falls into question by his subjects, the strength and stability of the government is endangered. It was not that the king had any negative personal feelings towards Daniel which he was trying to gratify in his punishment. Rather, we see the opposite. The king was fond of Daniel and was "sore displeased" at the very thought of punishing him. And he "set his heart" to deliver Daniel (Dan. 6:14), but found no solution to his governmental problem. It is not that the king's wrath needed to be satisfied but that the king's law needed to be vindicated and upheld. Darius must not be viewed as an offended individual seeking personal revenge, but as a king with a law and a government which he wants to uphold and maintain.

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How does this apply to God? God is called the “Lord of hosts” (Amos 4:13). This means He rules over many moral beings. The moral government of God is not limited to mankind. God said, “I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and *all their hosts have I commanded*” (Isa. 45:12). This means that the hosts of heaven are also under the moral government of God. The Bible says that the hosts of heaven *cannot even be numbered* (Jer. 33:22; Heb. 12:22). This means that the moral government of God is massive!

We can clearly see then why the penalty of the law serves a very important purpose in God’s moral government. God must publicly declare, display, or manifest His regard for His moral law in order to maintain its authority and influence throughout His entire moral government or moral universe. He must make these demonstrations of His character in order to keep His law from falling into contempt amongst all of His countless subjects.

The moral government of God is massive.

The awfulness of crime, the value of the law, and the importance of the precept are all shown in the severity of punishment which is executed when there is a violation. However, these are not made known or declared when the penalty of the law is not executed. Whenever a ruler executes the penalty of the law upon transgressors, he is showing the rest of his subjects his regard for his law and his care for their well-being. By doing this, the execution of penalties is meant to be a public example to deter others from doing likewise.

In the civil government of Israel, stoning was meant to be public so that others may “hear, and fear.” And once they were stoned, Israel would, “hang him on a tree” (Deut. 21:21-22). Stoning and then hanging the transgressor on a

tree was a public example to cause all others to fear to do likewise.

Likewise, in the moral government of God penalties are designed to have the same deterring effect. The Bible says, "But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these were our *examples*, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:5-6). "Now all these things happened unto them for *ensamples*: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11). "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an *ensample* unto those that after should live ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:6). "Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth an *example*, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 1:7).

The
punishment
of sinners is
God inflicted.
Therefore, it is
God reflective.

The punishment of sinners is God inflicted. Therefore, it is God reflective. That is, the punishment which God inflicts upon sinners for their sin is a reflection of His character. It reveals His regard for goodness and His hostility for evil. The penalty that God executes upon those who have done the public harm is a revelation to the public of His great benevolence towards them, by showing His determination to maintain and uphold the law which is designed for their well-being.

God's moral government is full of moral agents whose wills are moved or influenced by truths being presented to their minds. These truths serve as motives or incentives to obey His law. Therefore, if God is going to

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maintain His authority and the authority of His law over the moral agents that are throughout His moral government, in order to promote the well-being of His universe, He must manifest to the minds of His subjects His regard for His law so that they do not believe that they can transgress with impunity. He does this either through the execution of penalty upon the transgressor or through the substituted measure of atonement.

This is done lest His law falls into contempt and His subjects are encouraged to disobey. By showing His regard for His law so that His subjects know His seriousness in upholding it, and in presenting to their minds contemplations of awful experiences of pain which are undesirable, which they naturally want to avoid, God influences their will to obey His law and discourages them from disobeying it. Moral beings cannot help but to view their own well-being as valuable; therefore, considerations brought before their minds which show that a certain course of conduct would result in their eternal misery cannot help but to influence their will or choices. Thus the penalty of eternal hell has a profound influence upon the will of God's moral subjects. This penalty is God's governmental means of sustaining the authority and influence of His law, so that disobedience to the precept is prevented and adherence to the precept is secured through the execution of those sanctions.

Thomas W. Jenkyn said, "The suffering of a sinner, of one who transgresses the law, are right and good for the ends of the government which we are members. The penalty is inflicted, not for the mere sake of putting the delinquent to pain, nor of gratifying the private revenge of a ruler, but to secure and promote the public ends of good government. These ends are to prevent others from transgressing; by giving, to all the subjects, a decided and clear demonstration of the dignity of the law, and a tangible proof of the evil of

crime.”⁴⁰

It is very important to understand the motive God has in executing penalties because that is the very same reason that God required the atonement. The atonement is a substitute for our penalty, designed to accomplish its purpose. If God executes penalties to satisfy some unmerciful or vindictive spirit in on His part, then that is also why He required the atonement. But that was the idea behind the sacrifices of the heathen to the pagan gods, not the God of the Bible. God executes penalties for the governmental purpose of sustaining His law; and therefore, that is the same

God executes penalties for the governmental purpose of sustaining His law.

reason God required the atonement of Christ as a substitute for the penalty of sinners.

It is not that God’s wrath needed to be satisfied, since God is merciful and can turn away from His wrath when He wants to. It is that God’s law needed to be vindicated and upheld, since the good of His universe depends upon this. It was public justice that needed to be satisfied.

The execution of penalties is not the right of the individual transgressed against, as punishment is not to be revenge. But executing penalties is the responsibility of the Law-giver Himself. It is meant for the public’s good. Since God does not execute penalties for personal reasons but for governmental reasons, God therefore required the atonement not for any personal reasons but for governmental reasons. In other words, God’s problem in forgiveness was not subjective but was objective. His dilemma in exercising pardon were not internal to Himself but were external to Him.

Gregory of Nazianzus said, “Is it not plain that the Father received the ransom, not because He himself required

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or needed it, but for the sake of the Divine government of the universe, and because man must be sanctified through the incarnation of the son of God?"⁴¹

Just as stoning in the nation of Israel was meant to be a deterrent, that others may "hear, and fear" (Deut. 21:22), penalties serve this necessary purpose in the Kingdom of God. As we already saw, in the civil government of the Israelites, they would hang the body of a criminal, after he had been stoned, up upon a tree as a public example and warning to others (Deut. 21:22-23). Paul actually refers to this passage in the law when discussing the atonement of Jesus because He was publicly hung upon a tree (Gal. 3:13). Paul's reference to this passage carries with it this idea of public example. The atonement of Christ under the moral government of God, just like the penalty of the law under the civil government of Israel, is a public example meant to honor and uphold the law. It is designed to prevent and discourage others from following in our transgressions.

While I was open air preaching at the University of Florida in Gainesville, an atheist asked me, "Why can't God simply forgive without atonement?" This is a very good question and it gets to the very heart of the atonement itself. The nature of forgiveness is the same whether it is in *person to person* relations or in *government to criminal* relations. The Bible says, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). In other words, forgiveness is forgiveness whether it is done by a person or by a government. The nature of forgiveness of both is letting offenses go as if they had not been committed. And I can forgive my neighbor or let his offenses against me go without my neighbor making atonement. But God cannot forgive mankind or let our offenses against His law go without an atonement being made, because the relationship God has with the universe is different than the relationship I

have with my neighbor. The Lord sustains the relationship of the Moral Governor of the universe. Governmental relations do require atonement in order for forgiveness to occur while personal relations do not. Therefore, God cannot simply forgive mankind without atonement being made the same way that one individual can forgive another individual without atonement being made.

This was the point of Hugo Grotius in his refutation of Socinius. Like the atheist I met on campus, the error of the Socinians is that they viewed God merely as an offended individual. Therefore, they concluded that God could forgive

without atonement since any offended individual can forgive without atonement. While it is true that as an individual, God can forgive without any atonement, just as any offended individual can forgive without atonement, but as the Ruler of the Universe God must sustain and maintain the honor, authority, and influence of His law, for His own good and the good of His universe.

The Lord sustains the relationship of the Moral Governor of the universe.

The good of God's universe, or the rights and well-being of each moral being in the universe, depends upon the authority and influence of God's law. And since the authority and influence of God's law depends upon the mental impressions that His moral subjects have of His regard for His law, since the decisions of moral beings are influenced by the motives and mental considerations of their mind, then God cannot forgive sin in any way which would publicly dishonor or weaken His law, since the good of His universe depends upon its authority and influence being maintained.

If God weakens His moral government throughout His universe by publicly forgiving sin in such a way as to

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dishonor His law or encourage transgression, or in such a way as to give the impression that He doesn't care about His law and does not mean to maintain and uphold it, then He endangers the rights and well-being of all His subjects. This is because His moral government promotes the rights and well-being of all His subjects. Therefore, as a Moral Governor, or as The Ruler of the entire universe, God cannot forgive sinners who are criminals and rebels against His government without a governmental atonement provided to substitute their penalty and sustain the law throughout His universe just as the execution of the penalty upon sinners would have.

The only way that the governmental view or perspective of the atonement can be denied, by the Socinians or the Satisfactionists, is if the moral government of God is denied. That is because if God has a moral government in the universe over free moral beings, then there is a governmental purpose in the execution of penalties and there is a governmental problem in the forgiveness of sins. There would be a governmental problem in forgiving sin under God's divine administration just as there a governmental dilemma in any administration when extending pardon to rebels and criminals. This would, therefore, be the problem that the atonement would be designed to overcome.

Since the atonement is designed for the remission of sins, and remission of sins is the remitting of penalty for those sins, the atonement must answer whatever problems there are in the remission of penalty; the atonement must fulfill the purpose of the penalty if it is going to be an adequate substitute for the penalty or render the penalty remissible. Since it cannot be denied by any Bible believing Christian that God has a moral government in the universe, since it cannot be denied that God has a moral law and that He is the Sovereign of a great mass of moral beings, it

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cannot be denied that God has governmental problems in the forgiveness of sin. And it cannot be denied that the atonement was designed to overcome those governmental obstacles which were in the way of pardon. Therefore, the governmental view of the atonement cannot be properly, logically, or consistently denied by any Bible believing Christian.

Punishment has a governmental necessity to fulfill, because if punishment is not inflicted, then the character of the lawgiver will be misunderstood; and consequently, His law will be weakened. This would cause the law to fall into contempt amongst His subjects. For that reason, God said that he would “punish” lawbreakers, lest they “say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil” (Zeph. 1:12). If God simply did not punish sin, this would give the wrong impression of His character and His moral government or moral law would suffer as a consequence. Punishment, therefore, is necessary in order to express the character of the Lawgiver, to manifest His sacred regard for His law, His hatred for sin, and His love for righteousness, lest His subjects be encouraged to transgress assuming they can choose to disobey with the hope of impunity.

The problem that the moral government of God has with mere forgiveness or remitting the execution of the penalty is that the governmental purpose of penalty would be unfulfilled or unsatisfied. Forgiveness without atonement would encourage rebellion in God’s universe and cause His law to fall into contempt amongst His subjects. Forgiving the disobedience of mankind without the atonement would weaken and dishonor the law throughout the moral universe. Therefore, God has governmental reasons in requiring atonement. Atonement is necessary in order to solve His governmental problems of forgiveness. The atonement must substitute the execution of our penalty in order to satisfy the

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purpose of our penalty. That way our penalty can be remitted without the governmental problems that mere forgiveness would have caused. Charles Finney said, "The atonement is a governmental expedient to sustain law without the execution of its penalty to the sinner."⁴² Through the atonement, the purpose of the penalty is fulfilled without the penalty itself being executed, or even while the penalty itself is remitted.

God must either "*shew* his wrath" upon the wicked (Rom. 9:22), or through the atonement "*declare* his righteousness" (Rom. 3:25). To "shew" in the Greek means to "to show," "demonstrate," "prove," "manifest," and "display."⁴³ To "declare" means to "demonstrate," to give "proof," to give "manifestation," to give "sign" or "evidence."⁴⁴ To show implies the observer. To declare implies the hearer. Who is the recipient of these manifestations of God's character? Who does God show His wrath to, or declare His righteousness to?

The answer is the moral beings of His universe. It is their minds which are impressed with the character of God, either through His wrath being executed upon the wicked, or in lieu of this, the suffering and death of Christ on behalf of our sins. Paul said, "Christ Jesus: whom God hath *set forth* to be a propitiation" (Rom. 3:24-25). Christ has been "set forth," which means in the Greek, to "manifest," "display," "put forth," "point out," "show," "demonstrate," and "prove."⁴⁵ John Wesley said, "Whom God hath set forth - Before angels and men..."⁴⁶ Christ was "set forth" before God's kingdom or before all the minds of God's moral subjects, that His righteousness in forgiving us of our sins would be seen by all.

For what purpose are these public demonstrations put before the minds of moral beings? Why are these manifestations given to their minds for consideration? It is to uphold His law and maintain His government. Inflicting

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suffering for disobedience naturally discourages others from disobedience and it naturally encourages others to obedience. The showing forth of His wrath, or the demonstration of His righteousness through the atonement, is absolutely necessary for God's moral government in the universe. Albert Barnes said that in Christ, "God had retained the integrity of his character as a moral governor; that he had shown a due regard to his Law."⁴⁷

The same influence that the execution of the penalty of the law upon transgressors would have had on the universe is the same influence that the atonement of Jesus Christ, as a substitute for our penalty, has upon the universe. But the atonement actually has a greater influence upon the universe than the execution of the penalty would have had, because it not only inspires fear of the sanctions of the law, but it inspires love for the Giver of the law. The atonement is therefore a perfect and adequate substitute for the penalty of the law, which was preferred by God over the execution of the penalty.

The idea of the atonement is that it substitutes our penalty of eternal hell, fulfilling the governmental purpose of our penalty, so that our penalty can be remitted. Jesus said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the *remission of sins*" (Matt. 26:28). And Paul said, "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood is no *remission*" (Heb. 9:22). The Greek word used for remission means, "forgiveness or pardon, of sins (letting them go as if they had never been committed), remission of the penalty..."⁴⁸ The atonement substitutes our penalty, so that our penalty can be remitted and our sins can go unpunished by God's mercy.

The atonement is designed "to *declare his righteousness* for the *remission* of sins...To *declare*, I say at this time *his righteousness: that he might be just, and the*

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justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:25-26). God must be declared righteous in remitting sins, which in the Greek means in “passing over, letting pass, neglecting, disregarding...”⁴⁹ The only way that God is justified in remitting the penalty for our sins, in letting them pass as if they had not occurred or in letting them go unpunished, is because an atonement for our sins has been made which substitutes our penalty or replaces our punishment.

The atonement justifies God in the forgiveness of sins. It justifies Him in letting His wrath pass over us. Christ died that God “might be *just*, and the *justifier*...” God must be *just to His universe* by discouraging rebellion, *just to His law* by maintaining its authority and influence, and *just to Himself* by manifesting His true character, if He is going to set aside the penalty of hell that sinners deserve in justifying or pardoning them. If God pardoned or justified us without atonement, it would be unjust to His universe because sin is not discouraged, it would be unjust to His law because it is not being honored or vindicated, and it would be unjust to God because His character would be questioned and misrepresented.

The
atonement
justifies
God in
letting His
wrath pass
over us.

It is important that we remember that the purpose of executing penalties is not mere retribution or inflicting pain merely because the subject deserves it. That is why the suffering and death of Christ could be a substitute for our penalty. If the only objective of penalty was retribution, Jesus Christ could not have provided a substitute for our penalty. He was innocent and therefore did not deserve to be treated the way He was. The sinners dying next to Christ deserved to be there and therefore retributive justice was satisfied in their case, but Christ did not deserve to be there

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and therefore retributive justice was not satisfied in his case. The dying man next to Christ said, “And we indeed *justly*; for we receive the *due reward* of *our deeds*: but this man hath done nothing amiss” (Lk. 23:41). Christ was not wounded for his transgressions, “he was wounded for our transgressions” (Isa. 53:5). Therefore, the atonement could not have possibly satisfied *retributive justice*.

But the objective of penalties in the first place is not mere *retributive justice* but *public justice*. God punishes sinners upon condition that they deserve it, but for the sake of His kingdom. Public justice is the grounds or ultimate purpose, but retributive justice is the condition. The primary purpose of executing penalties is public justice. God promotes the well-being of His universe by maintaining the authority and influence of His law through manifesting to all His subjects His sacred regard for His law. Since the atonement is an alternative, replacement, or substitute for our penalty, it must fulfill the purpose of our penalty, otherwise forgiveness or remission would be unsafe.

The atonement was not our penalty, but substitutes our penalty, making it possible for our penalty to be withheld. The atonement was not a satisfaction of retributive justice, but was a replacement of retributive justice, so that retributive justice could be avoided. The atonement fulfilled the purpose of penalty or satisfied the reason behind executing retributive justice, which purpose or reason is public justice.

Though the atonement did not and could not have satisfied *retributive justice*, since the innocent died and the guilty are forgiven through mercy; the atonement did satisfy *public justice*. This is because God’s regard for His law is manifested and therefore, its authority and influence is maintained, and consequently, the well-being of His universe is promoted just as it would have been had the penalty of the

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law been executed upon the guilty. The atonement actually satisfies public justice to a greater extent than the penalty of the law being executed upon sinners would have. That is because the execution of penalties may influence God's subjects to obey Him out of fear, by manifesting His character and determination to uphold His law, thus presenting to their minds the expectation of awful consequences which are contrary to their own well-being if they disobey His law. But the atonement of Jesus gives them greater motives to obey God, since they see how good He Himself actually is, and how worthy He is to be loved, worshiped, and obeyed. The atonement manifests God's character in a greater way than the execution of penalty would have revealed. The atonement of Christ satisfies the purpose of the penalty of the law in a greater way than the penalty of the law itself could have.

The precept of the law itself demands that we love God and love our neighbor. The well-being of others is the object which the law commands that we commit our wills to. Since the law itself demands obedience out of benevolence and not out of selfishness, since it demands that we have benevolent motives and not selfish motives or that we obey for the sake of others and not of our own sake, the atonement brings God's subjects into true subjection and obedience in a way that the penalty of the law itself could not necessarily do.

It is absolutely essential that we understand that while the penalty for our sins is eternal death, the suffering and death of Christ on the cross takes the place of our penalty. Jonathon Edwards Jr. said, "The atonement is the substitute for the punishment threatened in the law; and was designed to answer the same ends of supporting the authority of the law, the dignity of the divine moral government, and the consistency of the divine conduct in legislation and

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execution.”⁵⁰ Albert Barnes said, “His sufferings were in the place of the penalty, not the penalty itself. They were a substitution for the penalty, and were, therefore, strictly and properly vicarious, and were not the identical sufferings which the sinner would himself have endured.”⁵¹ He also said, “The atonement is something substituted in the place of the penalty of the law, which will answer the same ends as the punishment of the offender himself would. It is instead of punishment. It is something which will make it proper for the lawgiver to suspend or remit the literal execution of the penalty of the law, because the object or end of that penalty has been secured, or because something has been substituted for that which will answer the same purpose.”⁵²

The suffering of Christ was a *substitute* for the punishment of sinners; it was an *alternative* to the damnation of our race. His voluntary suffering *takes the place of* the punishment of the guilty. His suffering and death is an adequate substitute for our eternal punishment because it reveals to the universe God’s regard for His law in an even greater way than our penalty would have. Since the purpose of our penalty has now been fulfilled through this substitute or alternative measure, our penalty itself can be remitted by God’s grace and mercy.

While the atonement is a substitute for our penalty so that our penalty *can be* remitted, in order to *actually* have your penalty remitted you must repent of your sins (Lk. 24:47). Jesus Christ shed his blood “for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28), but the Bible says that even *after* the atonement sinners must repent “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Just as it would not be safe to the public for God to pardon sinners without atonement, so also it would not be safe for God to pardon sinners without repentance. Therefore, the conditions of God’s forgiveness are not only an atonement but also repentance.

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Contrary to Reformed or Calvinistic theology, the Bible says that the atonement of Christ was made for *everyone* and was not limited to a *select few* (Isa. 45:22; 53:6; 55:1; Eze. 18:30-32; Matt. 23:37; Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 2:10-11; Jn. 1:29; 3:16; Rom. 2:11; 5:15; Heb. 2:9; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:11; 4:10; Tit. 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:2; Rev. 3:20). “But we see Jesus, who was made little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death *for every man*” (Heb. 2:9).

Notice that the Bible says that Jesus died “for every man.” Clearly, Paul did not read the Westminster Catechism or learn his theology from Geneva. Maybe Paul should have consulted with Calvin first to make sure that his statement would be orthodox? Maybe if he only had a copy of “Institutes of Christian Religion” he could have written the Bible better? Of course, I’m being sarcastic.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, clearly said that Jesus died “for every man” and not “for every *type* of man” as Calvinists teach. If he meant “every type of man” he could have simply said so. He said “every man” because that is what he meant. We shouldn’t read the Bible through Calvinist glasses. The problem is that Calvinists have to read their theology into the Bible, rather than to read their theology from the Bible.

When God provided a way for the Israelites to be saved from the poison of the serpents, a bronze serpent was put on a poll for all who had been bitten to look upon and be healed. It was lifted up that “any man” can look and be saved (Num. 21:8-9). Jesus Christ compared himself to the serpent in the wilderness and taught that He too must be lifted up so that “whosoever” can be saved through Him (Jn. 3:14-15).

But just because Jesus died “for every man” does not mean that every man is saved. Just because Paul said,

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"Christ... died for all, then were all dead" (2 Cor. 5:14), does not mean that "all" are saved. The Bible says, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our only, but also for the sins of the *whole world*" (1 Jn. 2:2). Yet we know that the whole world is not saved from God's wrath.

This is because the unlimited atonement of Christ does not mean that all *will be* saved, but that all *can be* saved. "For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him *might be* saved" (Jn. 3:17). The atonement of Christ does not automatically or

unconditionally save anyone. Jesus died to reconcile man to God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21), but even *after* the atonement we have the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18), and after the atonement we are to tell men "be ye reconciled unto God" (2 Cor. 5:20). And remember, Jesus Christ shed his blood "for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28), but the Bible says that even *after* the atonement that sinners must still repent "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Clearly, the atonement was one

The unlimited atonement of Christ does not mean that all will be saved, but that all can be saved.

necessary condition in the process of reconciliation, but man's conversion is also necessary for reconciliation between God and man.

The Bible teaches that for man to be saved, they need to obey the gospel (2 Thes. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17). The blood of Christ does not cover men if they continue in their sins (Heb. 10:26-31). Only those who are converted or who forsake their sins and trust in Christ have their sins covered His blood. Some are saved by the atonement and some are not saved by the atonement, not because the atonement was limited in its intention, but because some men choose repent and believe while others choose not to. Paul said, "God, who

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is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” (1 Tim. 4:10). “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Heb. 4:2). The atonement does not automatically or unconditionally save anyone; rather, it saves those who met the conditions of repentance and faith.

I have heard Calvinists say, “Jesus Christ did not come to make men salvable, but He came to actually save them.” They will quote, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). They do not believe that the atonement is a provision through which all men might be saved, but a means through which the elect are automatically saved. The problem with their statement is that it is a false dilemma or an unnecessary antithesis. It is not “either/or” but “both/and” in this case.

The fallaciousness of such a statement would be repeated if a person said, “Public schools do not exist to make education available to the public, but to actually educate students.” The truth is that public schools exist to do both. They exist to make education available to all while making it actual for those who have enrolled. In fact, education could not become actual unless it was first made available.

In the same way, Christ came to make salvation available to all, but salvation only becomes actual for those who are converted. The atonement is sufficient for the salvation of all, but the atonement is only efficient for those who turn to Him. Salvation cannot become actual unless it is first made available. Therefore, Jesus Christ came to both make men salvable and to actually save men.

Those who believe that the atonement automatically and unconditionally saves men are those who believe that in the atonement Jesus Christ “took our penalty” or “took our

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punishment.” But the penalty of the law is “the soul that sinneth, *it* shall die” (Eze. 18:4, 20). That is retributive justice. The death that occurred in atonement was not of “the soul that sinneth...” Therefore, the atonement was not the penalty of the law or retributive justice. Retributive justice is treating everyone according to their own personal character. This did not occur in the atonement and therefore, the atonement did not satisfy retributive justice.

A Calvinist will argue that Jesus Christ suffered our penalty, or took our punishment, because the Bible says “Christ hath redeemed us from *the curse of the law*, being made *a curse for us*: for it is written, cursed is every man that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13). But what is the curse of the law? Did the law of God ever demand for sinners to be crucified? No. In the civil government of Israel, the severest punishment of the law was stoning. Crucifixion was sanctioned by Roman law, but it was not sanctioned by Jewish law. God never crucified sinners. Under the moral government of God, the severe punishment of the law is eternal hell. That is why the text says that Jesus suffered “*a* curse,” not suffered “*the* curse of the law.” The curse of the law is what we are saved from; a curse is what he endured. *The* curse of the law was substituted with *a* curse.

Paul did not say that Jesus saved us from “the curse of the law” by suffering “*the* curse of the law,” but that he saved us from “the curse of the law” by suffering “*a* curse.” Jesus Christ saved us from the curse of eternal hell, by suffering the curse of hanging on the tree. His curse substitutes our curse, so that our curse can be avoided. By Jesus suffering the curse of crucifixion, of hanging on the tree, we now are saved from the curse of the law, which is eternal damnation.

Since our punishment is eternal hell (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thes. 1:9) it cannot be literally said that Jesus Christ took

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our punishment. In fact, it would be unjust for God to punish the innocent at all (Prov. 17:15). According to retributive justice, only those who *deserve* punishment can be justly punished, and only those who sin deserve punishment. Therefore, only those who sin can be justly punished. And since it would be unjust to punish the same sins twice, if Jesus was punished for our sins, justice would demand that the whole world be saved! Nobody that Jesus died for could possibly go to hell for their sin.

This view of the atonement, that Christ suffered our penalty and took our punishment, has inevitably lead to the errors of universalism, limited atonement, unconditional salvation, and once saved always saved. These conclusions cannot be logically denied if the premise is accepted that Jesus Christ took our punishment or suffered the penalty for our sins.

The Bible says that “to *punish the just* is not good” (Prov. 17:26). It also says, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that *condemneth the just*, even they both are an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 17:15). But it also says, “For Christ also hath once *suffered* for sins, the *just* for the unjust” (1 Pet. 3:18). How do we reconcile these verses? One says that it is not good to *punish the just*, another says that it is an abomination to *condemn the just*, and the other says that Christ *suffered the just* for the unjust. If God punished or condemned Jesus, who was just, is He an “abomination” to Himself? Is He not good according to His own standard? We must conclude that according to retributive justice Jesus could not be punished or condemned at all because He was just. God could not and cannot but approve of Christ at all times. God could never disapprove of Christ or His character because His character never has any qualities to disapprove of. But since He was just, He was able to suffer and die as a sacrifice for our sins. The *suffering* and *death* of the just was

a substitute for the *punishment* and *condemnation* of the guilty.

Dr. Lightfoot, one of the Westminster divines, even said, “Was Christ so much as punished by God? Much less, then, was He overwhelmed by the wrath of God – damned by God? Was a lamb punished that was sacrificed? He was afflicted, but not punished; for punishment argued a crime or fault preceding. Were the sad sufferings of Christ laid on him as punishments? Certainly not for His own sins; no, nor for ours neither. He suffered for our sins – bare our sins; but His sufferings were not punishments for our sins.”⁵³

The suffering of the just was a substitute for the punishment and condemnation of the guilty.

Dwight said, “Strict justice demands the punishment of the sinner only, and can in no sense require the punishment of another in his stead.”⁵⁴

Jonathon Edwards Jr. said, “An innocent person may choose to be made the subject of suffering, in the stead of a criminal. Therefore, though suffering which he chooses to endure, be inflicted on him, no injustice is done him; nor will it be pretended that this procedure is according to strict distributive justice, which requires the criminal to be punished, not his substitute.”⁵⁵

Charles Finney said that “it would not only be unjust, but it is impossible with God to punish an innocent moral agent at all. Punishment implies guilt. An innocent being may suffer, but he cannot be punished. Christ voluntarily suffered ‘the just for the unjust.’ He had a right to exercise this self-denial; and as it was by his own voluntary consent, no injustice was done to any one.”⁵⁶

Retributive justice demands that punishment only be inflicted upon the sinful, or upon those who deserve it.

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Nobody can be justly punished for an action unless they are guilty of that action. That is why those who hold to the view that Jesus Christ was punished also hold to the view that Jesus Christ, through imputation, became guilty and sinful. Just as they believe that babies are sinful through the imputation of Adam's sin, and therefore babies deserve hell, so they believe Jesus became sinful through the imputation of our sin, and therefore Jesus deserved to be crucified.

Martin Luther said that "of all sinners" Jesus Christ became "the greatest."⁵⁷ R. C. Sproul said, "He became the virtual incarnation of evil..."⁵⁸ Adam Clarke said that this is "a most blasphemous doctrine; viz. that our sins were imputed to Christ, and that he was a proper object of the indignation of Divine justice, because he was blackened with imputed sin; and some have proceeded so far in this blasphemous career as to say, that Christ may be considered as the greatest of sinners, because all the sins of mankind, or of the elect, as they say, were imputed to him, and reckoned as his own."⁵⁹ Albert Barnes said, "Jesus was not sinful, or a sinner, in any sense. He did not so take human guilt upon him, that the words sinful and sinner could with any propriety be applied to him. They are not applied to him any way in the Bible; but there the language is undeviating. It is that in all senses he was holy and undefiled. And yet language is often used on this subject which is horrible and only a little short of blasphemy, as if he was guilty, and as if he was even the greatest sinner in the universe. I have heard language used which sent a chill of horror to my heart; and language may be found in the writings of those who hold the doctrine of imputation in the strictest sense, which is only a little short of blasphemy."⁶⁰

To support their notion that Jesus Christ became sinful, they appeal to Paul who said, "For he hath made him *to be sin* for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). Does this

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verse actually teach that Jesus became sinful, or that Jesus became a sinner? There is an alternative interpretation or understanding, which is more consistent with the whole of Scripture. Adam Clarke said, "He made him who knew no sin, (who was innocent), a sin-offering for us."⁶¹ It is not uncommon to the Scriptures to use the word "sin" to refer to a "sin offering," as the word "sin" is translated "sin offering" in many places throughout Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Chronicles, Nehemiah, and Ezekiel, because the context of such passages is clearly referring to a sin offering and not an act of sin. Albert Barnes said, "To be sin - The words 'to be' are not in the original. Literally, it is, 'he has made him sin, or a sin-offering.'"⁶² And he said, "If the declaration that he was made 'sin'... does not mean that he was sin itself, or a sinner, or guilty, then it must mean that he was a sin-offering - an offering or a sacrifice for sin."⁶³ John Wesley said, "He made him a sin offering, who knew no sin."⁶⁴ So we can see that the idea that Jesus Christ became sinful on the cross is not at all supported by this particular verse.

Those who believe that Jesus Christ became sinful on the cross will also say that "the father turned his face away..."⁶⁵ The problem is that this is a hymn, not a Scripture. The Scriptures nowhere state that the Father turned His face away from the Son, as if His Son was repulsive to His eyes. However, R. C. Sproul said, "The load He carried was repugnant to the Father. God is too holy to even look at iniquity. God the Father turned His back upon the Son."⁶⁶ Their support for this view is, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). This must be poetic and cannot be taken literally, because it would be a denial of the omniscience of God. The Bible says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). And it says, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his

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sight: but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). It cannot be doubted, in light of these passages, that the eyes of the Father were beholding the Son when He was on the cross, even if somehow the Son had become sinful or had been transformed into a sinner.

Their “ultimate” proof-text for their view of Jesus being so sinful that the Father turned His back on him is when Jesus said, “My God, my God, why hast thou *forsaken* me?” (Mk. 15:34) Does this mean that the Father turned His face away? No. The meaning of this verse is shown in the context of the Psalm Jesus was quoting. The rest of the Psalm said, “Why art thou so *far from helping* me?” (Ps. 22:1) This clarifies what it means to be “forsaken.” To be forsaken is not to be spiritually or relationally separated, but to be provisionally abandoned.

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Jesus was forsaken in the sense that the Father did not deliver Him from the cross but rather He delivered Him to the cross. He did this by giving His Son over into the hands of wicked men to be crucified (Matt. 17:22; 26:35; Mk. 14:41; Lk. 24:7; Acts 2:23). Previously, the Father protected the Son when His life was being threatened (Matt. 4:6; Lk. 4:11; Jn. 7:30; 10:31; 10:39). But now, the Father lifted up the protection He previously had over Him. Pilate had no power over Jesus except what the Father gave to Him (Jn. 19:11). Therefore, Jesus was “forsaken” by the Father because the Father did not “help” Him, but rather the Father gave Jesus over to be crucified by men.

In contradiction to his own doctrine, that the Father turned His back on the Son, R. C. Sproul said that the Father was the one who “did strike Him, smite Him, and afflict

Him.”⁶⁷ How the Father could do all this, without even looking upon Christ or with His back turned on Him, Sproul does not explain. But the Bible says that it was wicked men who actually crucified Jesus (Mk. 12:7; 27:35; Mk. 15:24-25; Lk. 20:14-15; 23:33; 24:20; 24:7; Jn. 19:18, 23; Acts 2:23; 2:36; 4:10; 1 Thes. 2:14-15). The Apostles’ Creed says that Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate.”⁶⁸ That is because it was Pilate who “delivered” Jesus to be “crucified” (Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Lk. 24:7; Jn. 19:16).

In this same way the Father can be said to be the one who bruised the Son (Isa. 53:10), or sacrificed the Son (Gen. 22:2), in the sense that the Father gave the Son over as an offering (Jn. 3:16), lifting up the protection that He once had over the Son, and delivering Him as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. As the hymn says, “God, His Son not sparing, sent Him to die...”⁶⁹ God spared not His Son but delivered Him for all mankind (Acts 4:25; Rom. 8:32).

During the war in Iraq, critics of the war were saying, “The President is killing our troops.” They didn’t mean that the President was directly killing American soldiers, but that he was sending them off to war; and consequently, they were dying. Likewise, the Father bruised the Son only in the sense that He made “His soul an offering for sin” (Isa. 53:10), but not in the sense that the Father directly bruised and crucified Him, or that the Son was under the wrath of the Father. Jesus must have been pleasing to the Father at all times, especially on the cross, because Jesus was perfectly obeying the Father and doing precisely what He wanted Him to do.

Contrary to the doctrine that Jesus Christ became a sinner or sinful, the Bible says that Jesus was offered to God *without blemish or spot* (Lev. 22:20; Ex. 12:5; Lk. 23:41; Heb. 9:14; 13:8; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22-23; 3:18). The Bible also says, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). Jesus has never been anything other than

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holy. If a sacrifice had any spots or blemishes, it could not be acceptable to God. The only reason that the atonement of Christ is acceptable to God, as a substitute for the punishment of the guilty, is because Jesus Christ was perfect and innocent. Jesus was a *sinless sacrifice*, not a *punished sinner*.

What is the difference between punishment and sacrifice? Punishment signifies the personal sin and guilt of the individual being punished. A sacrifice signifies the personal sin and guilt of another individual, whom the sacrifice is made for. That is why the Bible never says Jesus was “punished” for our sins, but that Jesus Christ was “sacrificed” for our sins and that He “suffered” for our sins. A sacrifice is offered to God as an alternative or replacement to our punishment. His sacrifice is in the place of our punishment, fulfilling its purpose, so that our punishment can be set aside by God’s grace and mercy, or withheld in forgiveness.

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Our salvation is not a matter of justice, which we can *demand* of God, but a matter of grace, which we can *request* from God. A sacrifice for sin, or atonement, makes it possible for God to set aside our punishment but *it does not obligate Him to do so*, so our salvation is a matter of grace not justice. If God sets aside our punishment, He is being gracious by treating us more favorably than what is demanded. But if our sins were already punished in Christ, justice would demand that God does not punish us for those sins which Christ was already punished for, since justice does not allow for the same sins to be punished twice. It would be unjust to punish us for the sins that Christ was punished for, since justice was satisfied the first time. We would therefore be released from liability

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to punishment on the grounds of strict justice. But when a sacrifice for sin is made, which substitutes the punishment of sin, God can exercise grace and mercy in withholding the punishment for sin when we repent, but justice would still allow for God to punish those who do not repent.

If Jesus Christ was “punished” for our sins, instead of making a “sacrifice” for our sins which substitutes our punishment, then we cannot say that our sins are forgiven. When sins are forgiven, they are not punished. When sins are punished, they are not forgiven. Sins cannot be punished and forgiven at the same time, since punishment and forgiveness

Sins cannot
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are opposites. But if Jesus provided an atoning sacrifice which substitutes the punishment of our sins, then the punishment for our sins can be withheld or set aside and there is real or genuine forgiveness of sins in our salvation. God can allow our sins to go unpunished, without misrepresenting His character or encouraging the transgression of His law, because an atoning sacrifice for our sins

has been provided.

It must also be understood that the atonement was not the payment of our debt as some have supposed, but that it was that which was necessary for God to graciously and mercifully pardon our debt. The Bible explicitly says that God forgives us our debts (Matt 6:12; 18:27; Lk. 7:42). The debt that we owed was an eternity in the lake of fire. The atonement is a substitute for our penalty, not the penalty itself.

If the atonement was just a commercial transaction where our debt was paid, we wouldn't need to repent and believe to be saved since even if we are impenitent and unbelieving, our debt is still paid. Our debt would be paid

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even before we repent and believe; and therefore, we would be saved before we repent and believe. But the Scriptures never represent the impenitent and the unbelieving as being saved, even though Jesus Christ has died for them.

This logical conclusion that we are saved by Christ no matter what we do cannot be avoided if we assume that Christ actually paid our debt. Caleb Burge said, "If the debt of sinners has been paid, it cannot be again demanded whether they have faith or not."⁷⁰ If our debt was paid, we wouldn't have to worry about going to hell if we continue in our sins and die in our sins or if we believe the gospel or reject the gospel, since our debt is paid no matter what we do. We would all have been born saved and would have been safe and secure even while unconverted.

Also, if "Jesus paid our debt" there would be no real grace, mercy, or forgiveness in our salvation. This is because grace, mercy, or forgiveness is when our debt is pardoned or when our penalty is remitted. The Bible specifically and explicitly contrasts forgiving a debt with the payment of a debt (Matt. 18:23-34). A debt that is paid is not forgiven. And a debt that is forgiven is not paid.

It is strange that the "doctrines of grace" known as Calvinism or Reformed Theology *actually excludes all grace* in our salvation through their atonement view by saying that Jesus paid our debt! If Jesus paid our debt, we could never pray as Jesus taught us to, "forgive us our debts" (Matt. 6:12). That is why the "debt" analogy is used in Scripture to illustrate the nature of forgiveness, but it is never used in Scripture to illustrate the nature of atonement. The debt analogy shows precisely what forgiveness actually is, but

A debt that is paid is not forgiven. And a debt that is forgiven is not paid.

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when applied to the atonement, it excludes forgiveness all together.

Albert Barnes said, "When a debt is paid, there is no forgiveness; when a penalty is endured, there is no mercy."⁷¹ If our debt is paid, it is a matter of *justice* for God to cancel our obligation to pay it, not a matter of *grace*. John Wesley said, "...when the debt is paid, or the purchase made, it is the part of equity to cancel the bond, and consign over the purchased possession."⁷² Jonathon Edwards Jr. said, "But the fact is, that Christ has not, in the literal and proper sense, paid the debt for us... Payment of debt equally precludes grace, when made by a third person, as when made by the debtor himself..."⁷³

This is precisely why we should not view God as an unforgiving creditor or make the atonement a mere commercial transaction. We must view God as the Moral Governor of the universe, who wanted to pardon sinners by setting aside their penalty while also honoring and upholding His law before His universe of free moral beings.

The atonement of Christ was not the same as the sacrifices pagans and heathen offered to satisfy their vindictive and unforgiving gods. God must be viewed, not as a mere offended individual who cannot forgive, but as the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose authority has been challenged and whose law has been disobeyed, and as one who will only forgive when it is safe to the public for Him to do so. We must view God as desiring the highest well-being of His universe, and therefore, as one who must maintain the authority and influence of His law either through the execution of the penalty upon the guilty or through a substitution or sacrifice of the innocent on behalf of the guilty. God was not vindictive or merciless, but rather, He wanted to pardon sinners by setting aside their penalty while still satisfying the demands of public justice by maintaining

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His law. God was not motivated by revenge as an individual but was acting responsibly as the Ruler of the universe.

Just as God does not take any sadistic pleasure or vindictive satisfaction in *punishment* (Eze. 18:32; 33:1; Lam. 3:32-33; Heb. 12:10), neither is the Godhead gratified or satisfied in any personal vindictive or sadistic sense when it comes to the *atonement* (Ps. 51:16-17; Heb 10:6; 10:8). The way that wicked men treated His Son did not itself please God (Mk. 12:6-9; Lk. 20:13-16; 1 Thes. 2:15). The satisfaction (Isa. 53:11) and the pleasure (Isa. 53:10) which God the Father has in the atonement is not sadistic or personal vindictiveness, but rather this satisfaction and pleasure is because God delights in public justice, rejoicing that His laws are being enforced and upheld through the public demonstration of Christ's bloody sacrifice, since His laws are designed for the well-being of all. And He was rejoicing and delighting that mercy and pardon can now be granted to repentant rebels who have violated His moral law. He knows that through the suffering and death of Christ, the penalty of the law can be withheld from sinners. This is the reason for the satisfaction and pleasure God the Father had in the suffering of the Son.

The Bible says, "*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities*" (Isa. 53:10-11). Just as punishment is a means to an end and not the end itself; and therefore, God rejoices in justice, not for the pain as an end but as a means, or not for its own sake but because of what it brings; so also the blood atonement is a means to an end and not the end itself. Therefore, the pleasure God gets from the

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bloodshed is not in the bloodshed as an end, or in the suffering for its own sake, but as a means to an end, delighting in it because of what it brings. God was pleased to sacrifice His son because through His death God said, “shall my righteous servant justify many.”

It is very important that we do not view the atonement as analogous to men throwing a child to a pack of wolves to satisfy their blood thirsty hunger and thus save their own lives. We must view God as the Moral Governor of the universe who required an atonement, not to satisfy an unmerciful or vindictive spirit within Himself, but so that He can honor and uphold His law throughout His Kingdom amongst all His moral subjects even though He remits the execution of the penalty to the sinner.

God still
has wrath
after the
atonement.

God has wrath against the guilty and against the guilty only. God has no wrath for the innocent. Jesus Christ was innocent; and therefore, His death could not satisfy the

wrath that God has for the guilty.

However, J. I. Packer said, “The wrath of God against us, both present and to come, has been quenched... Jesus Christ abolished God’s anger against us... by His sacrificial death for our sins Christ pacified the wrath of God.”⁷⁴ John Piper said, “The wrath of God was satisfied with the suffering and death of Jesus. The holy curse against sin was fully absorbed.”⁷⁵

Contrary to what Reformed theologians try to say, the atonement did not quench, pacify, or satisfy the wrath of God. This is obvious since God still has wrath after the atonement (Lk. 21:23; Jn. 3:36; Acts 12:23; Rom. 1:18; 2:5; Col 3:6; Rev. 6:17; 14:10; 16:19). God had wrath for the wicked before the atonement and He still has wrath for the

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wicked after the atonement. Therefore, the atonement did not do away with the wrath of God.

Calvinists say that Jesus drank and emptied the “cup” of God’s wrath. They teach that when Jesus said, “let this cup pass from me” (Mat. 26:39), that he was referring to the wrath of God. But this cannot be true because Jesus told his disciples that they would drink of the exact same cup that he would drink of (Matt. 20:22). And it cannot be true because the cup of God’s wrath is still full after the atonement (Rev. 14:10; 16:19). The idea that, “The wrath of God was satisfied”⁷⁶ is a modern hymn, not a Scripture.

Jesus died for the whole world but the world is still under God’s wrath. The world is under the wrath of God, despite the fact that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (Jn. 3:16). No man is saved from the wrath of God until they repent and believe. Those who are impenitent and unbelieving are under the wrath of God, despite the fact that Jesus shed His blood for them.

On the other hand, if God’s wrath was satisfied for us, we wouldn’t need to repent and believe in order to be saved from His wrath. We would have been saved even while we were impenitent and unbelieving. In fact, everybody would have been born saved! If Jesus quenched the anger of God or pacified His wrath, there would be no wrath to flee from (Matt. 3:7; Lk. 3:7).

But the Bible says that before we came to believe in Jesus Christ we were under the wrath of God. Jesus said, “He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but *the wrath of God abideth on him*” (Jn. 3:36). How strange it would be if this meant, “Whoever does not believe that Jesus satisfied the wrath of God, is under the wrath of God.” This would make no sense. How can failure to believe that Jesus satisfied God’s wrath put you in danger of God’s wrath? For if you believe that Jesus satisfied God’s wrath, God’s wrath

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is no longer something to worry about. But the reason that we were under the wrath of God before we believed in Jesus was because Jesus did not satisfy the wrath of God, as the wrath of God still remains.

If God's wrath was satisfied, there would also be no real forgiveness or mercy through the atonement. That is because forgiveness or mercy is when God turns away from His wrath. The Bible says, "I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever" (Jer. 3:12). "But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath" (Ps. 78:38). "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin. Selah. Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger" (Ps. 85:2-3). "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? (Jonah 3:9) "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy" (Mic. 7:18). Nothing could be any clearer from these passages than that mercy and forgiveness is when God turns away from His wrath and anger. But if God's wrath and anger has been satisfied in the atonement, there is no real forgiveness through the atonement and neither could there be any wrath and anger after the atonement.

When I preach to sinners in the open air, I tell them that they are currently under the wrath of God because of their sin, *and at the same time*, I tell them that Jesus Christ has died for their sin. Logically, I could not say that they are still under the wrath of God for their sin if the atonement was the satisfaction of God's wrath for their sin. I could not tell them to flee from the wrath that is to come by repenting of their sins and coming to Jesus Christ, as there would be no

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wrath to flee from. This view of the atonement would make repentance, or obeying the gospel, completely unnecessary.

The truth is that atonement makes the forgiveness of sins available to everyone, but only those who are converted actually receive it. Forgiveness is not when God's wrath is satisfied; forgiveness is when God turns away from His wrath (Ps. 78:38; 85:2-3; Jonah 3:9; Micah 7:18; Jer. 3:12). We ought to tell sinners that they are under the wrath of God, but if they turn from their sins and come to Jesus Christ, then they can be saved from the wrath of God. There is real forgiveness through the atonement for those who turn from their sins because God can turn away from His wrath due to what Jesus Christ has done. As Paul said, "God *for Christ's sake* hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

Instead of singing, "The wrath of God *was satisfied*," we should be singing, "The wrath of God *can be set aside*." The Bible says, "Christ our *passover* is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). This means that now the wrath of God can *pass over* us instead of being *poured out* upon us (Ex. 12:13, 23). In this way Christ saves us from the wrath that is to come (1 Thes. 1:10).

The good news is that because of the atonement, everyone can be saved from the wrath of God. The atonement of Christ reveals to God's universe His regard for His law just as executing the penalty upon sinners would have, so now God can remit our penalty or turn from His wrath because atonement has been made. God can turn from His wrath or remit the execution of our penalty because atonement has been made which honors His law just as it would have been honored if He poured His wrath out on sinners or executed the penalty of the law upon them. The

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atonement has fulfilled the purpose of God's wrath, satisfying the reasons for the penalty of the law, so now God's wrath or the penalty of the law can be withheld.

We are not saved from the wrath of God *at Calvary*, but we are saved from the wrath of God, because of Calvary, *at conversion*. Though our penalty can be withheld, God will only turn from His wrath *when sinners turn from their sins*. Those who stay in their sins are those who stay under God's wrath despite the atonement that was made for them. Those whom Jesus died for are still under the wrath of God and are going to receive the penalty of hell, unless they repent of their sins and believe the gospel.

God will turn from His wrath if sinners turn from their sins.

The Bible says that those whom Christ died for can still perish (1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Pet. 2:1). God is not obligated by justice to forgive those whom Jesus died for, so our salvation is by grace (Eph. 1:7). If God had to forgive those whom Jesus died for, they would be saved by justice not grace. But God is not obligated to save those whom Jesus died for.

The Bible says, "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother *perish*, for whom *Christ died*?" (1 Cor. 8:11; see also Rom. 14:23) Regarding this verse, Adam Clarke said, "So we learn that a man may perish for whom Christ died."⁷⁷ John Wesley said, "We see, Christ died even for them that perish."⁷⁸

The Bible talks about "false prophets" who will deny "*the Lord that brought them*, and bring upon themselves *swift destruction*" (2 Pet. 2:1). Regarding this verse, Adam Clark said, "That through their own wickedness some may perish for whom Christ died."⁷⁹ John Wesley said, "Therefore Christ bought even them that perish."⁸⁰

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If we are truly saved by grace then God does not have to save those for whom Jesus died. In order to be saved by grace, retributive justice must demand your damnation. Retributive justice still demands the damnation of our race, even though Jesus has died for our entire race, so that when any individual is saved it is still by grace.

The reason that those for whom Christ died can still perish is because forgiveness through the atonement only comes to those who repent and believe. The atonement is not at all inconsistent or incompatible with repentance. Forgiveness was made *available* to all at *Calvary*, but forgiveness only becomes *actual* at *conversion*. No man is saved from God's wrath until they repent and believe. The atonement is a substitute for the penalty of everyone, which makes the penalty of every remissible, but only those who are converted actually have their penalty remitted by God's grace and mercy. We see then that the atonement is by no means contrary to the requirement of repentance but in fact is the only reason God can forgive those who do repent.

Why Isn't Everybody Saved?

Why are some damned for their sin but some are saved by the atonement? It is not because the atonement was limited or only made for a few. It is because some freely choose to repent and some freely choose not to. Though Christ has died for all, sinners still need to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20). What remains left to be done in the process of reconciliation, now that the atonement has been made, is man's repentance and faith. The atonement was one condition in the process of reconciliation. The atonement was one condition of God's mercy and forgiveness. Man's choice to repent and believe is also conditions. If reconciliation between God and man does not take place, it is

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not because God has not done His part, but because man has not done his.

A. W. Tozer said, “Universal atonement makes salvation universally available, but it does not make it universally effective toward the individual.”⁸¹ He also said, “If atonement was made for all men, why are not all saved? The answer is that before redemption becomes effective toward the individual man there is an act which that man must do. That act is not one of merit, but of condition.”⁸²

The Bible teaches that God wants all to repent and be saved (Eze. 33:11; Acts 17:30; 2 Pet. 3:9), but those who refuse to repent must be damned. They are damned not by any fault of God’s but by their own fault. They are damned because they freely chose to sin and not to repent. Sinners who refuse to repent and be reconciled to God must be sent to hell. Hell is a real governmental necessity. No community is safe if there is no prison for law breakers. God’s law is for the good of everyone but no law would be maintained if there is no punishment. And no punishment would be punishment unless it is painful. Painless punishment is no punishment at all. Therefore, those who refuse to repent of their sins and be reconciled to God through Christ must be sent to hell, the prison of the universe (1 Pet. 3:19). There, they will be tormented in eternal pain (Matt. 22:13; Rev. 14:10-11). The good of the universe demands this. God has no other alternative for those who do not choose to repent of their sins and believe the gospel.

So why are some saved and others not? It is because some freely choose to repent and receive God’s offer and others freely don’t. Salvation is described as a gift that God offers to all to accept and receive (Jn. 1:11-12; Lk. 14:16-24; Rom 5:18). An offer or invitation is nonsense unless the one whom it is being offered to is capable of receiving it, and if that which is being offered is meant for him. To offer a man

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something which he does not have the ability to receive, or which was never meant for him, is to simply mock him. God would be insincere in inviting all to be saved and believe the gospel if He knows that they are unable to do so and if the atonement was not even made for them. The fact that God invites men to accept His offer of salvation is proof that men have the ability to accept the invitation and that Christ has made a way for them to be saved.

Paul said, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). God has given us an invitation to be reconciled through Christ, but we must choose or decide to accept that invitation in order for reconciliation to occur. If men who hear the gospel do not accept God's offer of salvation, it is not because they *couldn't* but because they *wouldn't* (Matt. 11:20-21; 22:3; 23:37, Mk. 6:6; 7:30; 13:34; 14:17-18; 19:14; 19:27; Lk. 14:16-24; Jn. 5:40; Acts 7:51; 17:27; Rev. 2:21).

God "sent forth his servants to *call* them that were bidden to the wedding: and they *would not* come" (Matt. 22:3). Though God offers salvation to all men, many men choose to reject God's gracious offer (Isa. 65:2; Lk. 7:30; 14:16-24; Jn. 1:10-11; Rom. 10:21; 2 Thes. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17). To their own damnation many men choose to resist His grace (Gen. 6:3; Matt. 23:37; Lk. 7:30, 13:34; Acts 7:51). "But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Lk. 7:30).

Arnobius said, "The fountain of life is open to all, nor is any one deprived of the right of drinking: but if thy pride be so great that thou refuseth the offered gift and benefits, why dost thou blame him who invites thee?"⁸³

CHAPTER NINE

SCRIPTURAL OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

We have seen what the sinner's problem really is, namely unwillingness. And we have clearly seen what the solution is that God uses to remedy the situation, particularly the influence of truth presented by preachers and the Holy Spirit. Having now laid this foundation of understanding, it will help us in understanding some of the passages commonly used against the idea of man's natural ability or free will.

Men Need Drawing To Come

“No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:44).

This passage must not be isolated or left alone because the following verse explains what it means. It is a sound principle of hermeneutics to allow the Bible to interpret itself. The context of a passage helps us to understand the passage itself. The following verse says, “It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all *taught* of God. Every man therefore that hath *heard*, and hath *learned* of the Father, cometh unto me” (Jn. 6:45).

How then are men drawn by the Father? Are men drawn by a constitutional change or through an irresistible

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force? No. Men are drawn by moral means. Coming to Christ is a choice of the will. Therefore, the means used to bring about this choice are means which respect and regard the will of man. Since coming to Christ is a choice of the will, God brings men to Christ by influencing their will.

God teaches men and this is what influences them to come to Jesus. The drawing of God is through spiritual revelation. The Father draws men to His Son by granting us a revelation of His Son and what He has done for us on the cross. Jesus said, "And if I be lifted up from the earth, will *draw* all men unto me" (Jn. 12:32). It is the truth of Jesus Christ that draws us to Him.

If verse 44 was talking about a constitutional change, it could not be brought about by teaching as verse 45 says. Teaching has no tendency or ability to change the constitution of man. But if the drawing is brought about by teaching, as verse 45 says, then the drawing in verse 44 must be an influence upon the will of man. Truth influences the will and therefore, teaching the truth has the ability to change the will of man. Coming to Jesus is a choice of the will, which is brought about by the drawing of the Father's teaching.

This passage does not deny the choice of man's will in salvation. It doesn't say "no man can come," but "no man can come, except..." The choice of man is a consequence of the drawing of God. The choice to come to Jesus Christ is brought about by the enlightening influence of the Father. God does not draw us to Himself through some *irresistible force*, but through the *influence of truth*.

Albert Barnes said, "In the conversion of the sinner God enlightens the mind John 6:45, he inclines the will Psalms 110:3, and he influences the soul by motives, by just views of his law, by his love, his commands, and his threatenings; by a desire of happiness, and a consciousness

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of danger; by the Holy Spirit applying truth to the mind, and urging him to yield himself to the Saviour. So that, while God inclines him, and will have all the glory, man yields without compulsion; the obstacles are removed, and he becomes a willing servant of God.”¹ He goes on to say, “Shall be all taught of God - This explains the preceding verse. It is by the teaching of his Word and Spirit that men are drawn to God. This shows that it is not compulsory, and that there is no obstacle in the way but a strong voluntary ignorance and unwillingness.”²

Regarding man’s natural ability, man is only able to obey the truth *that he knows*. If a man does not know about

Man is only able to obey the truth that he knows.

Jesus, he is not able to believe in Jesus or to follow Jesus. Natural ability is not the ability to obey truth that you do not possess. Natural ability is the ability to obey the truth that you do have. Natural ability is not the ability to do the impossible (*obey what is not known*), but it is the ability to do the possible (*obey what is known*). Natural ability is the ability of the will to obey or

disobey the light or revelation that has been revealed or given to the mind.

This truth is clearly stated by the Apostle Paul, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14) It is naturally impossible for men to believe in him whom they have not heard. It is naturally impossible for men to obey the truth which they do not have. This shows, not only the necessity of open air preaching, but also the necessity for the work of the Spirit who takes the truth and presses it powerful upon the minds of men to influence their will to believe and call upon the Lord.

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The point of the Apostle was that those who have not heard cannot believe. This explains why those who have not been taught by the Father cannot come to the Son. This perfectly explains why no man can come to the Son, unless He is drawn by the Father. Unless the Father first teaches sinners about His Son, they are not capable of believing in, coming to, or following the Son. And unless the Father first convicts men of their sin, they will not see their need of coming to the Savior.

Teaching must always come before obedience. Knowledge or truth is a precondition or prerequisite for obedience to the truth. The will of man can only obey or disobey the knowledge that the mind has. Does man have the natural ability to believe in Jesus, whether they know about Jesus or not? The answer is no. Natural ability cannot do the impossible. But does man have the natural ability to believe in Jesus, come to Jesus, and follow Jesus, *once the truth about Jesus is revealed* to them? The answer is yes. Once they are drawn by the Father then they can choose to come to the Son.

It is also important to understand that the mind operates under the law of necessity, but the will operates under the law of liberty. That is, the mind must affirm truth when it is properly presented, but the will is free to obey or disobey the truth that is affirmed by the mind. We see this with the crowd that Stephen preached to. The Bible says, “And they were *not able to resist* the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake” (Acts 6:10). Their minds, by necessity, affirmed the truth of what he preached. Their minds could not resist it. But it goes on to say, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, *ye do always resist* the Holy Spirit, as your Fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). Their will operated under liberty. Their will disobeyed and resisted the truth that their mind affirmed.

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The revelation that God grants is irresistible. Men cannot help but to know the truth when God reveals it. But sinners reject and suppress the truth that they have (Rom. 1:18). Yet, according to John 6:45, those who not only hear the truth but actually learn from it are those who come to Jesus Christ. Those who do not learn from what they hear from the Father will not come to the Son. Those who hear from the Father and choose to learn from it will come to the Son. Men resist or yield to the drawing of God by choosing to learn from or not learn from the teaching that He gives them. Men are “drawn” by God and choose to “come” (Jn. 6:44), only when they both “hear” and choose to “learn” from the Father (Jn. 6:45). Clearly, both God and man have their active role.

Speaking by the Spirit of God

“Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. 12:3).

The question with this passage is this, what does “speaking by the Spirit of God” mean? Does it mean that the Holy Spirit gives us a constitutional enabling? Or does it mean that men can speak under the influence of the Holy Spirit? The answer is the latter. When a man is under the influence of the Holy Spirit and are submitted to it, they will not call Jesus accursed. If a man calls Jesus accursed, that is proof that they are not submitted to the influence of the Spirit of God. But if a man truly confesses Jesus Christ as Lord, this is done under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Without the influence of the Holy Spirit revealing to man the truth about Jesus Christ, man *would never* and *could never* confess Him as Lord. Man *could never* because without the Spirit revealing Jesus as Lord, how can they

confess Him to be Lord? The Spirit must first reveal to man that Jesus is the Lord before man could be capable of confessing Him as such. And man *would never* confess Him as Lord without the Holy Spirit because man, on his own or without the influence of God, would never submit to the truth but would continue on in deception. Man is unwilling to obey God and to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Therefore, man needs an influence outside of himself to bring him to submission and obedience. That outside influence is the working of the Holy Spirit. When a man is brought to submission to the Lordship of Christ, it is because of the working and influence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

The Spirit, through influence, makes us willing to do what God has already made us capable of doing. The Holy Spirit makes us willing to obey God by presenting powerful truths to our minds. At creation, God made us constitutionally capable of obeying the truth that we know and receive when He granted us a free will and made us in His image. At creation, God made us capable of obedience. At conversion, the Spirit makes us willing to obey.

Taming the Tongue

“But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God” (Jas. 3:8-9).

James also told us, “If any man among you seem to be religious, and *bridleth not his tongue*, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain” (Jas. 1:19). Therefore, since those who are truly religious bridle their tongue let us take for granted that the expressed limitation in taming the tongue must refer to the unregenerate or unsaved. If that is the case, here are some points for consideration.

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First, it is very worthy noting that this passage describes “men” as being “made after the similitude of God.” The so called “inability” of man is typically credited to the sin of Adam, saying that when Adam sinned the image of God in man was lost. Since the image of God in man was lost, man no longer has a free will. This is the common argument.

However, it is clear from this verse that the image of God in man has not been lost. Man is still “made after the similitude of God.” Therefore, any free will that man had at the beginning because he was made in God’s image, he still has now.

There are many other passages, after Gen. 1:26-27, which describe man as being in the image of God. These would be Gen. 9:6 and 1 Cor. 11:7. Man remained in the image of God after the fall of Adam because God is still our maker. He forms each individual in the womb (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 27:11; 43:1; 43:7; 44:2; 44:24; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 26:10; 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Ecc. 7:29; 31:15; 35:10; Mal. 2:10; Rom. 9:20; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3). This is why God takes responsibility for our condition at birth (Exo. 4:11; Prov. 20:12). Since God forms us in the womb, God forms us in His image.

Francis A. Schaeffer said, “But there is one thing which he did not lose, and that is his mannishness, his being a human being. Man still stands in the image of God – twisted, broken, abnormal, but still the image-bearer of God. Man did not stop being human. As we have seen in Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9, even after the Fall men are still in the image of God.”³

Consider how God spoke to Cain, after the fall of Adam, as one who had the power of choice between obedience and disobedience. “And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If

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thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Gen. 4:6-7). Whatever the results upon all of mankind are because of Adam’s sin, the loss of the image of God and the loss of free will certainly are not part of it.

Second, no sinner can tame the tongue unless he first changes his heart. Jesus said, “O generation of vipers, *how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*” (Matt. 12:34). The reason that they cannot speak good things, according to Jesus, is because they have evil hearts. Jesus also said, “For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doeth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit... A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: *for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh*” (Luke 6:43, 45).

The roots must change before the fruits can change.

This is why Jesus commands us to change our hearts or “make the tree good” (Matt. 12:33). The roots must change before the fruit can change. It is impossible to change the fruit if you do not first change the root. Therefore, a sinner cannot tame his tongue. He must first change his heart. As long as He remains a sinner or remains sinful in his heart, he cannot tame his tongue. This is because the will or heart (tree) is the cause; the words or action (fruit) is the effect.

The actions of man are not self-existent. The actions have a cause. The cause of a man’s actions is their own heart or will. You cannot change the effect without first changing the cause. As long as the cause is the same, the effect will be the same. It is absolutely impossible to change the effect

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without first changing the cause. A sinner cannot speak differently, or act differently, until his heart is different. As long as their intention is selfish, their life will necessarily be sinful.

A sinner may, for a time, seem to control his tongue. But the overflow of his evil heart will eventually come out. Words and actions are nothing more but the outflow of the heart. The heart is the problem. Therefore, it is the inside that must change first. As Jesus said, “cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matt. 23:26). Jesus was actually filled “with anger, being grieved, for the hardness of their hearts” (Mk. 3:5). This indicates that the state of man’s heart is man’s own fault, something which he causes and which he has control over.

This is why the Bible says, “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and *make you a new heart* and a new spirit: for why will ye die” (Eze. 18:31). “*Wash thine heart from wickedness*, that thou mayest be saved” (Jer. 4:14). “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and *purify your hearts*, ye double minded” (Jas. 4:8). The words of a man are the outflow of his heart. As these passages imply, men have the ability to change their hearts. While a man cannot tame his tongue while his heart is wicked, he can change his heart. That is why every man will have to give an account to God, *even for every idle word that they speak*, as it all comes out of their own hearts (Matt.12:36).

The Carnal Mind Cannot Obey

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:7-8).

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This passage would be completely without meaning or understanding if we do not define what the carnal mind is. Many have taken the liberty to define the carnal mind on their own, but good hermeneutics says that we must allow the Bible to interpret itself. The context of this passage gives us insight as to what Paul meant by the carnal mind. This verse is very commonly taken by itself or isolated when it was never meant to be. The two previous verses say: “For they that are *after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh*; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be *carnally minded* is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5-6).

The Greek word “mind” used in these passages means, “intensively to interest oneself in (with concern or obedience): - set the affection on.”⁴ And it means, “to purpose.”⁵ Therefore, a person has a carnal mind when they are choosing to interest themselves in carnality, when they set their affections on their flesh, or when they purpose to live for the gratification of themselves. A man has a carnal mind when they choose to “mind the things of the flesh,” that is, when they choose to serve themselves and their own pleasures rather than serving God. The carnal mind is nothing more than a selfish state of mind.

The carnal mind is nothing more than a selfish state of mind.

The carnal mind is not a passive state but an active state. It is not a state of mind that we are passively born with. It is a state of mind that men choose to have. The Greek word “enmity” means “hostility or opposition.”⁶ Hostility or opposition is an active state. The carnal mind is a mind that is in active hostility or opposition to God. It is when an individual is purposely and intentionally minding the things of the flesh. That is, they are living to please themselves

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instead of living to please God. Such a state of mind is intentional, voluntary, deliberate, and volitional.

Albert Barnes commented that this passage “means that the minding of the things of the flesh, giving to them supreme attention, is hostility against God...”⁷

Charles Finney said, “The proper translation of this text is, the minding of the flesh is enmity against God. It is a voluntary state of mind. It is that state of supreme selfishness, in which all men are, previous to their conversion to God. It is a state of mind; in which, probably, they are not born, but into which they appear to fall, very early after their birth. The gratification of their appetites, is made by them, the supreme object of desire and pursuit, and becomes the law of their lives; or that law in their members, that wars against the law of their minds, which the apostle speaks. They conform their lives, and all of their actions to this rule of action, which they have established for themselves, which is nothing more nor less, than voluntary selfishness or a controlling and abiding preference of self-gratification, above the commandments, authority, and glory of God. It should be well understood, and always remembered, that the carnal mind, as used by the apostle, is not the mind itself but is a voluntary action of the mind. In other words, it is not any part of the mind, or body, but a choice or preference of the mind. It is a minding of the flesh. It is preferring self-gratification, before obedience to God.”⁸

According to Thayer’s definitions, “carnal mind” means the “cause of opposition.”⁹ In other words, the carnal mind is the cause of a sinner’s opposition to God. It is with the mind that choices are made. The will is a faculty of the mind. Because a sinner is choosing to serve his flesh, to “mind the things of the flesh,” he is in opposition to God who commands him to deny himself and to serve the Lord (Ex. 20:3; Matt. 16:24; 1 Cor. 10:31). The cause of his

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enmity with God is his carnal mind or his choice to serve himself and be selfish. A sinner is in opposition to God and is in a state of hostility towards God's law because he is choosing to be selfish by minding the things of the flesh.

While a person is in this selfish state of mind, they cannot please God and they cannot obey the law. That is because God is not pleased with selfishness and the law requires benevolent motives, not selfish motives (Ps. 5:4; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14). Therefore, those who are carnally minded cannot please God and they cannot obey the law.

As long as they are in this selfish state of mind, they cannot be pleasing to God, nor can they be in submission to the law. It is impossible for a person, who has a carnal mind, to be pleasing to God or to be in submission to God, while they are in such a state of mind.

What they need to do is repent. Repent means to change your mind. To repent of your sin means that you change your mind about sinning and you make up your mind to obey the law of God. True repentance is when a person goes from being in a selfish state of mind (*being carnally minded*) of choosing to serve himself (*living for self-gratification*), to a loving state of mind of choosing to serve God supremely and love his neighbor equally.

But as long as a man is carnally minded, he cannot please God and he cannot obey the law. But if he changes his mind (repent), so that he is no longer choosing to live for himself but chooses to live for God, then he can be pleasing to God and he can obey the law. When the cause of his hostility towards God and His law is removed (*the carnal mind*), then he can be pleasing to God and be in submission to God's law.

On the other hand, if the cause of his hostility is not removed, he can do neither. As long as the will, which is a

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faculty of the mind, is in opposition to God, the will cannot be in submission to God. As long as the will of man is selfish, that man cannot be pleasing to God because God cannot be pleased with selfishness. Those who are selfish or self centered can never be in a state of obedience to the law because the law forbids selfishness. The carnal mind is always hostile to the law of God. All the actions that proceed from a carnal mind are in hostility to the law of God and can never be obedience to the law because the motive behind all of them is selfish.

The carnally minded must choose to change their mind, which means that they must choose to repent. Then they can be in a state of submission and surrender to the law of God. Then the actions which proceed from the decisions of their mind will be in accordance with the law of God.

An important distinction to understand is that this passage refers to a sinner's mind, not to the sinner's make up. It refers to his character, not his constitution. Paul addresses the state of his will, not the state of his nature. This verse does not deal with the question of whether or not the carnally minded have the constitutional power to change their mind, or whether they have the natural ability to repent. This verse simply says that while a person is in such a state of mind of carnality and selfishness, they cannot please God and they cannot truly obey the law.

It would be equivalent to saying, "Those who have disobedient hearts cannot please God and they cannot obey the law." That is, while their heart is disobedient, they cannot do such things. But if they change their heart, then they can. Such a statement does not say that they cannot change their heart, but it says that while their heart is in such a state, they cannot please or obey God.

Likewise, this passage about the carnally minded does not say that they cannot change their mind. It simply

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says that while their mind is in such a state, they cannot please or obey God.

I was pleased after writing the above to find that Albert Barnes and Charles Finney said that precise same thing. It is always a great relief to find out that you are not alone in your interpretation and understanding of the word of God.

Charles Finney said, "The apostle does not affirm, that a sinner cannot love God, but that a carnal mind cannot love God; for, to affirm that a carnal mind can love God, is the same as to affirm that enmity itself can be love."¹⁰

Albert Barnes said in his commentary, "But the affirmation does not mean that the heart of the sinner might not be subject to God; or that his soul is so physically depraved that he cannot obey, or that he might not obey the law. On that, the apostle here expresses no opinion. That is not the subject of the discussion. It is simply that the supreme regard to the flesh, to the minding of that, is utterly irreconcilable with the Law of God. They are different things, and can never be made to harmonize; just as adultery cannot be chastity; falsehood cannot be truth; dishonesty cannot be honesty; hatred cannot be love. This passage, therefore, should not be adduced to prove the doctrine of man's inability to love God, for it does not refer to that, but it proves merely that a supreme regard to the things of the flesh is utterly inconsistent with the Law of God; can never be reconciled with it; and involves the sinner in hostility with his Creator."¹¹

Every call to repentance in the Bible, which is directed towards man, implies that man has the ability to change his mind. If the call to repentance does not imply that man can repent, then what in the entire Bible could ever imply that men could repent? Nothing could imply the ability to repent more than the command to repent. Why command

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men to do something if it is impossible? If men were incapable of repentance, God would have no reason to command them to repent. If God is good, why command repentance from all and punish all impenitence, if repentance is impossible and impenitence is unavoidable?

If God commands men to do something, He gives them the ability to do it. God calls *all* men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31). This means that *all* men everywhere have the ability to change their mind. And as none need to change their mind but those who are carnally minded, since those who are spiritually minded do not need to change their mind, it is only the carnally minded that God calls to

None need to change their mind but those who are carnally minded.

repentance. Every call to repentance is only directed to the carnally minded. Therefore, the carnally minded have the ability to change their mind.

Consider this in logical syllogisms:

- Repentance is a change of mind.
- Only the carnally minded need to change their mind.
- Therefore, only the carnally minded are called to repentance.
- The command to repent or to change your mind implies the ability to repent or to change your mind.
- The carnally minded are commanded to repent or to change their mind.
- Therefore, the carnally minded have the ability to repent or to change their mind.

Men are commanded in the Bible to change their hearts, which implies that they have the ability to do so. God, being a loving ruler, does not command the impossible at the

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threat of eternal punishment. The command of the ruler, without the ability of the subject, is tyranny. The command from a good, just, and reasonable ruler, presupposes the subject has the power to choose what is required. Therefore, since God commands men in the Bible to change their hearts, this implies that they have the ability to do so.

The Bible says, “*Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved*” (Jer. 4:14). “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and *purify your hearts, ye double minded*” (Jas. 4:8). “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and *make you a new heart* and a new spirit: for why will ye die...” (Eze. 18:31).

If men are incapable of obeying these commands, why give these commands at all? If these commands cannot be obeyed, they are useless and God must never have even intended on them being obeyed at all. If God never intended on these commands being obeyed, then God does not really want them to be obeyed. And if God does not really want them to be obeyed, He is insincere in commanding them. If God wants these commands to be obeyed, and if He is sincere in His command, then these commands must be possible for men to obey.

The command of the ruler, without the ability of the subject, is tyranny.

The Bible also says, “Set your affections as things above, not on the things on the earth” (Col. 3:2). “*Set your affections*” is the same Greek word used for “mind” in Rom. 8:5-7. Clearly, men have the choice of minding the flesh or of minding the spirit. Men can choose to set their affections on things above or things beneath. The word “set” indicates our choice and control over what our affections are on. To command men to “set their affections” or to “mind” the

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things that are above, assumes that it is their choice to make. It is within our natural ability to choose who we will serve (Jos. 24:15), whether we will serve ourselves or serve God. Therefore, we have the natural ability to choose what we will set our affections on. We decide to mind either the flesh or the spirit.

Charles Finney said, “Some one may ask, Can the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, change itself? I have already said that this text in the original reads, ‘the minding of the flesh is enmity against God.’ This minding of the flesh, then, is the choice or preference to gratify the flesh. Now it is indeed absurd to say, that a choice can change itself; but it is not absurd to say, that the agent who exercises this choice, can change it. The sinner that minds the flesh, can change his mind, and mind God.”¹²

Dead in Sins

“...we were dead in sins...” Ephesians 2:5

It is common for those who argue for the doctrine of inability to appeal to this verse and others like it that describe man, before regeneration, as being “dead in sin.” They will ask questions such as, “Can dead men choose anything?” Then they will say, “No, dead men cannot choose anything. Therefore, sinners who are dead in their sins cannot choose to be converted and live righteous.” Following this logic we would have to conclude that sinners do not choose to sin either because “dead men cannot choose anything.” This whole line of reasoning blurs the distinctions between physical death and spiritual death. It is a logical fallacy to take the limitations of the physically dead and to impose them upon those who are spiritually dead.

The Bible says that Christians are “dead *to* sin” (Rom. 6:2; 6:11). Does that mean that a Christian is incapable of sinning? No. Likewise, just because a sinner is

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dead *in* sins does not mean that he is incapable of repenting. We must be careful not to take points out of analogies which were not originally meant to be given.

Regarding being dead to sin Adam Clarke said, “The phraseology of this verse is common among Hebrews, Greeks, and Latins. To die to a thing or person, is to have nothing to do with it or him; to be totally separated from them: and to live to a thing or person is to be wholly given up to them; to have the most intimate connection with them.”¹³

To be *dead to sin* is to be separated from sin and in a relationship with God. To be *dead in sin* is to be separated from God and in a relationship with sin. A person who is dead to sin is still capable of returning to sin (1 Jn. 2:1). And a person who is dead in sin is still capable of returning to God (2 Chron. 30:9; Isa. 55:7; Jer. 3:22; Hos. 6:11; Mal 3:7; Lk. 15:18, 20, 24).

When the Bible talks about a sinner being “dead,” it is not talking about his ability at all. It is referring his relationship. In Biblical interpretation we must look and see how a word is used elsewhere in the Bible. To see how a word is used gives us insight as to what the word means. The word “dead” is applied to sinners elsewhere in the Scriptures and this gives us help in understanding what is meant by its usage in this particular verse.

The Bible says, “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24). What did the father mean that his prodigal son was dead but is now alive? Did he mean that his son did not have the ability to return home, but now he has the ability to return home? No. He meant that his relationship with his son was dead, but now that he has returned, his son is alive to him relationally again.

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When a man is in sin, they are relationally separated from God. They are, therefore, dead in their sins. But when a sinner repents of his sins and returns to God, they enter into a relationship with Him. They are, therefore, alive again.

Calvinists have said, “Can a dead man resurrect himself? No. Then how can a sinner repent?” But this is to compare physical death with spiritual death. To say that we were “dead in trespasses and sins” is to say that we were spiritually dead. Physical death is constitutional and therefore affects your abilities. Spiritual death is not constitutional, it is relational. It has to do with our relationships, not with our abilities.

Spiritual death is a relational separation from God.

When the Bible says that a sinner is dead, that does not mean that he doesn't have the ability to turn to God. When the Bible talks about a sinner being born again, regenerated, or made alive, it is not saying that he now received the ability to turn to God. Relationally, when a man sins, his relationship with God is dead. A man's personal sins separate him from God (Isa. 59:2; Lk. 15:24; Rom. 5:12; Rom. 7:9, Col. 1:21; 2:13.). When a man chooses to sin, he becomes spiritually separated from God or dead in his relationship with Him (Eze. 18:4, 20; Isa. 59:2, Lk. 15:24; Rom. 5:12; 5:14; 7:9; 7:11; 8:6; 2 Cor. 5:14; Col. 1:21; 2:13; Rev. 3:1). A sinner's relationship with God is completely dead because of his sin. Spiritual death is relational separation from God. But when a man forsakes his sins and is forgiven through Jesus Christ, his relationship with God becomes alive. He starts to experience true life with God (Jn. 10:10; Jn. 17:3).

It is a very dangerous practice for any theologian to try to pull his theology out of, or squeeze his theology into, a single word. Since the Bible does not teach that sinners

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cannot repent and be converted, those who hold to such views have to resort to trying to prove their theology by imposing their own definitions upon words in Scripture instead of practicing proper exegesis.

If you simply give your own definition to Biblical words, instead of properly understanding their actual or original definition, you can make the Bible teach whatever doctrine you want. That is what I have seen many do when it comes to the word “dead.” To say that a sinner is dead in sin is to say that he is without a relationship with God, not that he is without the ability to return to God.

The story of Lazarus is sometimes appealed to by those who hold to the doctrine of inability and constitutional regeneration. They equate God telling sinners who are dead in their sins to repent, with Jesus telling Lazarus who was dead to come forth. They use this story from the Gospels as an analogy of regeneration.

However, we should not equate the physically dead with the spiritually dead. But besides this, when Jesus called Lazarus to “come forth,” Lazarus actually did it. This means God must have already given him the ability to do what He commanded. The fact that Lazarus actually came forth is proof that Lazarus had the ability to come forth. If he couldn’t have done it, he wouldn’t have done it. This story does not show God commanding men to do the impossible, but shows Him commanding men to do what He has given them the ability to do.

Jesus also told the lame man to get up and walk (Jn. 5:8-9). But He gave him the ability to do what was commanded. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we ever see God commanding anyone to do that which they cannot do. God only commands men to do what He has given them the ability to do. What God commands, He supplies the ability to be done.

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Therefore, since God commands all men who are dead in their sins to repent of their sins (Acts 17:30), this means that He has given all of them the ability to do this. All men are obligated and commanded to obey God. Therefore, all men are able to do so.

THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL OF GOD

“The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Act 4:26-28). “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

Some Calvinists have argued, since the crucifixion of Christ was determined by the counsel of God, those who were involved in His crucifixion were not acting as *free* moral agents but were under God’s “*sovereign control.*” However, while there may be cases in which man’s free will is suspended by God, there is no reason to believe that occurred in this particular case. The affirmation of determination on the part of God does not necessitate the negation of freedom on the part of man. There is no reason why God’s determination and man’s liberty, in this case, cannot be compatible.

For example, if I determine to be taught by certain theologians at a specific seminary, does that mean that those professors are not willingly teaching at the school or are not free to resign? No. The determination on my part for them to teach me does not negate the freedom on their part in being teachers.

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Likewise, if I determine that a certain grocery store will sell me groceries if I go there, because I foreknow that they are a grocery store, does this in any way conflict with their liberty? No. I know that they are freely willing to sell groceries so I can determine to buy groceries from them. My determination and their freedom are not mutually exclusive or incompatible but actually co-exist.

The Apostle Paul “determined to sail by Ephesus” (Acts 20:16). Does that mean that the sailors on the vessel that he determined to sail on were acting under Paul’s compulsion or control? No. Paul determined to sail on a certain vessel to a certain location, but that does not mean that the vessel he determined to sail on was under his causation.

When Paul sailed to Ephesus, he could say that what occurred was what was “determined before to be done,” instead of something which occurred by surprise or accident. But the occurrence of what was determined before to be done did not exclude the freedom of those who participated in its occurrence.

In the same way, God determined the crucifixion of Christ, but that does not mean that those who participated in His crucifixion and contributed to it were not free in what they did. What they did to Christ was not a surprise to God. What they did was what God had “determined before to be done.” In order to accomplish His purpose of slaying the Lord, God delivered Christ into the hands of those who already wanted to kill him by their free choice.

There certainly was no shortage of people who wanted to kill Jesus because of the way that He preached. Jesus said that “the world” “hateth” him, “because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil” (Jn. 7:7). And it says that men, “consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety, and kill him (Matt. 26:4). The Romans and the Jews both had

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their reasons as to why they wanted to kill him. There were plenty of men who “sought how they might kill him” (Lk. 22:2; See also: Jn. 5:18; 7:1). But the enemies of Christ were unable to kill him as long as the Father was protecting him (Matt. 4:6; Lk. 4:11; Jn. 7:30; 10:31; 10:39). The Bible says, “Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come” (Jn. 7:30).

When the proper time came, the Father lifted up the protection that He had over Jesus and gave Him into their hands in order to accomplish the crucifixion, which He had determined or purposed before to bring to pass. The Father “*delivered*” Christ “into the hands of sinful men” (Lk. 24:7; See also: Mk. 9:31; Lk. 9:44). The Father gave Pilate the power to crucify Jesus, which power he otherwise would not have had (Jn. 19:11). Jesus was “*delivered* by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). God determined to deliver Jesus unto wicked men and God foreknew what they would do to Jesus if He did. This is because the Father knew the hostility and hatred that was already freely in their hearts. These wicked men wanted to kill Jesus before God delivered Jesus unto them. God certainly did not need to directly control the states or choices of their will.

God was able to incorporate their voluntary wickedness into His plans and even turn it around and use it for good. This, it seems, God also did with Joseph’s brothers (Gen. 50:20). But this does not mean that God caused their wickedness. It is one thing to say that God “*worketh* all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11). And it is quite another thing to say, “God *causes* all things after the counsel of his own will.” God can *work with* the free will choices of men to accomplish His purposes without *causing* all the choices of men. To say otherwise would limit His

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omnipotence and deny Him the ability that even man has on a limited scale.

However, Reformed Theologians have used these passages to teach that man is accountable for his sins even though his actions are not free but are caused by God. They use these passages to say that man's accountability does not require man's liberty. But as we have seen, there is no reason to believe that Pilate and the others were not free. As Pilate said, "I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee" (Jn. 19:10). Pilate certainly was conscious of possessing free will. He was aware of the fact that what he was doing, he was doing by his own free volition.

The very fact that Peter blamed them for their sin by saying, "ye have taken, and by *wicked hands* have crucified and slain," indicates that their actions were free. Peter presupposes their freedom since he said that their actions had moral character and that they are responsible for them. If they could not have acted otherwise, their actions could not have moral character and they could not be responsible for them. You cannot say that a puppet or a robot has moral character. And you cannot blame a man for acting under the direct control of God anymore than you can blame a man for the beating of his heart. That which a man has no control over is that which cannot contribute to his moral character and that which he cannot be rightly blamed for.

The Bible goes on to say, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, *whom ye have crucified*, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were *pricked in their hearts*, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, *what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:36-37) Apparently, Peter's audience had not taken Peter's previous words about the determinate counsel of God to mean that they had no free will in the matter or that they were only acting under the

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control of God. Otherwise, they could not have been pricked in their hearts for their action or have seen any reason why they needed to be saved for acting in such a way. But they were pricked in their hearts and sought for a way of salvation because they internally knew that what they had done was caused freely by their own wills and, therefore, they were rightly responsible and accountable for it.

The freedom of man's choice is directly connected with the accountability man is under. The Scriptures had already established the direct relationship between man's freedom of choice and his accountability. God said, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life..." (Deut. 30:19) "Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God.... And a curse if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God" (Deut. 11:26-28).

Responsibility or accountability presupposes free will. Men will be judged according to the free choices of their wills. Since these men were responsible for taking Jesus and for killing him, though God had determined that Jesus should be delivered unto them and slain, they still took Him and killed him by their own free choice.

Unbelievers Cannot Please God

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

Reformed theology teaches that since it is impossible to please God without faith, and since no man can give himself faith in their view, that therefore it is naturally impossible for men to please God. Martin Luther said, "For as no one can give himself faith, neither can he take away his

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own unbelief.”¹⁴ Therefore, this verse is used by Reformed Theologians as an argument against man’s free will ability to obey God and, consequently, to please Him.

As we already saw in a previous chapter, faith is not some mystical thing that God grants to some and refuses to give to others. Faith is a personal choice of the heart to embrace the truth that is perceived and known. This is presupposed by the fact that God commands men to believe (Mk. 1:15; 11:22; Jn. 6:28-29; 10:38; 12:36; 14:11; 20:27; Acts 16:31; Heb. 3:12; 3:15; 4:7; 4:14; 10:23). If faith was not a volition of their will, commanding them to believe would be pointless and nonsense. But Jesus even marveled at unbelief (Mk. 6:6). Jesus also rebuked men for their unbelief (Mk. 16:14; 9:19; Lk. 24:25). And God blamed men for not believing (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 13:15; 21:42; Mk. 12:10; Lk. 20:17; Acts 7:57; 28:27; 2 Tim. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:7). This clearly reveals that unbelief is voluntary and avoidable. It shows that faith is not some mystical thing that God grants to certain men, but that faith is in fact a free choice on man’s part.

God has
made
Himself
abundantly
known to
all men.

The Bible teaches that God has made Himself abundantly known to all men, so they are without excuse for not believing in Him and for not serving Him (Jn. 1:9; Rom. 1:18-21). If men are “without excuse” for their unbelief and for not serving God because they possess the knowledge of His existence, this implies that their will is free to embrace the knowledge of God. Having knowledge of God would not make them “without excuse” for their unbelief toward Him and for their failure to serve Him, unless their will was capable of believing and serving Him due to the possession of this knowledge. If an unbeliever cannot have faith in God and serve Him, despite the knowledge that God has given

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them, then the knowledge that God has given them would not make them “without excuse.” The knowledge of the truth only makes sinners “without excuse” for not obeying it, if they actually are capable of obeying the truth that they possess.

Clearly, since sinners are ‘without excuse’ for their unbelief and disobedience, unbelievers are actually capable of having faith and are capable of serving God. The problem is that men refuse to know Him (2 Chron. 15:2; Ps. 10:4; Isa. 64:7; Jer. 9:6; Matt. 7:7; Acts 17:27; Rom. 3:11). The will of an unbeliever is in rebellion against the knowledge that their mind possesses. Unbelief is a criminal choice. Unbelief is active hostility toward God. Unbelievers, or those who are without faith, are not poor victims of their circumstances or men who haven’t yet encountered enough light necessary to believe. An unbeliever has enough requisite truth to recognize the existence of God but he willingly refuses to acknowledge Him.

Paris Reidhead said, “And when I went to Africa, I discovered that they weren't poor, ignorant, little heathen running around in the woods looking for someone to tell them how to go to heaven. That they were monsters of iniquity!! They were living in utter and total defiance of far more knowledge of God than I ever dreamed they had! They deserved Hell! Because they utterly refused to walk in the light of their conscience, and light of the law written upon their heart, and the testimony of nature, and the truth they knew!”¹⁵

It is those who choose not to “believe that he is” and who decide not to “diligently seek him” that cannot “please him” (Heb. 11:6). While a man is in such a hostile state, they are not pleasing to God. No man could possibly be pleasing to God while they are choosing to be an unbeliever. In fact, such people are displeasing to Him. They no doubt provoke

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Him to anger by their utter unwillingness to acknowledge the truth. Nothing that they do can possibly please God while they freely choose to ignore His existence. Nothing they do can possibly be righteous while their heart is in such enmity toward God.

Evidently, this particular verse states no hindrance upon man's free will nor does it refute the doctrine of man's freedom. This is because man's freedom is not the ability to please God without faith. Free will is not the ability to please Him while choosing to ignore Him or while refusing to acknowledge His obvious existence. But free will, in regards to faith and unbelief, is the ability to acknowledge or ignore the God that has made Himself blatantly known. It is the ability to embrace the truth of His existence or to reject the truth of His existence, which He has made irresistibly known through inescapable revelation.

It should be obvious then that the only thing that keeps a man back from pleasing God is his own unwillingness to acknowledge and serve Him. There is no inability on the part of an unbeliever, resulting from a defect in the nature that God gave him, which keeps him back from pleasing God. Therefore, it is possible for a man to please God. This verse itself assumes that man can please God *by faith*.

If a man chooses to be a believer, or to acknowledge the Lord and to serve Him, then they are in fact pleasing to Him. "But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is *accepted with him*" (Acts 10:35). "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that we ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to *please God*, so ye would abound more and more" (1 Thes. 4:1). "But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices *God is well pleased*" (Heb. 13:16). "And whatsoever we ask, we receive

of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are *pleasing in his sight*" (1 Jn. 3:22).

Pray Without Ceasing

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17). "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12).

It has been argued by some that since the New Testament tells us to "pray without ceasing" and to be "instant in prayer," that this is a commandment that we cannot keep. Rather than saying that we can choose to pray without ceasing because we are commanded to do so, and that we would not be commanded to do such a thing if such a choice cannot be made, they say that this is an impossible commandment. Therefore, they argue that our moral obligation exceeds our moral ability.

It is worth noting that the epistles of Paul do not always contain moral law but also contain sound guidance and good advice. For example, Paul gave his own guidance and advice regarding marriage which he specifically said was not a commandment from the Lord (1 Cor. 7:6; 7:12; 7:25). And just because Paul said to, "Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss" (1 Thes. 5:26; see also, Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12), does not mean that we are morally wrong or have violated a moral obligation if we fail to kiss one another! Not everything stated in the New Testament is a direct command or moral law, but there is also sound guidance and good advice.

If "pray without ceasing" is Paul's advice and guidance, instead of moral law from God, it would not be a violation of our moral obligation if we fall short of this. If this is not moral law, this could not be an example of our moral obligation exceeding our moral ability.

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However, let's assume for the sake of argument that "pray without ceasing" actually is a moral law and that we are morally obligated to do it. Does this mean that our moral obligation exceeds our moral ability? The answer is no. Paul and the Bible elsewhere uses the phrase "without ceasing" in reference to prayer. In these passages, the phrase is not addressing what *ought to be done* but refers to what *has been done* and what *is being done*.

The Bible says, "Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made *without ceasing* of the Church unto God for him" (Acts 12:5). "For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that *without ceasing* I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9). "For this cause also thank we God *without ceasing*" (1 Thes. 2:13). "I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that *without ceasing* I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day" (2 Tim. 1:3). "We give thanks to God and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *praying always* for you" (Col. 1:3).

In light of these passages we can clearly see that Paul's command or advice to pray without ceasing is not something which is unrealistic, impossible, or unattainable. The fault commonly lies in the assumption that praying without ceasing literally means without going a single moment or second without praying. This of course cannot be the meaning since Paul said that he himself does pray without ceasing. We cannot believe that he never slept or that he always prayed in his sleep! But to pray without ceasing simply means that we are to habitually and continually pray with fervency, that prayer ought to be an essential and regular part of our life, and that prayer ought to occupy our heart and mind and not be neglected. Prayer should not cease from our lives or be omitted from our

activities but should be a habitual and regular exercise of our hearts and minds.

Ethiopian Skin & Leopard Spots

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer. 13:23).

It should be remarked that this passage is talking about Israel during a certain period of time in their history. This passage is not talking about all sinners of all time. To apply this passage to all sinners of all time is to ignore the proper rules of hermeneutic interpretation, particularly the rule of context.

Despite all of the effort of God, they were still wicked and evil.

It should also be remarked that this passage is not talking about the way Israel was born. This passage is talking about the way Israel had become through their self-chosen habitual manner of living. It says that they were “*accustomed* to do evil.” The unchanging state of these people was a moral condition by choice and habit as opposed to a constitutional condition by birth.

At this point in their history, Israel had resisted God for a long time. These men disobeyed God continually. This was after God had been reaching out to them time and time again. God said, “...when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not” (Isa 66:4). “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded” (Prov. 1:24). “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). Despite all of the efforts of God, they were still wicked and evil. In fact, they were worse than when they started because they

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had to continually harden their hearts as God was reaching out to them. They were well accustomed in doing evil.

They were so accustomed to do evil that their reformation would be comparable to a leopard changing his spots or an Ethiopian changing his skin. Through their habitual choice of disobedience, they made themselves reprobates. They resisted the influence of God to the point of no return. It was as likely to see an Ethiopian changing his skin, or a leopard changing his spots, as it would be to see these hardened reprobates changing their moral ways.

This passage was given to show Israel that they were without excuse, not to imply that they had an excuse. If they were born evil, had no choice in the matter, or truly could not obey God, they would have an excuse for being evil. But in context, God was revealing to them the justice of their punishment. The Bible says, “What will thou say when he shall punish thee?... And if thou say in thine heart, *wherefore come these things upon me? For the greatness of thine iniquity...* Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are *accustomed to do evil*” (Jer. 13:21-22). They rightly deserved punishment because of the greatness of their iniquity or because they were accustomed to do evil. They were being punished because of their habitual and continual disobedience or because of their voluntary and well established custom in doing evil. The point of comparing their moral reformation to an Ethiopian changing his skin, or to a leopard changing his spots, was to show “the greatness of thine iniquity,” not to show any inability in their nature.

To use this passage to say that *all sinners of all times* are incapable of changing their ways, repenting, or obeying God, is to severely stretch and twist this passage and to change its actual and original meaning. This verse certainly does not support the idea that all men are incapable of

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changing their moral character, or that all those who are disobedient are incapable of obeying God.

To interpret this verse or any other verse to teach that man cannot obey God would be to set the Bible against itself. It would be to overlook myriads of clear declarations. And it would give sinners the excuse they are looking for in order to justify themselves in their disobedience and to condemn the Lord for His requirements. My prayer is that the Holy Bible will never again be used as a weapon against the moral government of God by interpreting it in such a way as to comfort sinners in their rebellion and to encourage them on their disobedience.

Let the natural ability of man be declared from one end of the world to the other, to be preached on every street and from every pulpit, so that sinners will truly see just how wicked, inexcusable, and unjustifiable their disobedient state actually is, so that they can acknowledge how deserving they actually are of eternal damnation, and recognize how desperately they need the influence of God's grace and the forgiveness that is in Jesus Christ. Therefore, preachers must never shy away from refuting the doctrine of man's natural inability, but must boldly and fearlessly declare the truth of the Bible, that man can obey both the law of God and the gospel of Christ.

APPENDIX I

DOES MAN INHERIT A SINFUL NATURE?

As we saw in the book, the doctrine of free will, which was held by early Christianity, was eventually replaced with the Gnostic doctrine of a sinful nature through the contribution and influence of Augustine. Augustinians, Lutherans, and Calvinists teach that man's nature is so sinful and corrupt that man cannot choose what is good. This is why, when the topic of man's natural ability is brought up, the question about man's nature in general is usually introduced to the discussion.

Just as natural inability is commonly used by sinners as an excuse for sinning, so also a "sinful nature" is a common excuse for their sin. I regularly hear sinners justifying their sin by saying, "Sin is human nature." Instead of taking full responsibility by saying, "Sin is my choice," they blame their Creator by saying, "Sin is my nature." Instead of humbly admitting that sin is the choice of their will, they comfort themselves by saying that sin is the defect of their God given nature.

As long as men try to convince their minds that sin is not their fault, they will never admit that they deserve punishment and, consequently, need the atonement of Christ. If men are convinced that sin is not their fault, then they can never be convinced that they deserve punishment for it. Only

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those who deserve wrath are in need of mercy. Only those who deserve damnation are in need of salvation. Therefore, those people who are convinced that sin is not their fault but is the defect of their nature, instead of the deliberation of their will, must be shown otherwise.

As already mentioned in this book, effective communication necessitates the defining of words. Therefore, the word “nature” must first be defined before we can ask if man inherits a “sinful nature.” Your nature defined is your constitution, make up, structure, design, composition, substance, and essence. Human nature would include our faculties of intelligence, emotion, free will, and all of the elements of spirit, soul, and body. Our constitution is both physical and spiritual. Therefore, to ask if man has a “sinful nature,” is to ask if man’s design is evil, if his composition is sinful, or if his constitution and substance is morally wicked.

God Gives Us Our Nature

First, we must understand that God is the author of our nature. God is the cause of our constitution. Neither Adam nor the devil forms our nature. The Bible says that God personally forms us in the womb (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Isa. 27:11; 43:7; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Ecc. 7:29; Job 10:9-11; 31:15; 35:10; Jn. 1:3). “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works...” (Ps. 139:14)

God did not merely create Adam and then step back as Deism claims. Our nature is not the product of mere “natural generation” as if God was not involved in our formation. God is personally the Creator of all. The development of a child inside the womb is a miracle. It is supernatural. The work of designing and creating a baby, physically and spiritually, is God’s own personal work. That

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is why God takes personal responsibility for our condition at birth (Exo. 4:11; Prov. 20:12).

To say that God only created the natures of Adam and Eve is a deistic perspective. A proper theistic view says that God is the creator of every man's nature. The Bible says, "*All things* were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn. 1:3). "For of him, and through him, and to him, are *all things*" (Rom. 11:36). "God, who created *all things* by Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:9). "For by him were *all things* created... *all things* were created by him... by him *all things* consist" (Col. 1:16-17). The "all things" that have been made by Christ include all the human natures which are made and created inside the womb.

We Were Designed For Holiness

Mankind is described as being made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7). The Bible says that men are "made after the similitude of God" (Jas. 3:9), even after the fall of Adam. That is why when it comes to sin, the Bible says that sin is actually contrary to human nature (Rom. 1:26-27). God wanted mankind to imitate Him in choosing holiness (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26; Matt. 5:48; 1 Pet. 1:16). God did not design us to live wickedly. Therefore, sin is an abuse and misuse of our created constitution.

God did not intend or plan for us to use our mental, moral, spiritual, or physical abilities for sin. That is why the Bible says that sin is "against nature." Sinners choose to do "that which is against nature." Through the freedom of their will, they choose to do what is contrary to their design. It was never God's intention for man to sin. It was not His plan for mankind to be sinful (Gen. 6:5-6; Matt. 25:41; Eph. 1:4;

Sin is an abuse and misuse of our created constitution.

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1 Thes. 4:3). God actually would have preferred a sinless universe that needed no atonement at all (1 Sam. 15:22). Since sin was contrary to God's plan or intention for mankind, God has made sin contrary to the design of our constitution.

God never intended for us to use our constitution for sin. On the contrary, He wants us to use our members for righteousness (Rom. 6:13, 19; Rom. 12:1; 1 Thes. 4:3-4). Paul said, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to *possess his vessel in sanctification and honor*" (1 Thes. 4:3-4). Our constitution was not designed for sin, but sin is contrary to the intended use of our nature, because God is our designer.

Harry Conn said, "...any sin is not natural to man, but is a violation of his created design."¹ Jed Smock said, "Sin is a perversion of our nature. We were not designed to sin. We were designed to live holy. And sin is using our nature selfishly instead of using our human nature lovingly."² He also said, "...as an automobile is not designed to be used as a tractor, our minds and bodies are not designed to plow the fields of sin... sin is contrary to man's design and nature."³

The Bible teaches that God never planned, intended, designed, desired, or caused men to sin (Gen. 6:5-6). Nothing could have been further from God's intention and design for mankind than wickedness. Therefore, nothing could be more unnatural for man than sin. A man who lives sinfully is living unnaturally.

Conscience Is A Faculty Of Our Nature

A man who lives holy is actually living in accordance with his nature. That is, our nature demands us to walk in holiness. God designed our constitution or nature with a conscience so that we have the natural tendency, a

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constitutional bent, or a compositional influence to obey the law of God. Paul said, “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, *do by nature the things contained in the law*, these having not the law are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their *conscience* also bearing witness, and *their thoughts* the meanwhile *accusing* or else *excusing* one another” (Rom. 2:14-15).

The truths of conscience are often referred to as “natural revelation” or “the light of nature.” Our natural composition gives us a natural disposition, or a constitutional inclination, to obey the law of God. By divine design we have a constitutional bias against sin. God has designed our nature to be in favor of virtue by writing His law upon our hearts. Therefore, men sin against their better knowledge.

Sin is described as being unintelligent (Matt. 7:24-27). Sin is to choose against what you know to be right. Sin is to choose what you know to be wrong. “Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth” (Jn. 9:41). “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

The declaration that “all have sinned,” therefore, presupposes that “all” know the law of God through their conscience, as only those who have knowledge are capable of rebelling against it. Therefore, the very declaration that “all have sinned” is a declaration that God has designed the constitution of all men to be against sin, since God has given the light of conscience to all. “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (Jn. 1:9). Some suppose the fact that “all have sinned” implies that sin is natural for all, or that all men have a sinful nature. But in reality, it shows the opposite. This is because “all have

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sinned” implies that conscience is part of the nature of all, and therefore that sin is contrary to the nature of all. .

When a man sins, his own “thoughts” the Bible says accuse him. His own conscience or nature is “bearing witness” against him (Rom. 2:15). Deep inside man, within his very essence or embedded in the nature God has given him, there is the still small voice of conscience that cries against his every act of sin and commands obedience to the moral law of God. Therefore, a sinner chooses contrary to the influence of his nature.

Every sinner is at variance with his conscience. A sinner is fighting against his moral knowledge. He has mutinied against the light of nature! He is at war with his own constitution! Truly, “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov. 13:15). God has built into us road blocks for the path of sin. Men sin against the nature that God has given them. In order for a man to rebel against God, they have to literally rebel against their own nature.

A sinner chooses contrary to the influence of his nature.

Free To Obey Or Disobey Our Nature

Irenaeus said, “Men are possessed with free will, and endowed with the faculty of making a choice. It is not true, therefore, that some are by nature good, and others bad.”⁴ Even Augustine at one point said, “Sin is volitional. No one is compelled by his nature to sin.”⁵ On the other hand, Martin Luther said that man “must will, desire, and act according to his nature...”⁶

The doctrine of the Necessitarians is that the will of a being is necessitated by the nature that the being has. The mode of the wills operation is that of necessity. The doctrine of Libertarians, however, is that the will of a being is free to act according to or contrary to the nature that they have. The

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nature one has may *influence* their will, but it does not *cause* their choices. The mode of the wills operation is that of liberty. The doctrine of the former and not of the latter is what is affirmed by the Scriptures.

If the will of a being was not free, but was necessitated by their nature, the fall of angels and men would have never occurred. Sin is the proof of free will. When God created everything He said it was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Lucifer himself was created as an angel, not as a demon, who had a good nature. The Bible says, “Thou wast *perfect* in all thy ways from the day that thou wast *created*, till iniquity was found in thee” (Eze. 28:15). Lucifer became a devil by sinning against his nature. His sin was not the creation of God but was his own creation. His sin and character was not the product of his nature, but was the product of his will. The Bible says, “For thou hast said in thine heart, *I will* ascend into heaven, *I will* exalt my throne above the stars of God, *I will* sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: *I will* ascend above the heights of the clouds; *I will* be like the most High” (Isa. 14:13-14).

The nature one has may influence but not cause their choices.

Your nature does not cause your will, that is, the state of your nature does not necessitate the choices of your will. The will is free to choose according to or contrary to your nature (Rom. 1:26-27). The relation between your nature and your will is not causation but influence. That is, your nature may influence your choices but it does not cause your choices. The choices of the will are self-determined. Free will is the power of self-determination. The faculty of the will freely originates choices.

The rebellion of Lucifer was not committed by any necessity of his nature but occurred through the freedom of

his will. Likewise, God created Adam and Eve with a good nature. Yet despite their good nature, they sinned. Their will was free to choose according to or contrary to their nature. The tragedy of mankind is that God has created every single one of us, like He created our first parents, and we too have freely chosen to sin against our nature, just like our first parents.

Sin Is Unnatural

The fact that men naturally feel guilty for their sin is proof that it is not man's nature to sin. The reason that we naturally feel guilty if we sin is because God is the author of our nature and He has designed us for holiness, not for sin.

Alfred T. Overstreet said, "God created all men with a good nature. All sin is a corruption of man's nature, it is a perversion of man's nature. It is rebellion against our nature – it is rebellion against the 'law of God written in our hearts' and against the God who has written his law in our hearts."⁷ He also said, "The nature we are born with teaches us to reject evil and choose good... Men must go against their nature to sin."⁸

Winkie Pratney said, "God made human nature; God did not make sin! Sin is never natural. It is horribly unnatural. Sin is never 'human'. It is horribly in-human. Sin creates remorse, guilt, and shame; every time a man feels these three witnesses in his soul, they tell him sin is not natural. Even the simple lie-detector can tell us this. The whole body reacts adversely when a man sins... God never planned sin for man. It is the most un-natural thing in the moral Universe... Do not dare say sin is 'natural'! God hates sin with perfect hatred; He loves humanity."⁹

Jed Smock said, "Sin is unnatural. Whatever the sin might be, it is unnatural. It is contrary to our nature to have sex with the opposite sex outside of marriage. That's

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contrary to our nature. It is contrary to our nature to lie, to steal. That is why when you first started lying or stealing, you had a guilty conscience.... A guilty conscience is to your soul what pain is to your body. You get pain around your heart especially, you think I better get a check up, that's not normal, something is wrong... You get a guilty conscience, your conscience is trying to tell you your behavior is wrong. You weren't designed to lie, steal, or cheat, or fornicate, whatever it is your doing that's selfish."¹⁰

Charles Finney said, "The constitution of a moral being as a whole, when all the powers are developed, does not tend to sin, but strongly in an opposite direction..."¹¹

When conscience is developed, a man's own nature stands against him when he sins. His own constitution and composition fights him and condemns him. But when he obeys his conscience and does what is right, he has perfect peace of mind. As Paul said, "There is now *no condemnation* to them that are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit" (Rom. 8:1).

A man's
own nature
stands
against
him when
he sins.

We know experientially through consciousness that we have been so created by God that we naturally feel the pains of conscience when we do what is wrong and we naturally have peace of mind when we do what is right. When the idea of right and wrong is developed within the mind, or when we have a developed conscience with moral principles, we naturally feel good when we choose to do what is right and we naturally feel bad when we choose to do what is wrong. It is not by choice that we feel that way, it is by nature. By divine design, our sensibilities naturally respond or react when our will chooses contrary to or in conformity with the knowledge of our mind.

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Gordon C. Olson said, “God endowed man’s constitution with profound abilities and reactions to enable him to achieve great heights of comprehension and moral character in imitation of his Creator. Just as virtuous actions would deposit uplifting characteristics in the inner personality, so sinful indulgences would degrade our inner being and bring about disturbing agitations.”¹²

Our Conscience Delights in the Law

Romans chapter seven gives us a description of what occurs when the mind of an unconverted sinner is convicted by the law. Using a literary technique, Paul uses the present tense to tell the narrative. As many stories begin with “once upon a time,” Paul said, “For I was alive without the law *once*, but *when* the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7:9). He then proceeded in his narrative to discuss what happens when an unconverted sinner encounters the law of God.

Some suppose Romans chapter seven to be a description of the Christian life, as opposed to a description of an unconverted state. But we know Paul is not referring to his own converted state because he already said that Christians have been made “free from sin” (Rom. 6:18, 22). The man in Romans seven was not “free from sin” and, therefore, he was not a Christian.

Paul also said that, “There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). Yet the man in Romans chapter seven was under condemnation and therefore needed to be saved by Jesus (Rom. 7:24-25).

And Paul said that, “to be carnally minded is death” (Rom. 8:6). But the man in Romans chapter seven said, “I am carnal, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). Therefore, the man in Romans chapter seven did not have eternal life.

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And finally, Paul said that as a converted man he lived with a good and pure conscience that was void of offense (Acts 23:1; Acts 24:16; 2 Tim. 1:3). The man described in Romans chapter seven is deeply disturbed by his conscience (Rom. 7:16). Therefore, the description given in Romans chapter seven was not of the converted life of the Apostle Paul. It is a narration describing what happens when an unconverted sinner's mind encounters the law of God and is convicted by it.

In this chapter we can see that even an unconverted transgressor can say, "I consent unto the law that it is good" (Rom. 7:16). This is because of the law of his mind (Rom. 7:23). A sinner can say, "I delight in the law of God *after the inward man*" (Rom. 7:22). This is a classic way of referring to our God given conscience. The conscience of a sinner consents unto the goodness of the law and even delights in it. It is natural and normal for a man's conscience to do this.

The supernatural revelation of "thou shalt not" given in the Ten Commandments is automatically affirmed by the natural revelation of our conscience. If the unregenerate did not consent unto the goodness law, they could never be convicted and, consequently, they never could be converted. Conviction is necessarily antecedent to conversion. Conversion proceeds from conviction; and therefore, conviction must precede conversion.

The unregenerate could never feel guilty or be convinced that they are justly condemned for violating the law, if their conscience did not consent to the goodness of the law. A man would feel justified in violating a bad law, but a man would feel condemned for violating a good law. If the law is wrong, the transgressor is right. If the law is right, the transgressor is wrong. A man can only feel guilty, and his mind can only recognize that he was wrong for his transgression, if his mind is first convinced that the law

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which was violated was a good law. Therefore, God created us with a natural recognition of the goodness of His law. He has created us with a natural approval of what is right.

While sinners are voluntarily hostile in their *will* toward holiness, they necessarily approve in their *conscience* of holiness. The will of a sinner rejects what his mind approves of. Charles Finney said, “Moral agents are so constituted, that they necessarily approve of moral worth or excellence; and when even sinners behold right character, or moral goodness, they are compelled to respect and approve it, by a law of their intelligence... The vilest sinners on earth or in hell have, by an unalterable constitution of their nature, the necessity imposed upon them, of paying intellectual homage to moral excellence... But this being altogether an involuntary state of mind, has no moral character.”¹³

Since God has created our nature with a conscience, or a natural knowledge of right and wrong, we naturally approve of the moral attributes of God and other benevolent beings. And we naturally disapprove of the character of the devil and other selfish beings. God is good because He loves. He lives for the good of everyone. The devil is evil because He is selfish. He lives supremely for his own good. Our constitution has been so designed by God to approve of the good and to disapprove of the evil. We naturally know that benevolence is right and selfishness is wrong. God is good and therefore, He designed us that way.

Epic tales of good vs. evil in both literature and Hollywood depend upon mankind’s ability to distinguish between good and evil. They depend upon mankind’s natural approval of the good and natural disapproval of evil. Think of any famous tale of good vs. evil. Think of any story that has a “good guy” and a “bad guy.” What was it that made the “good guy” so good? It was that he cared about other people. We naturally know what the Bible says, that love is the

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fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:10; Gal. 5:14). And what was it that made the “bad guy” so bad? It was that he cared supremely for himself and disregarded the well-being of others.

As God’s creation, we naturally admire and respect a man’s good moral character and naturally abhor and disrespect a man’s evil moral character. Through our conscience, we naturally know that a benevolent being is a good being, and that a selfish being is an evil being. It is because of our conscience, or the natural moral knowledge God has given us, that we naturally approve of what is right or good, and we naturally disapprove of what is evil or wrong. It is our human nature to approve of what is good and to disapprove of what is evil.

Broadcasted through the airwaves each year are pictures and videos of suffering children and starving masses across our world. Which heart does not naturally break at the sight of such agony, grief, and misfortune? These commercials are meant to be appeals to our “humanity.” God designed us with a natural compassion for the weak, hurting, and dying. The tragedy of humanity is that despite our humanity, despite our natural compassion, men still choose to be selfish and wicked. The wickedness of man is despite our nature, not because of it.

I remember as a young child on the playground of my elementary school seeing a little boy being picked on by another boy. I remember being naturally outraged at the abuse the child was suffering by the bully. I naturally knew that the way he was being treated by the bully was wrong. Consequently, I naturally felt upset over it. Having care and concern for the young and innocent is a “natural affection” (Rom. 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3). These thoughts and feelings I had

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were not originated by my own choice but were the result of the design of God. It was by nature and not by choice that I was disturbed over this unjust treatment. It is natural to be upset over the abuse an innocent person suffers at the hands of a bully. It is unnatural not to be.

I can also remember when my brother and I were very young children and our mother took us for a walk to the local corner store. My brother wanted a candy bar but my mother denied his request. After getting back home, my mother saw my brother walking around with the candy bar. My mother asked, "Where did you get that?" Apparently he

It is natural to feel bad for sin. It is unnatural not to.

had stolen it. Immediately my brother burst into tears. Obviously, nobody had to teach my brother to cry or even tell my brother to cry. It came naturally. His conscience convicted him. Eventually he remorsefully confessed to stealing the candy.

My brother felt awful about his theft and I did too. I remembered how nice and friendly the owner of the store had always been to us. I felt very bad that my brother would steal from him. My mother had my brother walk back to the store, return the candy bar, and apologize to the owner. Both my brother and I had very sensitive consciences. It is natural to feel bad for sin. It is unnatural not to.

Corrupting Your Conscience

Through the habitual choice of sin, a moral being is capable of numbing their conscience. Through continually ignoring the claims and demands of your conscience, you can desensitize yourself so that you have a seared conscience (1 Tim. 2:4). This state of insensitivity is not a natural state, but an unnatural state. It is a degenerate state which is

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arrived at through habitual choice. Men must corrupt themselves to be in such a state.

God speaks about Israel after they continually rebelled against Him and said, “Where they ashamed when they had committed abominations? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush” (Jer. 6:15; 8:12). This state of being is not how God made them or how they were born. It was how they made themselves through their own free will.

Extreme cases of this degenerate state would be sociopaths and serial killers. Of course, these are the exceptions and not the rule for mankind. The average or normal person does feel good when doing right and feels bad when doing wrong. That is normal or natural and anything else is abnormal and unnatural.

Virtue Relates To Choices Not Constitution

It should be understood that a man is not virtuous because he feels bad for doing wrong. Even the unconverted naturally feel bad for doing wrong. That is a natural reaction that our sensibilities have in response to our consciousness of the choices of our will which were contrary to the moral knowledge of our mind. Our feelings naturally react when our will chooses to obey or disobey our conscience.

But moral character is not determined by the states of the sensibilities but by the states of the will. Whether a man is good or evil is not determined by his nature but by his choices. A man is virtuous if he actually chooses what is virtuous. A man is not virtuous because he has a natural approval of virtue or because sin is against his nature and design. His will is free to live according to his nature or to choose that which is against his nature. Man’s character is derived from his will choosing according to or contrary to the conscience God created as part of his nature.

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Hypothetically, suppose God formed individuals in the womb with “sinful inclinations.” Would that mean that they were born sinful or born sinners? No, because a person is not sinful or a sinner merely because of the inclinations they are created and designed with. It is not a sin to have an inclination towards sin. If it is an inclination “towards sin,” then by definition, it is not a sin itself but only an inclination towards sin. An inclination towards sin would be a temptation and not a sin because it is merely an influence to make a sinful choice and not a sinful choice itself.

If God formed infants in the womb with a nature that had sinful inclinations, that does not mean that they are born sinners or born sinful because moral character is not predicated upon a person’s inclinations but upon their choices. This is evident from the fact that if a person is created with sinful inclinations, but they make holy choices, their character is holy and not sinful. Likewise, if a person is created with holy inclinations, but they make sinful choices, their moral character is sinful and not holy. Moral character is not determined by your constitutional inclinations or by what your nature inclines you towards. Moral character is determined by your personal free will choices or by what you actually choose to live for.

Gordon C. Olson said, “Moral character must be a voluntary choice of the person involved, as distinguished from a constitutional trait or natural attribute. A natural attribute is something we cannot help. It is an essential part of our beings, involuntary. Moral character is a term that describes what we are doing with our endowments of personality and the moral light which we possess. It cannot refer to something back of the will but is the choice of the will itself. If moral character is something fixed or something that controls the will in one direction or in

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another, then virtue or blame disappears, the law of cause and effect takes over, and moral action ceases to exist.”¹⁴

Man’s nature and man’s character is a necessary and proper distinction. We must not confuse character with constitution. Nature and character must be distinguished between, lest we confuse our natural attributes with our moral attributes. Our character is determined by our own will. Our constitution or nature is determined by God’s will. Moral character has to do with voluntary states, not involuntary states. Nature has to do with involuntary states, not voluntary states.

There is no moral character in man’s involuntary nature. Man did not consent to or choose what type of nature, design, or natural tendencies he would be created with. Therefore, his moral character does not consist in the nature, design, or natural tendencies that he is created with. God’s moral law says absolutely nothing about man’s nature, design, or natural tendencies. Consequently, man’s nature, design, or natural tendencies, cannot have any moral qualities in and of themselves, since they cannot be in conformity with or contrary to the moral law of God.

The quality of your constitution is not determined by your choice but by your Creator. Therefore, man’s design does not show any virtue in man. Rather, it shows the goodness of our Designer. God has given us our nature and so our nature reflects and reveals the character of God. As Thomas Chalmers said, “There are certain broad and decisive indications of moral design, and so of a moral designer, in the constitution of our world... One patent example of this in the constitution of man, is the force and prevalence of compassion – an endowment which could not have proceeded from a malignant being; but which evinces the Author of our nature to be himself compassion and generous.”¹⁵

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In this way, our design reflects the goodness of our Designer. Man's make-up shows the greatness of our Maker. Mankind's constitution indicates the character of our Creator. And human nature signifies the intelligence of the God of nature.

Men Are Sinners Despite Their Constitution

Some may think that if I am saying that mankind has a natural or constitutional influence towards virtue and against sin, that mankind therefore is not sinful. The truth is that a man is a sinner, who truly deserves punishment, and therefore needs forgiveness through the atonement of Christ, because while God has given mankind the natural ability to obey Him, and He has given us the natural influence to obey Him, we have nevertheless chosen to sin.

Sin is universal because temptation and free will is universal.

This is true not only of Adam, but also of all of us. Men sin against their conscience; and therefore, they sin against their nature. The influences of our nature can be obeyed or disobeyed, yielded to or resisted. Despite all the efforts of God, both internal and external to man, mankind has still chosen to rebel against the good moral government of God, which has been revealed through man's conscience. Man's constitutional influence toward virtue exists despite man's choice to sin. And man's choice to sin exists despite man's constitutional influence toward virtue.

Men Are Sinners By Choice, Not Constitution

If men do not inherit a sinful nature, why is sin so universal? Sin is universal because temptation and free will are universal. All men, at some point, have freely given into temptation. Nobody can say, "I'm just a poor sinner. It is not

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my fault. I was born this way.” Sinners cannot say, “My nature made me do it.” If a man is a sinner, he is not worthy of pity but worthy of punishment. It is his fault. His sin is not the result of the nature God gave him, but of the choice that he has made.

The Bible says, “God hath made men upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc. 7:29). “God hath made man upright” shows that we cannot blame our sin upon our Creator, on our nature or constitution, or on our birth. And when it says, “...they have sought out many inventions,” this means that we have personally chosen to go after sin.

A sinner, by definition, is a person who chooses to sin. You cannot be a sinner until you first choose to sin. The Bible says that sinful men have “*corrupted themselves*” (Gen. 6:12; Exo. 32:7, Deut. 9:12, Deut. 32:5, Jdg. 2:19, Hos. 9:9). The sinfulness of each individual is self-inflicted. A sinner is in a self-caused state of wickedness. The will is the source or cause of all our moral qualities and moral behavior. Sin is not the condition of man’s constitution but the quality of man’s choice. Sinfulness is not some involuntary condition which is inflicted upon us. Sin is not something which is helplessly forced upon mankind. Sinners are not wicked by design but by their own determination.

The
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The Bible say’s man’s heart is evil *from their youth* (Gen. 8:21; Jer. 22:21; 32:30). That means that all men everywhere, at the age of accountability when they know right from wrong or have become moral agents, have personally and freely chosen to be sinners (Gen. 6:12, Ex. 32:7, Deut. 9:12, Deut. 32:5, Jdg. 2:19, Hos. 9:9, Ps. 14:2-3, Isa. 53:6, Ecc. 7:29, Rom. 3:23, Rom. 5:12). Men have chosen to be sinners despite the fact that sin is contrary to

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our design or nature, and despite our natural ability to do the will of God.

God said, “Everyone one of them is *gone back*: they are all together *become filthy*, there is none that doeth good no, not one” (Ps. 53:2; 14:2). It is self-evident that only the morally innocent can become guilty and only the morally clean can “become filthy.” This description of the sinful state of man describes a degenerate state, or a condition which they have “gone back” into, as opposed to a state that they were helplessly born into. Being a sinner is a condition that we have deliberately chosen to “become.”

The Bible says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). The phrases “*have gone astray*” and “*we have turned*” signifies personal volition. Sinners are deliberate rebels.

In fact, sin is something that each individual conceives in their own heart (Acts 5:4). It is something that men originate with their own will (Ps. 7:14; 58:3; Matt. 12:35, Lk. 6:45). Men, in a sense, give birth to sin. A sinner “*travaileth* with iniquity, and hath *conceived* mischief, and *brought forth* falsehood” (Ps. 7:14). Sin is personal because it is originated by each person.

When the Bible says, “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 5:12), this means that all men have personally and deliberately chosen to violate the revealed law of God. We have used our natural ability of choice to choose contrary to the design of our nature, to do what we knew to be sinful. The Bible says, “But unto the wicked God saith... thou hatest instruction, and *castest my words behind thee*” (Ps. 50:17). All men have deliberately chosen to rebel against the moral knowledge God has given them and to choose what they have naturally known to be wrong.

To deny that man is sinful by nature is not the same as denying that man is sinful. To deny that man is sinful by

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nature is simply to deny the idea that man is sinful involuntarily or that he is wicked under necessity. But you can deny that man is sinful by nature and still admit that man is sinful. To say that man is not sinful by nature, but that man is still sinful, is simply to affirm that man is sinful by voluntary choice. In this way, a man is the author of his own moral character.

Gregory of Nyssa said, "For that any one should become wicked, depends solely upon choice."¹⁶ Theodore of Mopsuestia denied the concept "that men sin by nature, not by choice..."¹⁷ Ignatius said, "If anyone is truly religious, he is a man of God; but if he is irreligious, he is a man of the devil, made such, not by nature, but by his own choice."¹⁸

Gordon C. Olson said, "Sin is always a wrong voluntary attitude or purpose of life, or a wrong motive of heart. Sin is not a fixed something back of the will controlling its actions. The will determines the nature of character . . . We are sinners simply because we choose to sin or live selfishly. We are never held accountable for what we are not the author of. Ability is always the measure of responsibility."¹⁹ He also said, "Moral beings themselves are the author of their own rebellion, which is an unintelligent abuse of their God-given endowments of personality.... It is man who has abused his God-given freedom."²⁰

Since men are sinners by the liberty of their wills, as opposed to the necessity of their natures, we cannot blame anyone else for our sin. If we are found to be sinners, it is entirely our own fault.

Sinners Separate Themselves From God

In the Bible, those who choose to be sinners are described as being spiritually dead. Spiritual death, or separation from God, is the result of each individual's personal sin. When a person chooses to sin, they are putting

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a barrier between themselves and God. The Bible says, “But *your iniquities* have separated between you and your God, and *your sins* have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa. 59:2). Thus, we can see that men become dead in sin because of their own personal sins.

The Bible says, “Even when we were dead in *sins*” (Eph. 2:3, 6). “And you being dead in *your sins* and the uncircumcision of *your flesh*” (Col. 2:13). Notice that these passages say “your iniquities” and “your sins,” making the cause of this condition personal and plural, not impersonal or singular. It means that men are dead in their own sins, not spiritually dead merely for the single sin of Adam.

Since the Bible says that a sinner is spiritually dead because of their own personal sins, we can conclude that men are not born spiritually dead but that men become spiritually dead when they personally and freely choose to sin. As the Bible says, “...death passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned*” (Rom. 5:12). Spiritual death is not a birth defect but is a self-inflicted condition.

Paul specifically said that we are not spiritually dead for Adam’s sin but for our own. After he said, “...death passed upon all men, *for that all have sinned*,” He said, “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had *not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression*” (Rom. 5:14). Paul here made a distinction between our sin and Adam’s transgression and clearly stated that we become spiritually dead, not for Adam’s sin, but for our own.

While Adam physically died a long time after he sinned (Gen. 5:5), Adam became spiritually dead the day that he sinned, just like God said that he would (Gen. 2:17). But does that mean that all his descendents inherit spiritual death from him? No. The parents who are spiritually dead do not transmit spiritual death at conception to their children,

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anymore than parents who are spiritually alive transmit spiritual life at conception to their children. Logically, if spiritually dead parents propagate spiritually dead children, then spiritually alive parents would propagate spiritually alive children. But spiritual death and spiritual life are not hereditary, since you do not inherit your spirit from your parents.

Spirits are not hereditary or inherited from parents (*Traducianism*), but spirits are created by God at conception (*Creationism*). God is known as “the God of the spirits of all flesh” (Num. 16:22; 27:16). This is because God “formeth the spirit of man within him” (Zac. 12:1). The Bible says, “As thou knowest not what is the way of the *spirit*, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God *who maketh all*” (Ecc. 11:5). God makes all spirits which is why He said, “all souls are mine” (Eze. 18:4). And this is why Paul said, “your body and... your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20).

Spiritual death and spiritual life are not hereditary.

Our parents are the “fathers of our flesh” but God is called “the Father of spirits” (Heb. 12:9). God does not create us with dead spirits, but with living spirits. He creates us spiritually alive *in a sense*. That is, there is not yet any sin barrier between us and God. We become spiritually dead or relationally separated from Him when we first sin. Paul said, “For *I was alive* without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and *I died*” (Rom. 7:9). “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it *slew me*” (Rom. 7:11). We see that spiritual death occurs after we sin. Only the living can die. Therefore, only those who were once alive can become dead in sin. That is why Paul said “I was alive” before he said “I died.” And

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that is why the Scriptures said, “For this my son was *dead*, and is *alive again*” (Lk. 15:24). To say that he was “alive again” means he is relationally alive to the Father for the second time.

Dr. Emmons said, “Nor can we suppose that Adam made men sinners by conveying to them a morally corrupt nature. Moral corruption is essentially different from natural corruption. The latter belongs to the body, but the former belongs to the mind. Adam undoubtedly conveyed to his posterity a corrupt body, or a body subject to wounds, bruises and putrefying sores. But such a body could not corrupt the mind, or render it morally depraved. There is no morally corrupt nature distinct from free, voluntary, sinful exercises. Adam had no such nature, and consequently could convey no such nature to his posterity.

But even supposing he had a morally corrupt nature, distinct from his free, voluntary, sinful exercises, it must have belonged to his soul, and not to his body. And if it belonged to his soul, he could not convey it to his posterity, who derive their souls immediately from the fountain of being. God is the father of our spirits. The soul is not transmitted from father to son by natural generation. The soul is spiritual; and what is spiritual is indivisible, is incapable of propagation. Adam could not convey any part of his soul to his next immediate offspring, without conveying the whole. It is, therefore, as contrary to reason as to Scripture, to suppose that Adam’s posterity derived their souls from him. And if they did not derive their souls from him, they could not derive from him a morally corrupt nature, if he really possessed such a nature himself.”²¹

Paris Reidhead said, “Are people in trouble spiritually because they inherit some spiritual defect from their parents or grandparents? No. They are in trouble because when they reach the age of accountability they

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deliberately turn their own way - they commit their will to the principle and practice of pleasing themselves as the end of their being. That is sin.”²²

He also said, "Now remember, sin is a crime. It is the committal of the will to the principle and practice of governing one's life to please one's self. In other words, when the Scripture says, 'all have sinned,' it is saying that upon reaching the age of accountability, every individual has chosen to govern and control his life to please himself... We know that upon reaching the age of accountability, each of us chose as the principle by which we would live: 'I am going to govern and control my own life.'"²³

Clement of Alexandria said about sinners and their relationship with God, “their estrangement is the result of free choice.”²⁴

Personal Salvation for Personal Sins

At the age of accountability, when our conscience was developed or our moral constitution reached the point where we could be held accountable, we all chose to sin and separate ourselves from God. The very basis of our guilt is the fact that we have the natural ability to obey God (*free will*), and a natural knowledge or influence to obey God (*conscience*), and we have chosen to sin anyways. Without free will and conscience being elements of man's nature, man could not be accountable for his actions at all. The faculties of free will and conscience are essential to moral agency; and consequently, they are necessary for any being to be subject to moral government.

The fact that mankind has a nature that includes free will and conscience does not mean that mankind is not sinful, but is actually the precondition for man to even be sinful at all. That is because a being is sinful if they freely choose to do what they know is wrong (Jn. 9:41; Jas. 4:17).

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Men are sinners because they sin when they don't have to, knowing that it is wrong but doing it anyways.

The very reason that men need God's grace and mercy through the atonement of Jesus Christ is because sin is their own fault, since they have been sinners by choice. A sinner deserves punishment for his sin because his sin is the product or fruit of his own will, a choice which he has freely made, which he was free not to make. Since a sinner deserves punishment for freely choosing to sin, when he was free not to sin, this is the very reason that He needs God's grace and mercy through Jesus Christ.

We need the atonement of Jesus Christ because of our choices.

If a man was born a sinner, or was a sinner by necessity of his nature, then his sinful condition would not be his own fault; and consequently, he could not deserve punishment for it. Therefore, he wouldn't need God's grace and mercy through the atonement of Jesus Christ. If a man is a sinner by no fault or choice of his own, then he deserves no condemnation; and consequently, he needs no Savior.

We don't need the atonement of Jesus Christ because of our birth. We need the atonement of Jesus Christ because of our choices. It is true that infants are subjected to physical death because of Adam's sin; and therefore, they need the resurrection that comes through Jesus (1 Cor. 15:21-22). But infants are morally innocent because they have not yet sinned (Rom. 9:11). Therefore, they are in no danger of damnation. Jesus did not die to save babies from hell, because babies are not in any danger of hell. Jesus said that only the sick need a doctor (Lk. 5:31). It is only sinners that need a Savior. Once a man chooses to be a sinner, they are in danger of damnation and are in need of salvation.

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We don't need the atonement of Jesus Christ because of our ancestors. We need the atonement of Jesus Christ for our own sin. We need His atonement for our own personal rebellion. The Bible says, "JESUS: for he shall *save* his people from *their sins*" (Mat. 1:21). And it says, "All *we* like sheep have gone astray; *we* have turned every one to *his* own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all" (Isa. 53:6).

Our need for salvation or our necessity for the atonement is because of our own free choices, not because of our involuntary birth. We do not need the atonement for merely existing. We need the atonement because of what we have done with our existence. We need a Savior, not for merely being born, but for being rebellious. It is not sinful to merely exist, or to be born, but it is sinful to make choices which are contrary to the law of God. Therefore, men are not in danger of hell for merely existing or for merely being born. And they do not need forgiveness in Christ for merely existing or for being born. But men are in danger of hell for making sinful choices; and therefore, they need the forgiveness that is in Christ for their own sins.

Lawful vs. Unlawful Gratification

While it is true that our natural influence is for virtue *as far as our conscience* is concerned, but our natural influence is for self-gratification, *as far as our flesh* is concerned. Our flesh doesn't care if we gratify it naturally or unnaturally, lawfully or unlawfully, it just wants to be gratified. The reason many think that we have a "natural tendency towards sin," is because they are thinking of our flesh. But our flesh doesn't want "sin" as if "sin" was the end in mind or object sought. The flesh wants gratification, whether it comes through sin or through lawful means.

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We have a constitutional, natural, God given desire for gratification. The flesh and mind that God has given us has natural desires that can be gratified through natural and lawful means. God designed our body and mind to be gratified through natural and lawful means. Sin is the choice of the will to gratify these natural desires through unnatural and unlawful means.

F. Lagard Smith said, "We have a nature that is capable of being perverted from legitimate to illegitimate, from the natural to the unnatural, from the pure to the polluted."²⁵ He also said that sin is to "pervert... natural,

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lawful means.

legitimate, human desires."²⁶ Augustine even said, "Evil is making a bad use of a good thing."²⁷ Tertullian said that the person who chooses to sin chooses to "make a bad use of his created constitution."²⁸ Paris Reidhead said, "sin is the decision to gratify a good appetite in a bad way."²⁹

A perfect example of this is the narrative of Eve's temptation and sin. We are told that she was tempted, not because she had a sinful nature, but because she had natural God given desires which the devil tempted her to gratify through forbidden means. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (Gen. 3:6).

The narrative of Jesus' temptation in the desert also shows the devil appealing to the natural desires that Jesus' human body had (Luke 4:3). Eve and Jesus had natural desires, which were good in themselves, but the devil used them as the occasion for their temptation. These desires were

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not in and of themselves sinful, since they were given to them by God.

The Bible says, “But every man is *tempted*, when he is drawn away of *his own lust*, and is enticed. Then when lust hath *conceived*, it bringeth forth *sin*: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:14-15). The “lust” is only a source through which we are tempted, but when it is conceived, it then becomes sin. Evidently, there is a type of lust which is not sin, but is rather the source through which we are tempted. The desires of the body serve as a temptation upon our will when the suggestion is brought to our mind to gratify these desires in an unlawful way. Until our will yields to these suggestions and we seek to gratify our desires in an unlawful way, we have not yet committed sin.

The desires of the flesh do not necessitate our will, because a person has the power and ability to “deny himself” (Mk. 8:34). And the desires of the body are not in and of themselves sinful. Temptation is not sin, neither is sin physical. Moral qualities belong to states of the will, not to states of our body. God has given us our flesh for us to possess it, but not so that our flesh would possess us. We must not be controlled by our flesh, but we must be in control of our flesh. Our flesh was meant to be our servant, not our master (1 Cor. 9:27).

Our flesh has its proper God-given place, but we must choose to control it and use it the way God intended. The devil will tempt men to gratify the natural desires of our flesh in an unnatural and unlawful way. This is why we must choose to keep our body under subjection (1 Cor. 9:27), and choose to deny ourselves (Lk. 9:23). As Paul said, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). Our flesh wants us to be self-indulgent

Our flesh
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and practice self-gratification, but the Spirit tells us to practice self-control and self-denial, choosing to put our flesh in its proper place and make a legitimate use of it. Our flesh has its proper function and its desires have a natural and lawful way of being gratified. But sin is to misuse our flesh and gratify its desires unnaturally and unlawfully outside of its intended purpose and legitimate boundaries.

Michael Pearl said, "The root of all sin is founded in runaway indulgence of God-given desires... Drives which are not in themselves evil, nonetheless, form the seedbed on which sin will assuredly grow... As the body of flesh was the medium of Eve's sin and of Christ's temptation, so it is the implement of your child's development into selfishness – which, at maturity, will constitute sinfulness."³⁰

Rev. E. W. Cook explained the difference between the occasion of sin and the cause of sin. He said, "the occasion of gluttony is the natural appetite for food; but because that between this occasion and the gluttony there come in the free moral, and responsible being, under obligation to keep all his inclinations in due subordination to the higher dictates of reason and judgment therefore does he himself become the efficient cause of the sinful gluttony. For the occasion he is in no way responsible, while he shoulders the entire burden of responsibility for the sinful gluttony."³¹

Charles Finney said, "All the constitutional appetites and propensities of body and mind, are in themselves innocent; but when strongly excited are a powerful temptation to prohibited indulgence. To these constitutional appetites or propensities, so many appeals of temptation are made, as universally to lead human beings to sin. Adam was created in the perfection of manhood, certainly not with a sinful nature, and yet, an appeal to his innocent constitutional appetites led him into sin."³²

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He also said, “The bodily appetites and tendencies of body and mind, when strongly excited, become the occasions of sin. So it was with Adam. No one will say that Adam had a sinful nature. But he had, by his constitution, an appetite for food and a desire for knowledge. These were not sinful but were as God made them. They were necessary to fit him to live in this world as a subject of God’s moral government. But being strongly excited led to indulgence, and thus became the occasions of his sinning against God. These tendencies were innocent in themselves, but he yielded to them in a sinful manner, and that was his sin.”³³

Sin is an illegitimate use of our body and mind. Sin is an illegitimate gratification of a legitimate desire. An example would be our sexual desires. The attraction between the sexes is a “natural attraction.” It is normal and natural and is not in and of itself wrong. God creates us and God has given us our sex drive. These desires are God given. He programmed them in us and designed us to have them. And everything God creates is good (Gen. 1:31).

Sin is an illegitimate use of our body and mind.

Paris Reidhead said, "When God made us He gave us many different appetites... But God looked at the being He made and to whom He had given all these appetites and urges and said, 'It is good!'"³⁴

God intended for man to populate the world. God told Adam and Eve to “be fruitful and multiple” (Gen. 1:22, 28). Sex, with all of its physical passions, was God’s idea. God designed our human bodies for the physical union between a male and a female. Sexual desire is natural and normal and is part of God’s intelligent design, as the devil certainly did not design our bodies!

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Augustinianism, in accordance with Gnosticism, believes that our flesh is sinful. More specifically, Augustinianism says that the physical passion or the “concupiscence” of the flesh is a curse of the fall of Adam, that all physical passion in sex is sinful, that all are born sinful on account of being born out of that physical passion, and that all are born sinful because they involuntarily inherit physical passion.

Augustine said, "Sensual lust belongs to the nature of brutes; but is a punishment in man."³⁵ He said sexual desire was “a disease—a wound inflicted on nature through the treacherous counsel given by the devil—a vice of nature—a deformity—an evil that comes from the depravity of our nature which is vitiated by sin.”³⁶ He taught that no man was born sinless, because, "No man is now born without concupiscence."³⁷ And he taught that Christ alone was born sinless because Christ alone was born without sex, being born of a virgin.

Augustine was rightly accused by Julian of Eclanum of teaching, “sexual impulse and the intercourse of married people were devised by the devil, and that therefore those who are born innocent are guilty, and that it is the work of the devil, not of God, that they are born of this diabolical intercourse. And this, without any ambiguity, is Manichaeism.”³⁸

Dennis Carroll said, “Manichaeans also taught that sexual intercourse was satanic. Augustine taught that through sexual intercourse we pass on evil or sinfulness to our children. So I see these significant parallels between these two systems.”³⁹

Julian of Eclanum refuted this error of Gnosticism in Augustine’s theology by saying, “the sexual impulse—that is, that the virility itself, without which there can be no intercourse—is ordained by God.”⁴⁰

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While Adam and Eve realized that they were naked after they sinned (Gen. 3:7), that does not mean as Augustine thought, that they did not have any physical attraction one for another before they sinned. It simply means that in their former state of ignorance, their nakedness did not have any moral connotations like it did now (Gen. 2:25). With their eyes opened, they had moral principles developed in their minds which were not previously there, thus they felt it necessary to cover their bodies, not because they did not previously have physical attractions or passions, but because they did not previously view these attractions and passions in any moral light.

Adam and Eve were physically designed for each other at their creation and were intended to multiply themselves through physical intercourse before they sinned (Gen. 1:22, 28). God actually designed men and women for each other. Physical attraction is by God's design and is therefore not sinful in and of itself. If a man and a woman commit themselves to each other through marriage, and engage in a normal sexual relationship with each other within that marriage, they are naturally and lawfully satisfying or fulfilling their God-given desires. As the Bible says, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4).

Physical attraction is by God's design and is therefore not sinful.

Natural attraction is a normal state of the flesh and is not sinful, but lust in the sinful sense is a state of the will. It is a sin to intentionally look at a woman, whom you are not married to, lustfully (Matt. 5:28). But there is no sin in marital sex or in the fleshly passions which are involved, so long as these desires are fulfilled lawfully and naturally. Sin is not the choice to gratify some type of sinful nature, but

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sin, like sexual immorality, is choosing to fulfill natural desires in an unnatural and unlawful way.

I once called into a Calvinist radio show that was promoting the hereditary sinfulness of babies. The topic of the show was original sin, total depravity, and sinful nature. I asked the host, "Is human nature sinful?" He said, "Yes." I asked, "Is homosexuality a sin?" He said, "Yes." I asked, "Is homosexuality human nature?" He said, "No!" I then asked, "How can there be a sin which is contrary to our sinful nature?" He was silent. He didn't know how to answer that question. If human nature is sinful, and homosexuality is a sin, how can homosexuality be against human nature? A sin which is against a sinful nature? This doesn't make any sense.

The truth is that when a person engages in any form of sexual immorality, such as fornication, homosexuality, or sodomy, they are choosing contrary to God's intention and contrary to the design of our constitution. These sins are against our nature because they are contrary to our design. They are a perversion of our design. Through these sins men are trying to satisfy or fulfill their God given sexual desires in an unnatural, unlawful, and selfish manner.

The Bible says that fornication is a sin against our body (1 Cor. 6:18), that homosexuality is against nature or against the natural use of the body (Rom. 1:26-27) and that sodomy is an abuse of our flesh (1 Cor. 6:9). Men are not fornicators or homosexuals by birth or by design. Men are sinners by choice. Our will is free to choose to gratify our flesh lawfully or unlawfully, naturally or unnaturally. The natural desires of our flesh become the occasions of sin.

While many sins are motivated by the desire to gratify the physical aspects of our constitution, other sins are motivated by a desire to gratify the mental aspects of our constitution. Sinners are "fulfilling the desires of the flesh

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and of the mind...” (Eph. 2:3). While the “lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes” have to do with the physical aspects of our constitution, the “pride of life” relates to the mental aspects of our constitution (1 Jn. 2:16). Sinners try to gratify themselves by pursuing physical and mental satisfaction. Eve was tempted to gratify her desire for food, which was a physical desire, and to gratify her desire for knowledge, which was a mental desire (Gen. 3:6).

While God wants us to be happy and satisfied, He has given natural and lawful means for this. The problem is when a person selfishly establishes their own happiness as the supreme pursuit of their life, when they ought to be benevolent and live supremely for the happiness of God and equally for the happiness of their neighbor (Lk. 10:27).

The fact that our nature, or our body and mind, is susceptible to temptation, does not mean that we have a “sinful nature,” a “sinful flesh,” or a “sinful body.” We must distinguish between sin and temptation. The desires of the body and mind are the occasions of temptation (Jas. 1:14-15), but sin itself is a choice of the will (Jn. 5:14; 8:11; Rom. 6:12; 6:19; Eph. 4:26; 1 Jn. 3:4).

Charles Finney said, “...the appetites and passions tend so strongly to self-indulgence. These are temptations to sin, but sin itself consists not in these appetites and propensities, but in the voluntary committal of the will to their indulgence. This committal of the will is selfishness.”⁴¹

An example of how sin is contrary to the design of our constitution, or how sin is an abuse and misuse of our body and mind, is the sin of drunkenness. Drunkenness is an unnatural state of body and mind. Sobriety is a natural state. Drunkenness is an “induced” state. Liquor and beer require an “acquired taste.” Our body naturally rejects alcohol when the body becomes inebriated or intoxicated. Our body rebels by reacting with vomiting and headaches. This shows that

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the sin of drunkenness is contrary to our nature or that it is contrary to our design. Drunkenness is contrary to the proper function of our flesh. We have to corrupt our body to enjoy cigarettes or to crave alcohol. Our bodies do not naturally have those enjoyments or cravings. It is through choice that we corrupt our flesh, degenerate our nature, or pervert our body to enjoy and crave these things.

These unnatural desires of the flesh do not, in and of themselves, constitute sin. Drug babies for example cannot be considered “sinful” just because they inherit a flesh that has these unnatural cravings. A person is not a sinner because of the involuntary cravings and physical desires that they inherit, but because of the moral choices that they make. Sin or sinfulness does not consist in the states of the body or in the states of the sensibilities. All moral character consists in the states of the will. A drug addict could decide to no longer abuse mind altering substances and their flesh goes through withdrawals. If a person’s body craves drugs, but they choose not to gratify these cravings, then they are experiencing temptation but are not sinning.

Charles Finney said, “If these feelings are not suffered to influence the will... if such feelings are not cherished, and are not suffered to shake the integrity of the will; they are not sin. That is, the will does not give in to them, but the contrary. They are only temptations. If they are allowed to control the will, to break forth in words and actions, then there is sin; but the sin does not consist in the feelings, but in the consent of the will, to gratify them.”⁴²

Paris Reidhead said, “Now temptation is not sin. Temptation is the proposition presented to the mind that you can satisfy a good appetite in a forbidden way. Temptation leads to sin.... Sin is the decision of the will.... sin is the decision to gratify a good appetite in a bad way.”⁴³

Even Augustine at one time said, “Nobody can help

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what comes into his mind; but to consent or to dissent from involuntary suggestions, is the prerogative of our own will.”⁴⁴ And he said, "Whatever may determine the will, if it cannot be resisted, is complied with without sin; but if one can resist it, let him not comply with it and it will not be sin.”⁴⁵

Winkie Pratney said, “Don’t mistake temptation for sin. Temptation is a suggestion to gratify a desire in an illegal way or amount. Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted.”⁴⁶

Our Flesh Is Not Sinful

We cannot say that our flesh is “sinful” or that we have a “sinful nature” just because our flesh or nature is susceptible to temptation. It is not sinful to be tempted. Jesus was “tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Therefore, temptation is not sin.

Sinfulness is violation of God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4). God’s law tells us what type of choices we should and shouldn’t make (Exo. 20:3-17), not what type of body or nature we should or shouldn’t have. Therefore, choices can be sinful, but a body or a nature cannot be.

Our flesh is just dirt (Gen. 2:7, Gen. 3:19). Clearly then, our flesh cannot be sinful. You cannot have sinful dirt. Dirt does not have any moral qualities in and of itself. Dirt is physical. Dirt does not violate any commandment at all. There is no commandment that says, “Thou shalt not be made out of dirt.” Such a command would not even be a proper command, because a command is supposed to be a requirement as to what type of choice you should and shouldn’t make. What you are made out of is not a choice

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that you are free to make. Therefore, you cannot be properly commanded to be made out of a certain substance, and consequently, your substance cannot be sinful because it is not a violation of any moral obligation.

Our moral character cannot consist in our composition or in our body because we do not choose what type of body we have (Matt. 5:36; 6:27). Even if there was such a commandment that forbade being composed of a certain type of substance, our violation of that command would not be our fault but God's fault, since it was God who made us out of dirt (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 27:11; 43:1; 43:7; 44:2; 44:24; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 26:10; 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Ecc. 7:29; 31:15; 35:10; Mal. 2:10; Lk. 11:40; Jn. 1:3; Rom. 9:20; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16).

If our flesh is sinful, this sinfulness is not our fault but God's fault because God is the one who creates us with flesh. The Bible says, "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about... thou hast made me as the clay... *Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews*" (Job 10:8-11).

God is the creator of our composition and constitution. God is Holy and doesn't want us to be sinful. He certainly would not create us out of some type of sinful substance. Otherwise Job would be blaming God for his sinful condition by saying to Him, "Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together sinfully. Thou hast made me of sin. Thou hast clothed me with sinful substance and fenced me with an evil constitution." Job would be saying that men are sinful, not for choosing to break God's law, but for being created by God Himself!

To even apply the word "sinful" to an involuntary substance of our composition, or to our overall constitution itself, is to assign a moral quality to an involuntary state,

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which is an intrinsic contradiction. Moral qualities can only be predicated upon voluntary states of being, or else such qualities cannot truly be considered moral. Moral qualities are not inherent in matter itself, so it is impossible to be created out of a sinful substance.

Some modern translations of the Bible, like the New International Version, will translate the word “flesh” and other such words into the phrase “sinful nature,” thus applying moral qualities to our composition and constitution, which are involuntary on our part because they are not caused by our own will. But to translate the word “flesh” into “sinful nature” is a completely arbitrary translation, since the actual Greek word for sin and the Greek word for nature is not used in the original text at all in these passages. And out of all the possible meanings of the Greek word “sarx” which is used, the phrase “sinful nature” is not one of them.

The Greek word for "sinful" is "hamartolos" and the Greek word for "nature" is "phusis." These two Greek words are not found anyone in the entire Bible next to each other or side by side in order to make the term "sinful nature." The single word "sarx" which means "flesh" is what is mistakenly and inconsistently translated as "sinful nature," but this is really a false *interpretation* and not an accurate *translation*. The term “sinful nature” is not a term found anywhere in the Greek New Testament at all. The versions which translate words into “sinful nature” are practicing eisegesis not exegesis, which means that they are trying to fit their theology into the Bible, rather than deriving their theology from the Bible.

The fact that their translation is arbitrary is shown by the fact that they translate “sarx” or “flesh” into “sinful nature” all throughout their version, but when the very same word in the Greek is used to describe Jesus Christ, they do

not translate it as “sinful nature.” This is their happy inconsistency. If they were consistent in their interpretation, the Bible would state, “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the *sinful nature* is not of God...” (1 Jn. 4:3). And also, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the *sinful nature*” (2 Jn. 1:7). “God was manifest in the sinful nature” (1 Tim. 3:16). These verses are perfect reasons why the word flesh does not mean sinful nature and should never be translated as such.

Flesh is not sinful in and of itself, but it can be used sinfully.

Flesh is not sinful in and of itself, but it can be used sinfully. It is sinful to selfishly live after the flesh (Rom. 8:13), or to be living to gratify our flesh (Rom. 8:7). But it is not sinful to simply have a flesh. The moral law of God does not forbid that we have flesh, but it does forbid selfishness. That is why it is sinful to live after the flesh, but not sinful to simply have flesh.

We know with absolute certainty that it is not sinful to have a flesh because Jesus Christ was sinless (2 Cor. 5:21) and yet He had a flesh (Lk. 24:39, Jn. 1:14, Rom. 1:3; 9:5; Heb. 2:14; 5:7; 1 Tim. 3:16, 1 Pet. 3:18; 4:1 1 Jn. 4:3, 2 Jn. 1:7). Jesus said, “...for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Lk. 24:39). “And the Word was made flesh” (Jn. 1:14). “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same” (Heb. 2:14). “God was manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). “Forasmuch than as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh” (1 Pet. 4:1). “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world” (1 Jn. 4:3). “For many deceivers are

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entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 Jn. 1:7). Since Jesus Christ was sinless, and yet He had the same type of human flesh that we have, we can logically conclude from this that our human flesh is not intrinsically evil or inherently sinful.

Some have supposed that the virgin birth was necessary in order for Jesus to avoid the inheritance of a “sinful nature.” However, the Scriptures nowhere state that Jesus was born of a virgin to avoid the inheritance of some type of sinful substance. Rather, the Bible says that He was born of a virgin because His Father was God. “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: *therefore* also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called *the Son of God*” (Lk. 1:35).

Though Jesus was born of a virgin and His Father was God, Jesus did not have a different type of flesh from the rest of us. He had the same type of flesh that we have. Jesus was not made physically perfect until the third day when He was raised with a glorified body (Lk. 13:32; Heb. 5:9). If Jesus was born with a glorified flesh, or if He did not take upon Himself a physically depraved flesh like we have, which was subjected to death, He could not have tasted death for every man; and therefore, could not have made atonement at all. It was necessary for Christ to be made with the same type of physically depraved body that we have, so that He could be capable of physical death.

The Bible says, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels *for the suffering of death*, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should *taste death* for every man... For as much as *the children are partakers of flesh and blood*, he also himself likewise *took part of the same*: that *through death* he might destroy

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him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.... For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but *he took on him the seed of Abraham*. Wherefore *in all things* it behoved him to be made *like unto his brethren...*" (Heb. 2:9, 14, 16-17).

Consider the syllogisms which can be drawn from this text:

- Jesus was made in all things like us.
- Jesus was not made sinful.
- Therefore, we are not made sinful.

- Jesus was made a partaker of flesh and blood.
- Jesus was entirely sinless.
- Therefore, flesh and blood are not sinful.

- Jesus had the same type of flesh that we have.
- Jesus was not sinful in anyway.
- Therefore, our flesh is not sinful.

If Jesus was made "in all things" like we are made, we can conclude that he "took part of" the same type of physical substance that we took part of. In this way Jesus was made "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*" (Rom. 8:3), which doesn't mean that physical flesh is sinful, but means that Jesus was "*made in the likeness of men*" (Php. 2:7). The word "flesh" is sometimes used synonymous with men (Gen. 6:12; Matt. 16:17; Gal. 1:16).

Jesus was made in the likeness of men, in that he had the same human nature and flesh that we all have, but unlike all other men, he never chose to sin. The Bible tells us that Jesus was morally perfect (2 Cor. 5:21), even before He had a glorified, resurrected, or perfect body. He was morally perfect even while he had a physically imperfect body which

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was subjected to death (Lk. 13:32; Heb. 2:14). That is because sin is not a substance or state of the body, but is a choice of the will.

The command to “put away evil” (Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 22:22, 24; 24:7; Jdg. 20:13; Ecc. 11:10; Isa. 1:16), implies that evil is a choice of our will and not a substance of our nature. The command to “cease to do evil” (Isa. 1:16), and to “sin no more” (Jn. 8:11), implies that all sin is volitional. It implies that sin is not some involuntary substance dwelling inside of you which you cannot get rid of. Therefore, you don’t need a new body or a new substance to be free from sin.

You can have a pure and perfect heart or be morally perfect in this life, even while you have a fallen and corrupted body or are physically imperfect. This is evident since the Bible described certain men as being perfect in heart in this life, even while existing in their corrupted, depraved, or fallen flesh (1 Kin. 6:61; 11:4; 15:3; 15:14; 20:3; 1 Chron. 12:38; 28:9; 29:9; 29:19; 15:17; 16:9; 19:9; 25:2; Job 1:1, 8; Ps. 102:1; Isa. 38:3). “And the Lord said unto Satan, hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? (Job 1:8). “Remember now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight” (Isa. 38:3).

Sin is not a substance or state of the body, but is a choice of the will.

Clearly, you can be morally perfect, or completely obedient to God, even while you’re physically depraved. Your heart can be right with God, in obeying all the moral knowledge that you have, even while your body does not sustain perfect health. Though your flesh is corrupt, your moral character does not have to be. Your will can obey all

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the moral knowledge of your mind, thus creating a perfect moral character, even while your body or flesh is fallen and depraved, or even while you are physically imperfect.

The distinction between the moral and the physical must be kept in our minds. We must differentiate between *moral depravity* (Rom. 3:23), and *physical depravity* (1 Cor. 15:22-23). And we must distinguish between *moral perfection* (1 Kin. 8:61; Php. 3:15), and *physical perfection* (1 Cor. 15:42; Php. 3:11-12).

For example, Paul said, “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised *incorruptible*, and we shall be *changed*” (1 Cor. 15:52). Paul was not saying that our moral character would be changed, but that our body would be changed. He said, “For this *corruptible* must put on *incorruption*, and this *mortal* must put on *immortality*. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that it is written, *death* is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:53-54). Paul was not talking about being made morally perfect, but physically perfect. He was not saying that we become morally incorruptible, as if we lose our free will in Heaven, but that we become physically incorruptible, since we lose our fallen body in the resurrection. The bodies that we have which are subjected to death will be taken away, so that death is swallowed up and gone.

Another example of the distinction between physical and moral perfection is when Paul said, “...not as though I had already *attained*, either were already *perfect*” (Php. 3:12). When Paul said he had not yet attained perfection, he was talking about being free from physical corruption and attaining physical perfection. This is obvious since He said in the verse right before, “If by any means I might *attain*

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unto the resurrection of the dead” (Php. 3:11). The context of verse eleven gives clarity to the meaning of verse twelve. Paul was saying that he had not yet attained physical perfection because he had not yet attained a glorified body.

Paul was not saying that he was sinful and had not yet been made free from sin, since Paul already said that Christians have been made “free from sin” (Rom. 6:18, 22), and that he had a “conscience void of offense” (Acts 24:16; see also Acts 23:1; 2 Tim. 1:3). Paul was certainly not saying that moral perfection is unattainable in this life, as many misunderstand him to be saying, since only two verses down he said, “Let us therefore, *as many as be perfect*, be thus minded” (Php. 3:15).

Clearly, Paul was writing about two different types of perfection. One type of perfection Paul said he had attained and one type of perfection which he said he had not yet attained. Paul was making a clear distinction between physical perfection and moral perfection and stated that the former is only attainable in the next life while the latter is attainable in this life. Moral perfection is attainable in this life while we are still in our flesh, since our flesh is not sinful in and of itself, and our flesh does not necessitate our choices, but we are free to live after it or to choose not to (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 9:27).

Jesus Christ made a distinction between moral perfection and physical perfection when He said, “and the third day I shall be perfected” (Lk. 13:32). Jesus Christ was morally perfect or sinless His entire life because he “knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), but He was not born or created physically perfect. He had the same depraved flesh that we have. Jesus lived a sinless life without a glorified flesh, while he inhabited a corrupted flesh! He was born with a physically depraved body that was subjected to suffering and death and it was not until He was resurrected on the third day

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that He received a glorified body; and therefore, became physically perfect.

The physical and the moral must always be properly distinguished or differentiated between, because what is physical relates to the flesh, but what is moral relates to the will. The former relates to the quality of our substance, while the latter relates to the quality of our heart or motive. Moral states cannot be inherited but what is physical is hereditary. As Jesus taught, “that which is born of flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6). Diseases and death is physical and has to do with our flesh, but sin is moral and has to do with our will. That is why diseases and death can be transmitted and propagated through semen or sperm, but sin cannot be transmitted or propagated through natural reproduction.

Julian of Eclanum said, “...death passed to us by Adam, not sins.”⁴⁷ And he said, “...all sin descends not from nature, but from the will.”⁴⁸ Alfred T. Overstreet said, “...sin is not a substance. It has absolutely no material or physical properties. Sin is an act, and so it is impossible for it to be passed on physically... A child has no moral character at birth...”⁴⁹

Moral character cannot be inherited or transmitted for the same reason that moral character cannot be borrowed or lent out. You cannot inherit the moral character of another person anymore than you can lend your moral character to somebody else. Moral character is not transferable. Moral character is not a “thing” that has any material existence. Moral character is immaterial. It is moral, not physical. A person is either sinful or holy based upon their personal choice and individual intention of their heart, not based upon the quality of their composition or the state of their constitution. Therefore, moral character cannot be bought and sold or be transmitted, transferred, or inherited from one person to another.

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While we do inherit physical depravity, or a body of flesh that is subjected to death (Gen. 3:22; 1 Cor. 15:22), we do not inherit moral depravity (Eze. 18:19-22). Moral depravity is our own fault. Moral depravity is a state of sinfulness, and sin is a personal choice of the will. Moral character is not hereditary through our nature but is originated through our will. Righteous parents do not give birth to righteous children and sinful parents do not give birth to sinful children. A righteous moral character, or a sinful moral character, requires personal choice. A man is the author of his own character. Moral character cannot be “transmitted through natural generation” or inherited by posterity.

Therefore, infants are not born righteous or sinful but are born morally innocent. The Bible repeatedly describes infants being “innocent” (2 Kng. 21:16; 24:4; Jer. 13:26-27; Ps. 106:37-38; Matt. 18:3). For example, when Israel would sacrifice their babies to false gods, God said that they were shedding “innocent blood.” Evidently, God views infants as morally innocent. If words have any real meaning or definition, or if the inspired writer meant what he wrote, God was literally calling infants “blameless,” “clean,” and “guiltless,” when He said that they were “innocent.”⁵⁰ That is what the Hebrew word literally means.

Infants are innocent because they are not yet sinful or guilty. You cannot be sinful before you commit sin or be guilty before you commit a crime. Infants don’t yet have any moral character at all because they haven’t yet “done anything” morally “good or evil” (Rom. 9:11). Moral knowledge plus moral choices equals moral character. Those who are not yet moral agents cannot possibly have moral character. To apply the words “sinful” or “sinner” to those

Infants are not born righteous or sinful but are morally innocent.

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who don't even know right from wrong, and who haven't yet made any moral choices, is to empty these words of any meaning at all. No one can be "sinful" or a "sinner" if they don't even know what sin is or if they haven't yet committed any sins.

Consider these truths in logical syllogisms:

- Moral character is determined by moral choices.
- Infants have not yet made any moral choices.
- Therefore, infants cannot have a righteous or sinful moral character.

- Without possessing moral knowledge, a person cannot possess any moral character, either good or evil.
- Infants are without moral knowledge.
- Therefore, infants cannot have moral character, either good or evil.

- Without moral knowledge and without moral choices, a person cannot yet be guilty of doing anything wrong but are necessarily innocent.
- Infants are without moral knowledge and without moral choices.
- Therefore, infants are not guilty of anything wrong but are necessarily morally innocent.

These Biblical truths are at an antithesis to the teaching of John Calvin who said, "we all sinned before we were born..."⁵¹ He also said, "Even before we see the light of day, we are in God's sight impure and sinful..."⁵² And he said, "infants themselves, as they bring their condemnation into the world with them, are rendered obnoxious to punishment by their own sinfulness..."⁵³

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Calvin held to the notion that infants sinned in Adam, and by participating in his sin by existing as his semen in his loins, they were personally sinful, guilty, and hell deserving. This particular moral philosophy would make us guilty of all the sins of all our ancestors, since we descend from all of them or existed seminally in them all. It would also mean that we participated in the righteousness of Noah and are under God's favor on account of that, since we all descend from him and were in his loins when he obeyed God. And this moral philosophy would make even Christ sinful and guilty, since He too was a descendent of Adam as we shall soon see.

But the whole notion of being guilty and liable to punishment for a sin that occurred without your knowledge and without your consent is nonsense and injustice. It is impossible to sin before you are born because sin requires moral knowledge and personal choice. It is impossible, under the justice of God's moral government, to be born condemned, because condemnation requires personal sin, and personal sin requires moral knowledge and personal choice.

When the Bible says "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 5:12), this is not without qualification. This description is obviously limited to those who are capable of sinning. It is self-evident that those who are not capable of sinning cannot be included in "all have sinned." Those who don't yet exist, those who don't know right from wrong yet, and those who haven't yet made any moral choices, are without the qualifying boundaries of the description of the "all" that have "sinned."

The "all" that have "sinned" are those who have reached the age of accountability. The Bible explicitly says that infants in the womb haven't yet sinned (Rom. 9:11). But the Bible say's man's heart is evil *from their youth* (Gen.

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8:21; Jer. 22:21; 32:30). It doesn't say that men are evil before they are born or before the age of accountability. The Hebrew word "youth" means "childhood," "juvenility,"⁵⁴ and "early life."⁵⁵ So when it says men are evil from their youth, it does not mean evil from their birth but evil from a young age, particularly the age of accountability, which is a state when moral principle is developed in the mind.

Under the moral government of God, moral accountability is according to the moral knowledge that a moral being possesses. Jesus taught this just principle of God's divine administration when He said, "Very I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:15). Sodom and Gomorrah never heard the gospel, so they will receive less punishment than those cities which have heard the gospel and have rejected it. Since Sodom and Gomorrah never heard the gospel, they are not going to be accountable to the truth of the gospel. However, those who have heard the gospel are obligated to obey it. Each person's obligation and accountability is proportionate to each person's knowledge. "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Lk. 12:48). Much is required from those who have much, and little is required from those who have little. Just as obligation and accountability is proportionate to ability, obligation and accountability is proportionate to knowledge.

Consider these logical and Scriptural syllogisms:

- The reason that men are "*without excuse*" for their actions is because they have knowledge (Rom. 1:20).
- Infants are ignorant or without moral knowledge (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16).
- Therefore, infants have an excuse for their actions.

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- The wrath of God is against men because they “hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).
- Infants are ignorant or without moral knowledge (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16).
- Therefore, the wrath of God is not against infants.

- Those who are under “condemnation” are those to whom the “light is come” and have “loved darkness rather than light” (Jn. 3:19).
- Infants cannot choose falsehood over truth because they are ignorant and without moral knowledge (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16).
- Therefore, infants are not under condemnation.

John Wesley said, "Nothing is sin, strictly speaking, but a voluntary transgression of a known law of God."⁵⁶ A. W. Tozer said, "Sin is the voluntary commission of an act known to be contrary to the will of God. Where there is no moral knowledge or where there is no voluntary choice, the act is not sinful; it cannot be, for sin is the transgression of the law and transgression must be voluntary."⁵⁷

Without moral knowledge and moral choices there can be no moral character. It is inconceivable that moral character should exist before there is moral knowledge or moral choice. That is why children remain morally innocent until the age of accountability when they know right from wrong (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16), and they choose to do wrong (Jas. 4:17). The age of accountability is also known as the age of reason. It is when their mind is developed, or specifically when their conscience is developed, so that they know right from wrong. When each person reaches this age, or state, differs from person to person. But those who don't know right from wrong cannot be sinful (Jn. 9:41). Infants do not yet know right from wrong (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16).

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And therefore, infants cannot be sinful according to the Bible.

The idea that infants are born sinful because they are born of flesh is nonsense. Men cannot *choose* what they are made of; and therefore, they cannot be sinful because of what they are made of. Even Augustine at one point recognized, "There can be no sin that is not voluntary, the learned and the ignorant admit this evident truth."⁵⁸ The nature you are born with is all together involuntary; and therefore, the nature that you are born with is completely without any moral character or moral qualities whatsoever. You cannot be sinful or be a sinner merely because of the

Man was created mortal and needed to eat from the tree of life.

nature that you involuntarily inherit at your creation. You cannot hold a man responsible for a nature which he hasn't chosen to have, nor can his involuntary nature be part of his moral character at all. Moral character must always be self-caused or self-chosen if it is going to truly have any moral quality. And for that which a man is responsible for he himself must be the cause of.

While sin or moral character is voluntary and caused by our own will, it is also true that infants, though innocent, do suffer physical death as a natural consequence of Adam's sin (1 Cor. 15:21-22). This is because we do not have access to the tree of life. In order to put a limitation upon sin, God has made it so that man needs to work by the sweat of his brow, thus giving man less idle time to sin (Gen. 3:19), and God has intentionally deprived our flesh from the fruit that sustains life, lest sin live forever (Gen. 3:22).

Man was created mortal and needed to eat from the tree of life to sustain his life. This is why the tree was in the Garden to begin with. If man was created immortal, without need of the tree of life, there was no reason for the tree of life

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to be in the Garden in the first place. But man was told that he could eat from all the fruits in the Garden, including that of the tree of life, except for the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). Man's immortality in the Garden depended upon His continual obedience to God. He could continue to stay in the Garden and continue to eat from the tree of life if He continued to obey God.

Adam's removal from the tree of life has consequently affected us all. If the head of a home loses his job and the means of sustaining his family, his whole family suffers as a natural consequence. It is not that the employer was punishing his entire family, but that his family naturally suffers in consequence of what happened. Adam, as the head of our race, has brought the consequence of physical death to all of us by losing his position in the Garden of Eden where the tree of life was. It is not that God is punishing all of us for Adam's sin, but that we naturally suffer as a consequence of what has happened.

Irenaeus said, "By means of our first parents, we were all brought into bondage by being made subject to death."⁵⁹

Gordon C. Olson said, "The 'tree of life' in the midst of the most pleasant garden where man was invited to dwell must be suggestive of something. I suggest that it may have been the means of keeping man's physical body and soul in vigor and to prevent decay and death. This is suggested also in Gen. 3:24, where man is prevented from taking of the tree of life after the fall. In vs 22, the reason is stated, 'lest he...eat and live forever.'" Not, presumably, that if he had eaten one time from it, he would have lived forever, but lest he keep on eating from it and thus keep on living forever."⁶⁰

Dr. Wiggers said, "Here it is to be remarked that, with the fathers, as Erasmus has suggested, the expression to die or to die in Adam, is synonymous with being driven out

of Paradise, because they who were driven out of Paradise, were no more allowed to eat of the fruit of the tree of life. At least this is the common meaning. For us to have died in Adam, is nothing else than what Methodius, in a fragment in Epiphanius (Haer. 64), thus expresses, ‘We were driven out of Paradise in the first father.’⁶¹

Some have argued for the sinfulness of infants by the fact that infants at times physically die. But the deaths of infants do not mean that they are not innocent, since animals die and they haven’t sinned, and Jesus Christ died and he was innocent. Therefore, infants can be subjected to physical death even though they are innocent. The wages of sin is eternal death, not physical death.

An infant
has no sin
to go to
hell for.

But if an infant dies, he will go to heaven and not hell. That is because an infant has no sin to go to hell for. King David was comforted because of his belief that he will go to see his child one day (2 Sam. 12:22). Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven belonged to little children (Matt. 19:14; Mk. 10:14; Lk. 18:16). Until children develop and

make the conscious choice to violate God’s law, they are morally innocent and do not deserve damnation. Infants are not sinners merely because they are made of flesh or because of the nature they are born with, and no child deserves hell merely because God forms them in the womb, creating and composing them of physical substance.

Sin is a state of the will. Sin is not a state of our flesh, body, substance, constitution, composition, or nature. Charles Finney said, “The fact is, sin never can consist in having a nature, nor in what nature is, but only and alone in the bad use which we make of our nature. This is all. Our Maker will never find fault with us for what He has Himself done or made; certainly not. He will not condemn us, if we

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will only make a right use of our powers – of our intellect, our sensibilities, and our will. He never holds us responsible for our original nature... since there is no law against nature, nature cannot be a transgression... man's nature is not a proper subject for legislation, precept, and penalty, inasmuch as it lies entirely without the pale of voluntary action, or of any action of man at all."⁶²

Finney's logic is sound. Sin is the choice to violate God's law. God's law tells us what type of choices to have, not what type of substance to be made of. Therefore, choices can be sinful but our substance cannot be. Since sin is a choice and not a substance, then men can only be sinful by choice and cannot be sinful by substance.

The law doesn't tell us what type of nature to have, but what type of choices to make. If the law was meant to reveal our wickedness (Rom. 7:7, 13), and our wickedness consists in our nature, why doesn't the law say anything about our nature? The law only talks about our choices. If the law was meant to reveal our sin, and the law only talks about our choices, then our sin must consist solely in our choices. If our sin consists of our nature, but the law talks only about choices and nothing about our nature, then the law would not really reveal our wickedness. The law only reveals our wickedness if our sin is our choice, since God's law only talks about our choices. Clearly, the wickedness of man consists in the state of his will, not in the state of his nature, composition, substance, flesh, body, or constitution.

Sin is not the involuntary state of your nature but the voluntary usage of the faculties of your nature. It is not that man's nature is sinful, but that man can choose to use the nature God gave him sinfully. Thus, man's sinfulness is his own fault, not the fault of his Creator. The faculties of man's nature which God granted can be used for either holiness or sin.

It is very important to this discussion to understand that the Gnostic's taught that the flesh was sinful in and of itself. That is why they denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (1 Jn. 4:3, 2 Jn. 1:7). Gnostics believed that sin is the substance of the body and the Scriptures called them "antichrist." Gnosticism attributes moral qualities to states of matter and believes that our flesh is inherently and intrinsically evil.

It is one thing to say that our flesh can be used for sin and quite another thing altogether to say that our flesh is sin. The Bible says our flesh is an instrument or a tool which we could use for sin or use for righteousness, but not that our flesh is itself a sin. The moral quality of our members is not intrinsic but depends entirely upon how we choose to use them. Whether our flesh is an instrument used for righteousness or whether our flesh is an instrument used for wickedness is a matter of our own free choice.

The
Gnostics
taught that
the flesh
was sinful.

Paul said, "Neither *yield* ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but *yield* yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God" (Rom. 6:13). Paul also said, "for as ye have *yielded* your members servants of uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now *yield* your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (Rom. 6:19).

If your flesh was a sin, Paul was saying that you should not yield your sin as an instrument for sin, but that you should yield your sin as an instrument for righteousness! But that doesn't make any sense! Rather, Paul was saying that sin is not the substance of our body, but we can choose to use our flesh for sin or use our flesh for the service of God.

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To be a servant of sin or to be a servant of righteousness is not a matter of nature, but a matter of choice. Our flesh is not created as a servant of sin or a servant of righteousness, but after we are created, we choose to “yield” our flesh to the service of righteousness or sin. The Bible says, “*Let* not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should *obey* it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12). The words “let” and “obey” indicates the consent and obedience of the will.

Commenting on these passages, Pelagius said, “...sin reigns in the body, namely, by obedience and consent... Every single member is made a weapon of wickedness to defeat righteousness, if it turns its function to bad use. At the same time it should be noted that it is through freedom of choice that a person offers his members for whatever side he wishes.... We present our members to serve sin: it is not the case, as the Manichaeans say, that it was the nature of the body to have sin mixed in.”⁶³

A. W. Tozer said, “It is important that we realize the human body is simply an instrument, because there are those who have taught that Christ could not be God in the flesh because the body is evil and God would not thus come in contact with evil. The false premise there is the belief that the human body is evil. There is no evil within inert matter. There is nothing evil in matter itself. Evil lies in the spirit. Evils of the heart, of the mind, of the soul, of the spirit – these have to do with man’s sin, and the only reason the human body does evil is because the human spirit uses it to do evil.... No, sin does not lie in the human body. There is nothing in the human body that is bad. Sin lies in the will of man and when the man wills to sin, he uses his body as a harmless, helpless instrument to do his evil purpose.”⁶⁴

To counteract the Gnostic idea that matter was intrinsically evil, or that the flesh was in and of itself sinful,

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Paul said that we can choose to sanctify our flesh, to set apart our bodies for the service of God, so that our body can be holy. Paul said, "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your *bodies* a living sacrifice, *holy*, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to *possess his vessel in sanctification and honor*" (1 Thes. 4:3-4). "And the very God of peace sanctify you *wholly*; and I pray God your *whole* spirit and soul *and body* be preserved *blameless* unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:23). "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up *holy hands*, without wrath and doubting" (1 Tim. 2:8).

Paul commanded, "glorify God *in your body*" (1 Cor. 6:20). Paul said that whether we are absent or present in the body we are to be acceptable unto God (2 Cor. 5:9). He also said, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for *the temple is holy*, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

It should be evident from all of these passages that the Scriptures do not support that Gnostic doctrine that the flesh is sinful or that the body is evil, but that it is an instrument which can be used either way, and in the case of the Christian, it is actually holy or sanctified.

On this point it is important to distinguish between sanctification and glorification. The difference between having a glorified flesh and having a sanctified flesh is this: a sanctified flesh has to do with how we morally use our bodies, while a glorified flesh has to do with the physical quality of our bodies themselves. We certainly cannot have a glorified body in this life, but we can have a sanctified body in this life. That means that we cannot have a physically

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perfect body in this world (Php. 3:11-12), but we certainly don't have to use our body to sin or choose to gratify our flesh through sin. We can sanctify our flesh in this world. We can set apart our body from sin to the service of God. Christians still live "*in the flesh*" (2 Cor. 10:3), but they do not live "*according*" to the flesh (2 Cor. 10:2), or live "*after the flesh*" (Rom. 8:1; 8:5). We still have a body but we are not selfishly living to gratify our flesh. Those who belong to Christ choose to walk after the spirit and no longer live to gratify the lusts of their flesh (Gal 5:16, 5:24).

We do not need to wait until glorification in order to experience sanctification. Since we are not born sinful or with a sinful body, but men are sinful by their own free choice, we do not need to wait until we die or until we cease to have these physical bodies in order to cease to be sinful, as Gnosticism taught. We can freely choose not to be sinful in this life.

This is why the Bible commands us, in this life, to cease to be evil and to be sinful no more. Two mistaken concepts theologians often hold to are, "You cannot become holy on earth." And, "You cannot become sinful in heaven." These ideas are in error because we know that there were angels who became sinful while in heaven, and we know that Jesus Christ, who is our example to follow, lived holy on earth.

The angels in heaven right now could sin, they could become demons like the others, but they don't want to. When we make it to heaven as the saints of God, we too could sin but we won't want to. We will be "as the angels of God in heaven" (Matt. 22:30). We will use our free will to be obedient to God for all of eternity, while retaining the liberty to become evil if we wanted to.

We can
sanctify
our flesh
in this
world.

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Those without glorified bodies are free to choose to be sanctified, and those with glorified bodies are free to choose to be sinful. Having a glorified body does not force one to be holy, nor does having a body not yet glorified force one to be sinful. Being sinful or being holy is not determined by the nature of your body, but by the determination of your free will.

Gnosticism Is Still Alive and Well Today

The idea of moral character existing before moral choices exist, or of moral character deriving its existence from something other than moral choices such as our body or our nature, is a Gnostic moral philosophy. How can our moral character truly be called “moral” if it has nothing to do with our choices, and consequently nothing to do with God’s law, but rather has to do with our nature, substance, constitution, or composition? If we fail to distinguish between sin and temptation, between the physical and the moral, between nature and character, between natural attributes and moral attributes, we will fall into the error of Gnosticism.

While I was preaching on the North Carolina State University campus, I asked a Calvinist this question, “Is the body a sin?” He said, “Yes our bodies are made of sin.” I asked, “You can put sin under a microscope and look at it?” He said, “Sure.”

While I was preaching on the Alabama A&M campus, a man said to me, “You can’t stop sinning. Even waking up is a sin because you wake up in sinful flesh.”

While I was open air preaching at the University of Texas in Austin, I said, “Go and sin no more.” To this a Calvinist responded, “Just the fact that we are composed of flesh makes us sinners...”

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While I was open air preaching to students at Tyler Junior College in Texas, I said, "Sin is a voluntary choice to violate God's law." A Calvinist in the crowd responded by saying, "Your body is sin. You are a sinner because you have a body. And so long as you are in your body, you are a sinner!"

Just recently a Calvinist sent me a personal message that said, "Your body is sinful and will be until death." These types of statements from Calvinists are Gnostic at their very essence.

After traveling the length and breadth of this nation and talking to thousands of people, I have concluded that Gnosticism is alive and well today. I have been shocked at how many Gnostic Calvinists I have encountered. The very idea that your body is sinful, and that because of this you cannot be morally perfect until you get a glorified body, is nothing short of pure Gnosticism. Yet many today claim that you cannot be free from sin until you die!

The truth is that your body does not make you unholy; and therefore, you don't need a new body in order to be made holy. Your body is not sinful, so you don't need a new body to be free from sin. The command to "be ye therefore perfect" (Matt. 5:48) certainly takes for granted that moral perfection is a choice of the will and not an involuntary state of the body, which we have absolutely no control over. A command implies that the object which is being commanded can be acquired by the choice of the will, and that the thing which is being forbidden can be avoided by the choice of the will. Therefore, moral perfection is a choice of the will, not a state of your body.

Since your body is not sinful, and since your body doesn't make you sin, you don't need a new body to be free from sin. Adam sinned with a perfect or glorified body, and Jesus Christ was sinless while he was in a depraved or fallen

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body. He was sinless while having a body that was not yet glorified. Therefore, a depraved body does not necessarily make you sinful. Neither does a glorified body necessarily make you holy. Being sinful or being holy does not depend upon the physical state or quality of your body, but upon the moral state or quality of your will.

Since Gnosticism fails to distinguish between the physical and the moral, they they fail to properly distinguish between physical depravity and moral depravity and between physical perfection and moral perfection. Gnostic moral philosophy says that sin is a substance of matter and is not limited to free will choices. To view sin as a state of the body, or a state of human nature, rather than a state of the will, is to have a Gnostic view of sin and human nature. The whole idea that man has a sinful nature, or that man's nature is sinful in and of itself, or that man is sinful through hereditary inheritance rather than through voluntary choice, is nothing more than the remains of Gnostic and Manichean philosophy surviving through Augustinian, Lutheran, and Calvinistic theology.

John Calvin said, "Augustine laboured to show, that we are not corrupted by acquired wickedness, but bringing an innate corruption from the very womb..."⁶⁵

In other words, wickedness was not the fault of the individual, since they did not cause it by their own free will, but was the fault of their constitution or design, acquiring it during the formation of their composition while in the womb.

Dean Harvey said, "The concept of inherited sin is a philosophical construct applied to theology. It is not found in the Bible."⁶⁶

In regards to original sin or constitutional sinfulness, Charles Finney said, "This doctrine is a stumbling-block both to the church and the world, infinitely dishonorable to God,

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and an abomination alike to God and the human intellect, and should be banished from every pulpit, and from every formula of doctrine, and from the world. It is a relic of heathen philosophy, and was foisted in among the doctrines of Christianity by Augustine, as everyone may know who will take the trouble to examine for himself."⁶⁷

Harry Conn said, "Augustine, after studying the philosophy of Manes, the Persian philosopher, brought into the church from Manichaeism the doctrine of original sin."⁶⁸

Augustine's theological term, "the transmission of sin," presupposes the Gnostic view that sin is some sort of substance that can be hereditary rather than a personal choice originated by the will. In a Gnostic world-view, sin is blamed on man's nature rather than on man's free will. In the Christian world-view, however, this is not true. These notions were completely foreign to the Early Church and even refuted by them, as they were only held by the Gnostics. It was not until Augustine converted from Manichaean Gnosticism that he brought these views with him into the Church. Many all throughout Church history have refuted these erroneous Gnostic views of human flesh or human nature, as we shall now see.

God Is Not the Author of Sin

Man is both a physical and a spiritual being. Our constitution is both physical and spiritual. It is not true however, as the Gnostics supposed, that the physical is evil but the spiritual is good, since God is the Creator of both physical reality and the spiritual reality. In fact, God forms us both physically and spiritually in the womb. He is the maker of our spiritual and physical constitution. The Bible says, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the *spirit*, nor how the *bones do grow in the womb* of her that is with child:

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even so thou knowest not the works of God *who maketh all*" (Ecc. 11:5).

Our physical and spiritual state at birth is the direct result of the working of God, who is the author of man's nature or constitution. Unless we are willing to believe that God is the author of sin, we cannot accept the theory or view that sin is the result of our physical or spiritual nature. To blame your sinfulness upon your free will or to confess being a sinner by choice is to humbly and fully take responsibility for your sin. But to blame your sinfulness on your birth or on your nature is to blame your Creator who formed you in the womb.

Charles Finney said, "To represent the constitution as sinful, is to present God, who is the author of the constitution, as the author of sin."⁶⁹

A writer in the Early Church, either Pelagius or one of his followers, said, "...it is impious to say that sin is inherent in nature, because in this way the author of nature is being judged at fault."⁷⁰ And he said, "...all sin is to be attributed to the free choice of the will, not to the defects of nature..."⁷¹

Winkie Pratney said, "To equate humanity with sinfulness is to make God the Author of His own worst enemy; to make God responsible for the thing that has brought Him unhappiness."⁷²

Julian of Eclanum said, "...the good God is the maker of those that are born, by whom all things were made, and that the children of men are His work."⁷³

He also said, "God is the Maker of all those that are born, and that the sons of men are God's work; and that all sin descends not from nature, but from the will."⁷⁴

Asa Mahan said, "If the above dogma is true, it is demonstrably evident, that this corrupt nature comes into existence without the knowledge, choice, or agency of the

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creature, who for its existence is pronounced deserving of, and ‘bound over to the wrath of God.’ Equally evident is it that this corrupt nature exists as the result of the direct agency of God. He proclaims himself the maker of ‘every soul of man.’ As its Maker, He must have imparted to that soul the constitution or nature which it actually possesses. It does not help the matter at all, to say, that this nature is derived from our progenitor: for the laws of generation, by which this corrupt nature is derived from that progenitor, are sustained and continued by God himself... If, then, the above dogma is true, man in the first place, is held as deserving of eternal punishment for that which exists wholly independent of his knowledge, choice or agency, in any sense, direct or indirect, He is also held responsible for the result, not of his own agency, but for that which results from the agency of God.”⁷⁵

It is very important on this point to remember that the Scriptures say that God is the author of our nature. He is the creator of our constitution. We are the work of His hands since He forms us in the womb. Just as the Bible says that God *formed* Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:7-8; 1 Tim. 2:13), the Bible uses the same word and language to say that God *forms* us in the womb (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 27:11; 43:1; 43:7; 44:2; 44:24; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 26:10; 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Prov. 20:12; 26:10; Ecc. 7:29; Job 10:8-11; 31:15; 35:10; Mal. 2:10; Acts 17:29; Rom. 9:20; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3). “And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?” (Exo. 4:11). “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God” (Acts 17:29). “Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about... thou hast made me as the clay... Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews” (Job 10:8-9, 11).

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“The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them” (Prov. 20:12). “The great God formed all things” (Prov. 26:10). “Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that maketh all things” (Isa. 44:24). “*All things* were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (Jn. 1:3). “For of him, and through him, and to him, are *all things*” (Rom. 11:36). “God, who created *all things* by Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:9). “For by him were *all things* created... *all things* were created by him... by him *all things* consist” (Col. 1:16-17). The “all things” that have been made by Christ include all the human natures which are made and created in the womb.

To blame sin upon a corrupted constitution is to blame our Creator for sin.

Who then is it that “formed thee from the womb” according to the Bible? It is “the Lord, thy redeemer” who “maketh all things.” But remember, Augustine held to a Gnostic moral philosophy and taught, according to Calvin, that wickedness was not “acquired” by personal choices, but was an “innate corruption from the very womb...”⁷⁶

Is it true that sin is not our fault? Is sin really a birth defect? To blame sin upon our formation in the womb is to blame the Lord for our sin, since He formed us in the womb. To blame sin upon a corrupted constitution is to blame our Creator for sin. To blame sin upon a faulty design is to blame sin upon our Designer.

Martin Luther, who we have seen was a student of Augustine’s writings, believed that God is the author of our nature, and that we are born with a sinful nature, and therefore he said that God “ceases not to form and multiply that nature, which... is defiled by sin...”⁷⁷ In other words,

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Luther was saying that God multiplies man's sinful nature by forming us all with a sinful nature!

This would be Luther's position put into a logical syllogism:

- Our nature is sinful.
- God is the author of our nature.
- Therefore, God forms us with a sinful nature.

The reason that he came to the wrong conclusion was because he started with the wrong premise. We should reason like this:

- God is the author of our nature.
- God is not the author of sin.
- Therefore, we are not born with a sinful nature.

Origen said, "not a single one is formed wicked by the Creator of all things..."⁷⁸

Eusebius said, "The fault is in him who chooses, not in God. For God has not made nature or the substance of the soul bad; for he who is good can make nothing but what is good. Everything is good which is according to nature. Every rational soul has naturally a good free-will, formed for the choice of what is good. But when a man acts wrongly, nature is not to be blamed; for what is wrong, takes place not according to nature, but contrary to nature, it being the work of choice, and not of nature!"⁷⁹

Methodius said that "the Divine Being is not by nature implicated in evils. Therefore our birth is not the cause of these things..."⁸⁰

He went on to say that men are "possessing free will, and not by nature evil..."⁸¹

He also said, "there is nothing evil by nature, but it is by use that evil things become such. So I say, says he, that

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man was made with free-will, not as if there were already evil in existence, which he had the power of choosing if he wished, but on account of his capacity of obeying or disobeying God. For this was the meaning of the gift of free will... and this alone is evil, namely, disobedience..."⁸²

And Methodius also said, "God did not make evil, nor is He at all in any way the author of evil; but whatever failed to keep the law, which He in all justice ordained, after being made by Him with the faculty of free-will, for the purpose of guarding and keeping it, is called evil. Now it is the gravest fault to disobey God, by overstepping the bounds of that righteousness which is consistent with free-will..."⁸³

We are not formed or fashioned in the womb wicked by God but we become wicked by choice after we are born. God certainly would not create us in the womb with a sinful nature since God hates sin and does not even tempt anyone to sin (Jas. 1:13). James goes on to tell us that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (Jas. 1:17), but if God gives us a sinful nature, that is not a good gift! We could say, "The worst of all gifts is from above!"

How could we say "I will...ascribe righteousness to my Maker" (Job 36:3), if He makes us with a sinful nature? We couldn't "ascribe righteousness to my Maker" if we are involuntarily and unavoidably made sinful by no fault of our own, but were made sinful because of the formation of our God given nature.

We know that God does not form us in the womb with a sinful nature since the Bible says that we are wonderfully made. King David said, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are they works; and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps. 139:14). We could not be wonderfully made if we were sinfully made. God's works could not be marvelous if God created sinfulness.

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Paul said, “For every creature of God is good” (1 Tim. 4:4). Clearly, God does not make men sinners but men make themselves transgressors. This is why the Bible says, “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made men upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc. 7:29). If sinners were honest with themselves, they would say what the Bible says, “*I make myself* a transgressor” (Gal. 2:18). Sin is not the fault of our constitution, but it is our own fault, because it is caused by our deliberate misuse of our constitution.

To say that we are born sinners is to say that God, who forms us in the womb, creates us as sinners. If God creates us as sinners, God forces us to be sinful. And if God forces us to be sinful, we cannot be responsible or accountable for being sinful. We cannot be justly punished for being what God created us as.

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If God created us sinners, we would not be the real sinners but God would be the real sinner. This is because our sinfulness would not be caused by ourselves but by Him. If God creates us sinners, sin is really His fault and consequently, He is not righteous or good. The reason that God is righteous is because He never causes the existence of sin, and the reason that He is good is because He cares for the well-being of everyone. Therefore, since God is good and righteous, we can conclude that He does not form anyone in the womb as a sinner or make anyone necessarily sinful.

While I was open air preaching at the University of Minnesota in Duluth, one of the students asked me, “Why did God create sin?” I explained, “Sin was not part of God’s creation. Sin is a choice that men and angels have made. God is not the author of sin. Sin is originated by other moral

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beings. Sin is the wrong use of free will. Sin is not some substance that God created. Sin is a free choice that moral beings have made. Sin is not God's creation, it is our own. Each sinner creates or originates their sin. Each individual is the author of their own moral character.”

Man, not God, is at blame for sin. This is because sin is the result of free will, not the result of a sinful nature. Sin is the fruit of our will and not the necessity of our flesh or the state of our nature. Sin is man's fault. Man is to be blamed for sin. That is because man is the cause of sin. Sin is man's choice. Sin is the fault of our own will. Sin is not God's fault. God is not to be blamed for sin. God is not the cause of sin. That is because sin is not the fault of the nature God has given us. Everything God makes is good (Gen. 1:31; 1 Tim. 4:4). The problem with the world is not the nature God has given us. The problem is that God's creation has corrupted itself (Gen. 6:12). The problem with the world is the choices that men have made. The problem is not with nature itself but with the will of man.

To talk of a sinful nature is a confusion of meaning and a contradiction in terms.

When expounding upon ethics and metaphysics in relation to sin, Cornelius Van Til said, “Sin is exclusively ethical hostility to God...”⁸⁴ But to talk of a sinful nature is a confusion of meaning and a contradiction in terms. That is because what is sinful belongs to *ethics*, but nature belongs to *metaphysics*. That which belongs to ethics and that which belongs to metaphysics are completely different in nature. Ethics deals with the moral quality of choices and behaviors, while metaphysics deals with the structure and composition of things. To confuse ethics with metaphysicals, by assigning inherent or intrinsic moral qualities to metaphysical or material objects, is confusion of the worst kind.

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Charles Finney said, "...it is impossible that sin should be a quality of the substance of body or soul. It is, and must be, a quality of choice or intention, and not of substance. To make sin an attribute or quality of substance is contrary to God's definition of sin. 'Sin,' says the apostle, 'is anomia,' a "transgression of, or a want of conformity to, the moral law." That is, it consists in a refusal to love God and our neighbour, or, which is the same thing, in loving ourselves supremely... Sin a substance! Is it a solid, a fluid, a material, or a spiritual substance?"⁸⁵

Pelagius said, "...we have to inquire what sin is, - some substance, or wholly a name without substance, whereby is expressed not a thing, not an existence, not some sort of a body, but the doing of a wrongful deed."⁸⁶

Winkie Pratney said, "good and evil are not qualities of substance or essence, but character... sin itself is a moral (not physical) creation of rebellious moral beings..."⁸⁷

As we have seen, sin is not a substance of the body. Sin is a choice of the will. Jesus implied this when he said "go sin no more" (Jn. 8:11). This command takes for granted that all sin is a choice, or that all sin is volitional and deliberate, something which we have control over. The Bible doesn't say about sinners, "Their *substance* is evil." Nor does it say, "Their *substance* should be reprov'd." But rather it says, "their *deeds* were evil" (Jn. 3:19), and that their "*deeds* should be reprov'd" (Jn. 3:20). To be born again is to put off the old man "with his *deeds*" (Col. 3:9), not to put off the old man "with his substance or composition." Men are sinful, not because of the work of God, but because of their own work, not because of what God made them of, but because of what they have made themselves. Sin is not some involuntary substance that we are made of, or some involuntary substance that indwells us, but is our own choice or voluntary state of our heart. All sin consists in sinning.

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Contrary to Augustinian theology, the Bible does not teach that we will always have “indwelling sin” which we cannot get rid of, or that we have this “indwelling sin” independent of our own will and choice. “Indwelling sin” in the Bible is something which we have the power to get rid of because it is inside of us by our consent or choice. “Indwelling sin” is a choice of the will. It is a disobedient heart.

The Scriptures teach that it is a choice to have sin inside of you or not. “*Let not* sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, that ye should *obey* it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12). The phrase “let not” implies the consent of the

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individual. “If iniquity be in thine hand, *put it away*, and *let not* wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles” (Job 11:14). The phrases “put it away” and “let not” implies the choice of the will. “Therefore *remove* sorrow from thy heart, and *put away* evil from thy flesh” (Ecc. 11:10). To “remove” or “put away” is a choice of our will. Jesus said, “Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside may be clean also.” We must choose to put away any sin that is within us.

Since sin is a choice, to be free from sin is a choice. God commands sinners to turn themselves from “*all*” their transgressions and to cast away from themselves “*all*” their sins (Eze. 18:30-31). This takes for granted that “*all*” sin is their choice and that it is something which they have control over. We are told to cleanse ourselves from “*all* filthiness of the flesh” (2 Cor. 7:1), And we are told, “lay aside *every* weight and sin” (Heb. 12:1). This too implies that “*all*” and “*every*” sin is our choice which we have control over.

Clearly, no sin is involuntary or something which exists independent of the will. Sin does not consist in the

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involuntary states of our nature, since we have no control over what type of nature we are born with and we have no power to change or alter our nature. But all sin consists in the voluntary states of our will, something which we do have power to change and alter. Men are not sinful by created constitution but by their own chosen character. Men are not morally good or evil by their creation but by their own personal choice.

We are taught to train our children in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6). This presupposes that their behavior is not determined or necessitated by their nature but by their will. It presupposes that they have the power of choice to determine how they are going to live and that through teaching we can influence them to make the right choices. The bad behavior of little children is often due to their ignorance, which is why we need to teach and train them. Often times they do not know to act better than they do.

We are also taught about the goodness of physically disciplining our children (Deut. 21:18; Prov. 22:15; 29:15). Just as penalty is the enforcement of precepts in moral government, so sanctions is the enforcement of precepts in family government. Just as God would encourage His universe to disrespect and disobey His law if He did not consistently uphold and maintain it, we too teach our children to disrespect and to disobey our commands if we do not discipline them, or if we are not consistent in our discipline. If we command them but do not discipline them in order to enforce the command, we are in fact encouraging their disobedience. We are teaching them that they do not need to respect or obey our law.

Parents have asked, "If my little child doesn't have a sinful nature, who taught my little child to be so rebellious?" The answer is that *parents teach* their children to be that way by not properly influencing their wills through the consistent

enforcement of family government. But we can teach them to respect and obey our commands through consistent discipline. Their behavior, good or bad, is not determined by their nature but by their will. Their choices are made after motives are contemplated in their minds. If they think in their minds that they can get what they want by screaming and having a fit, because we have taught them through their experience that they get what they want when they do those things, then they will continue to do those things as we have taught them to. But if they think that they will suffer a spanking if they scream and have a fit, because we have taught them this through experience, then this consideration in their mind will help them to stop doing those things and to start making better choices.

You cannot spank their supposed sinful nature out of them.

Choices of the will are made in light of the perceived incentives and motives in the mind. If they think they will benefit in that behavior, they will continue in it. But if they think they will suffer through that behavior, they will choose to act differently. The fact that the Bible teaches us to physically discipline our children implies that bad behavior is the result of their own will, not necessitated by their nature. If their behavior was a necessity of their nature, instead of that which was chosen or determined by free will, teaching our children would be useless and disciplining them would be cruel. You cannot spank their supposed sinful nature out of them if they had one, but you can influence the choices of their free will through instruction and discipline.

You cannot hold a child responsible for that which they could not have avoided, or threaten to punish them if they do that which their nature forces them to do. Disciplining children presupposes that their behavior and

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moral character is their own fault, which they could have avoided; that it was self-caused, self-determined, or self-originated, deriving from their own free will. The Bible teaches that obedience is “*learned*,” not inherited (Heb. 5:8), as all moral character is learned and acquired, not inherited, inherent, or innate.

The fact that God punishes sinners for their sin shows that sin is caused by the liberty of their will, not the necessity of their nature. If sin were necessitated by a sinful nature, then sin is not their fault and they cannot be justly punished for it. If sin is caused by the freedom of their will, then sin is their fault and they can be justly punished for it. No being can be justly punished for what was involuntary or unavoidable. You cannot punish or blame men for their sinfulness unless they are the cause of their sinfulness. If men were created sinful because of some sinful nature, they would deserve no punishment at all since it was not their fault or their doing. But if men chose to be sinful, then they do deserve punishment, because it is their own fault and choice.

Tertullian said, “No reward can be justly bestowed, no punishment can be justly inflicted, upon him who is good or bad by necessity, and not by his own choice.”⁸⁸

Justin Martyr said, “If a man were created evil, he would not deserve punishment, since he was not evil of himself, being unable to do anything else than what he was made for.”⁸⁹

Origen said, “The Scriptures...emphasize the freedom of the will. They condemn those who sin, and approve those who do right... We are responsible for being bad and worthy of being cast outside. For it is not the nature in us that is the cause of the evil; rather, it is the voluntary choice that works evil.”⁹⁰

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Irenaeus said, “Those who do not do it [good] will receive the just judgment of God, because they had not work good when they had it in their power to do so. But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for they were created that way. Nor would the former be reprehensible, for that is how they were made. However, all men are of the same nature. They are all able to hold fast and to go what is good. On the other hand, they have the power to cast good from them and not to do it.”⁹¹

Alfred T. Overstreet said, “But isn’t it a monstrous and a blasphemous dogma to say that God is angry with any of his creatures for possessing the nature which he created them? What? Can God be angry with his creatures for possessing the nature that he himself has given them? Never! God is not angry with men for possessing the nature he has given them, but only for the perversion of that nature. The Bible represents God as angry with men for their wicked deeds, and not for the nature with which they are born...”⁹²

Men cannot be justly punished for being what they are by nature, for if their state is by nature then it is not by choice, and if their state is not by choice it is not their fault, and if their state is not their fault they cannot be responsible and punished for being in that state. Therefore, if men are sinners by nature they cannot be held responsible or be punishable, and consequently, they do not need a Savior at all. Unless, that is, a Savior came to save them from unjust and cruel punishment. But the Savior came to save us from the punishment that we truly deserve; and therefore, our sinful state must be our own fault or choice.

The fact that Jesus Christ rebuked sin (Rev. 3:19), and that we are called to rebuke sin (Lev. 19:17; Lk. 17:3; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:15), both presupposes that sin is a choice of a person’s will and not a state of their

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nature. It implies that their sinfulness is voluntary and is their own fault. It implies that their moral character is within the realm of their own control. If a man is born sinful because of the nature they inherit, their sinfulness is not their fault and it makes no sense to rebuke them for their sinfulness. But if a man is sinful or a sinner by choice, if a sinner is the cause and creator of sin, then rebuking him makes total sense.

The very words “sinner” and “transgressor” implies choice. A sinner is someone who has made the choice to sin. A transgressor is someone who has made the choice to transgress God’s law. Sin or sinfulness is not a hereditary nature but is a choice to violate God’s law (1 Jn. 3:4). Evil is something that the will of a moral being can refuse, and good is something that the will of a moral being can choose. As the Bible says, “*refuse* the evil, and *choose* the good” (Isa. 7:15-16). The will is always involved in a person’s moral state since good and evil are volitional.

The command, “*Let* your heart therefore be perfect” (1 Kin. 8:61), “be ye therefore perfect” (Matt. 5:48), and “be ye holy” (1 Pet. 1:15), all implies that holiness is volitional. And the command, “cease to do evil” (Isa. 1:16), and to “sin no more” (Jn. 8:11), also implies that all sin is volitional and avoidable. A command is a declaration as to what type of choice you should and shouldn’t make. If what is commanded is not a choice, the command is pointless. If we have no choice in the matter, there would be no purpose in commanding us.

Moral Character Is Not Hereditary

Augustinian theologians have taught that when Adam sinned, our human constitution became sinful and we have all inherited this sinful constitution through natural generation. The problem with this is that your constitution does not become “sinful” because you choose to sin. Neither

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does your constitution become “righteous” when you choose righteousness. Your constitution stays the same even when your choices change. It is your moral character, not your constitution, which changes as often as your choices change.

There are no moral qualities in our constitution itself, since it is completely involuntary and beyond the scope of the legislation of God’s law. There are only moral qualities in our choices, since they are determined by us and are under the legislation of God’s law. To be wicked or righteousness is a matter of choice, not a matter of constitution or composition. No moral being is holy or sinful by mere passive existence. Rather, all moral beings are holy or sinful by active choice.

No moral being is holy or sinful by mere passive existence.

Sinfulness and holiness are moral attributes or moral qualities; and therefore, they must be voluntary. The idea of “inherited sinfulness” or “inherited righteousness” is an absurd contradiction. It is an oxymoron because if the quality is inherited, then it is involuntary. And if the quality is sinful or a moral attribute, then it must be voluntary. To inherit any moral quality, or to have an involuntary moral character, is a nonsensical contradiction. Sinfulness and holiness are descriptions of a person’s moral character; and therefore, they must be caused by their will.

Moral character is determined by the will’s obedience or disobedience to the moral knowledge of the mind. When a man does what he knows is wrong, he is blameworthy. But if a man does all that he knows to do, he is blameless. His heart is not evil and his character has no blemish if he does what he knows is right. Moral character, whether it is a good or evil character, is determined by the response of the will to the moral knowledge that the mind possesses. No moral

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being is holy or sinful, or can be holy or sinful, independent of their will. This is true of man, angels, and even God.

While your constitution is beyond the scope or limitation of your will power, your character is not. We do not choose what constitution we have, but we do choose what moral choices we make. So while your constitution is hereditary, your character is not.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, said, "...my spirit hath rejoiced in God *my Savior*" (Lk. 1:47). Mary did not have some "immaculate conception" which somehow made her sinless her entire life or "free from any personal or hereditary sin,"⁹³ as Augustinians have claimed. If Mary needed a Savior, she must have had sins she needed saving from. If Mary was sinless her entire life, she would need no Savior at all. If sin or guilt is transmitted from parent to child, then Jesus Christ would have been born sinful and guilty. Because Jesus was not born a sinner, or born sinful and guilty, then we can conclude that sin and guilt is not transmitted from parent to child.

There are other examples of how character is not hereditary. We are told that Job was a perfect man (Job 1:8), but his children probably were not (Job 1:5). Cain and Abel were both children of Adam, but one was righteous and one was unrighteous (Matt. 23:35; Heb. 11:4; 1 Jn. 3:12). We are told that Cain's "*own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*" (1 Jn. 3:12). From these examples we can conclude that moral character is not the result of heredity but the result of personal choice. Sinful parents do not give birth to sinful children anymore than righteous parents give birth to righteous children. While children may *imitate* the moral character of their parents, children do not *inherit* the moral character of their parents. Parents may *train* their children in their way of life, but parents do not *transmit* to their children their way of life.

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The story of Amon illustrates that a son can imitate the evil moral character of their parent. “Amon.... did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, *as his father Manasseh did*. And walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them” (2 Kin. 21:19-21). The story of Jehoshaphat illustrates how a son can imitate the good moral character of their parent, as he “walked in the way of Asa his father, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:31-32). Clearly, a person can imitate or follow their parent’s example, whether good or evil.

We see other examples of moral imitation as well. “Nadab.... Did evil in the sight of the Lord, and *walked in the way of his father*” (1 Kin. 15:25-26). “Ahaziah.... did evil in the sight of the Lord, and *walked in the way of his father*, and in the way of his mother” (1 Kin. 22:51-52). They walked in the way of their fathers, but their moral character was not determined by their ancestry. We are told that “Ahaz.... did *not* that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father” (2 Chron. 28:1). Children grow up and sometimes imitate their parents in their way of life and sometimes they do not.

The fact that moral character is not transmitted from parent to child is shown by “Solomon” who “did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, *as did David his father*” (1 Kin. 11:6). There were righteous kings who had sons who did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and there were evil kings who had sons who did what was right in the sight of the Lord. This shows that your moral character is not determined by the moral character of your parents, or by the nature that you inherit from them, but by your own personal use of your free will.

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We are told that a “just” man can “beget a son that is a robber...” (Eze. 18:9-10) Then that same wicked son can “beget a son, that seeth all his father’s sins which he hath done, and considereth, and *doeth not such like...*” (Eze. 18:14) These examples are clear. The righteous can have wicked offspring and the wicked can have righteous offspring. Each person determines for themselves what their moral character will be.

Jed Smock said, “A good or bad character is acquired, not innate.”⁹⁴

Your moral character is either sinful or holy. Sinfulness and holiness are voluntary states of the will; and therefore, these states are not hereditary and cannot be. Your inherited nature cannot be sinful or holy because your nature is not your voluntary choice. Your inherited nature cannot have any moral character at all, and you cannot be responsible and accountable for it, because it is not determined by your will. The nature that you inherit is within God’s control, not your own. Your moral character however is entirely within your own control because it is determined by your will. The reason that each individual is responsible and accountable for their moral character is because each individual is the author of their moral character.

Damnation is personally deserved because sin is personally originated.

Damnation & Salvation Are Not Hereditary

Since moral character is not hereditary, sin is not hereditary. Since sin is not hereditary, damnation is not hereditary. Damnation is personally deserved because sin is personally originated. Since punishment or damnation is according to personal choices, and since infants haven’t

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made any personal choices yet, infants cannot be punished or damned.

The idea of *deserving* punishment before you are *born*, or before you make *choices*, or before you have *character*, or before you are *guilty*, is nonsensical and inconceivable. The idea that you can personally deserve damnation before you have personally sinned is absurd and unjust.

Men do not deserve to burn in hell because their parents were sinners. Men deserve to burn in hell because they have chosen to be sinners. A man is innocent of a crime if he didn't commit the crime. A man is guilty of a crime only if he committed the crime. A person can only be justly punished if they deserve to be punished, and a person can only deserve to be punished if they committed the crime.

“Doth God pervert judgment? Or doeth the Almighty pervert justice?” (Job 8:3) Does God condemn the innocent for the sins of the guilty? “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do *right*?” (Gen. 18:25) God answered in great detail to vindicate His character and to justify His judgment. He said, “What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die....Yet say ye, Why? Doeth not the son bear the iniquity of the fathers? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Eze. 18:2-6, 19-20).

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God has repeatedly said, “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut. 24:16; 2 Kng. 14:6; 2 Chron. 25:4). God has been so clear on this subject that it is amazing that anyone should ever be confused about it.

The explicit justice of God is that each individual is responsible and accountable for their own personal sins. This is contrasted with the injustice that John Calvin ascribed to God when he said, "Adam drew all his posterity with himself, by his fall, into eternal damnation..."⁹⁵ It is not our fault that we are sons of Adam because it was not our choice to descend from him. Therefore, we cannot be punished merely for being sons of Adam. As a just Judge, God punishes men according to their personal deserts or demerits, according to the moral quality of their personal choices. Men are accountable for their choices and their choices only.

Men are
accountable
for their
choices and
their choices
only.

God will judge “every man according to *his ways*, and according to the fruit of *his doings*” (Jer. 17:10).

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man *according to his works*” (Matt. 16:27).

“...the righteous judgment of God: who will render every man according to *his deeds*” (Rom. 2:5-6).

“So then every one of us shall account *of himself* to God” (Rom. 14:12).

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in *his* body, *according* to that *he hath done*, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

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“Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be *according to their works*” (2 Cor. 11:15).

“...the Father, who without respect of persons, judgeth *according to every man’s work*” (1 Pet. 1:17).

“And I saw a great white throne... And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life: an the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to *their works*” (Rev. 20:11-12).

“And, behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man *according as his work* shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

Clearly, we are responsible and accountable for our sins and our sins only.

A. W. Tozer said, “...men are not lost because of what someone did thousands of years ago; they are lost because they sin individually and in person. We will never be judged for Adam’s sin, but for our own. For our own sins we are and must remain fully responsible.”⁹⁶

Theodore W. Elliot said, “...each person is responsible for his own sin and not for the sin of anyone else...”⁹⁷

Albert Barnes said, “...men are not to be represented as to blame, or as ill-deserving, for a sin committed long before they were born, and that they are not to be called on to repent of it.”⁹⁸

Leonard Ravenhill said, “God will not penalize me for Adam’s sin. God will not penalize Adam for my sin; but He will penalize each of us for our own sin.”⁹⁸

Lord Coke said, “...no one is punished for the sin of another...”¹⁰⁰

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L. D. McCabe said, “The Scriptures nowhere teach that we are guilty of the sin of Adam, or that we are punished therefore.”¹⁰¹

John Fletcher said, “All our damnation is of ourselves, through our avoidable unfaithfulness . . . everyone shall die for his own avoidable iniquity.”¹⁰²

Barnabas said, “He who chooses” to break the commandments “will be destroyed with his works...”¹⁰³

Hermas said, “All who therefore despise Him and do not follow His commands deliver themselves to death, and each will be guilty of his own blood.”¹⁰⁴

Origen said, “...we have freedom of will and we ourselves are the cause of our own ruin.”¹⁰⁵

Titian said, “We die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us.”¹⁰⁶

Even Prosper, a disciple of Augustine, said that those who “perish” do so because of “their voluntary iniquity.”¹⁰⁷

Irenaeus said, “Man, a reasonable being, and in that respect like God, is made free in his will; and being endued with power to conduct himself, he is the cause of his own becoming sometimes wheat and sometimes chaff; therefore will he be justly condemned.”¹⁰⁸

Baruch said, “For though Adam first sinned and brought ultimately death upon all, yet of those who were born from him, each one of them has prepared for his own soul torment to come, and again each one of them has chosen for himself glories to come. For assuredly he who believeth will receive reward. But now, as for you, you wicked that now are, turn you to destruction, because you shall speedily be visited, in that formerly you rejected the understanding of the Most High. For His works have not taught you, nor has the skill of His creation which is at all times persuaded you. Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul, but each of us has been the Adam of his own soul.”¹⁰⁹

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Since men are damned for their own sins and not for the sins of their ancestors, a person needs the atonement of Jesus Christ for their own sins and not for the sins of their ancestors. The Bible says, “All *we* like sheep have gone astray, *we* have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of *us* all” (Isa. 53:6). “JESUS: for he shall *save* his people from *their sins*” (Mat. 1:21).

A person only needs forgiveness for their own personal sins, which is why Jesus taught that God will “forgive *your* trespasses” (Matt. 6:15; Mk. 11:25; 11:26). No man is damned for the sin of another; and consequently, no man needs forgiveness through the atonement for the sin of another. No man needs forgiveness for a sin that they did not commit or cause. We do not need forgiveness for the *singular* “sin” of Adam. The Bible says that men need forgiveness for their own personal *plural* “sins” (Matt. 1:21; 26:28; Acts 2:38).

The
descendants
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On the other hand, just as we do not inherit the damnation of our parents, neither do we inherit the salvation of our parents. Many of the Jews in Jesus’ day thought that they did not need to repent and believed that they were already right with God merely because they were “children of Abraham.” John the Baptist confronted this error when he said, “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father” (Lk. 3:8). Their ancestry did not exempt them from their personal need of repentance. They personally needed to repent because they personally sinned.

The descendants of Abraham did not inherit his salvation. That is why Jesus Christ told Nicodemus, who was a Jewish man in his old age, that he would need to be born

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again to enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:3-7). Jesus was not telling Nicodemus that he needed to be born again because damnation *was* hereditary, but because salvation *was not* hereditary. Men need to repent and be born again, not because they are born with a sinful nature that damns them, but because they have personally chosen to sin. God never asks us to repent of the nature we inherit, or to repent of the ancestors that we descend from. God asks us to repent of our own personal choices of sin in order to be personally saved. Clearly then, neither damnation nor salvation is hereditary but both require personal or individual choice.

Albert Barnes said, “The work of salvation, and the work of damnation, are the two most deliberate and solemn acts of choosing, that mortal man ever performs.”¹⁰⁹ And he said, “Christianity does not charge on men crimes of which they are not guilty. It does not say, as I suppose, that the sinner is held to be personally answerable for the transgression of Adam, or of any other man; or that God has given a law which man has no power to obey.”¹¹¹

Jesus Christ was a Son of Adam

It has been taught by many theologians that the first sin of Adam somehow made his nature or constitution sinful, that we inherit our nature or constitution from Adam, and that therefore we are born with a nature or constitution that is sinful, and consequently all of Adam’s descendants inherit from him his sin, guilt, and damnation.

This is their view in logical syllogism:

- Adam’s nature became a sinful nature when he chose to sin.
- Adam’s descendants inherit their natures from him.

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- Therefore, Adam's descendants inherit from him a sinful nature.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, "The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself but for his posterity, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation sinned in him, and fell with him in the first transgression."¹¹²

The Catechism of Trent said, "Wherefore, the pastor should not omit to remind the faithful that the guilt and punishment of original sin were not confined to Adam, but justly descended from him, as from their source and cause, to all posterity."¹¹³

Thomas Aquinas said, "...a human being begets descendants as in the human being's nature.... And so a parent transmits to descendants the first sin that corrupted the nature..."¹¹⁴

Wayne Grudem said, "...we also inherited a sinful nature because of Adam's sin."¹¹⁵

Lewis Chafer said, "The Augustinian or realistic theory holds that the connection between Adam and his posterity was such, that by his individual transgression he vitiated human nature, and transmitted it in this corrupt and guilty state to his descendants by physical generation... Adam's individual transgression resulted in a sinful nature..."¹¹⁶

The volume "A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages" states, "Original sin, according to Anselm, is the sinfulness, or guiltiness, which each descendent of Adam incurs at his origin. For at his origin he inherits a sinful human nature. That is, when Adam sinned personally his personal sin corrupted his human nature, with the result that the nature inherited by his progeny was also a corrupt nature."¹¹⁷

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Louis Berkhof explains how certain theologians have taught, “Adam suffered the loss of original righteousness, and thereby incurred the divine displeasure. As a result all his descendants are deprived of original righteousness, and as such the objects of divine wrath...”¹¹⁸

S. Michael Houdmann said, “Because of Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience, sin has been an ‘inheritance’ for all their descendants.... When Adam fell into sin, the result was every one of his descendants also being ‘infected’ with sin.”¹¹⁹

John Rodman Williams said, “...we are all heirs of Adam, and thereby inherit his sinful nature. What Adam became through the Fall has been passed down to all his successors.”¹²⁰

It should bear much weight in our minds that not a single verse in the entire Bible says, “All of mankind inherits a sinful nature from Adam.” That is theory, not fact. Many theologians take for granted the idea that Adam’s nature somehow became sinful when he chose to sin, when even this point is nowhere stated in all of Scripture.

It has already been shown earlier in this volume that Adam did not have the power to change his nature nor the nature of anyone else. And neither could sin itself change human nature. But only God, who is the God of Nature, has the power to create and change human nature, and He certainly would not want to do so since He is good and He created human nature good. This point does not need to be fully readdressed here.

And it has been shown already that God did not create Adam’s nature only and then step back to “let nature take its course.” It has been abundantly shown that God personally and actively forms each individual in the womb. No doubt, God does not form our natures out of nothing or “ex nihilo.” Even Adam was created out of the dirt (Gen.

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2:7; 3:19), and Eve was made from his rib (Gen. 2:22). So God uses the DNA from our mother's eggs and our father's semen, but He is still the one who forms us in the womb.

The specific question to be dealt with here is whether or not "all" the "successors" or "all" the "descendants" of Adam inherit his sinfulness and damnation, as Augustinian theologians have claimed.

We know with absolute proof from the Scriptures that sin, guilt, and damnation is not heredity, transmitted, or inherited from Adam to all of his posterity because Jesus was a descendant of Adam and He was not born sinful, guilty, or

Jesus was a descendent of Adam and He was not born sinful, guilty, or damned.

damned. If "all" of Adam's descendants inherit a sinful nature, or inherit his guilt and damnation, then it stands to reason that Jesus Christ would have been included in the "all" because He too was a descendant of Adam as well. On this point, it must first be shown that Jesus Christ was indeed a descendant of Adam, which is a truth that many theologians overlook, ignore, and dismiss. Consider the following arguments.

First, Jesus Christ was an offspring or descendant of Abraham. The Bible says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, *which is Christ*" (Gal. 3:16). "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took of him *the seed of Abraham*" (Heb. 2:16). Since Jesus Christ was of the seed of Abraham, this helps us to understand why God said to Abraham, "*in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" (Gen. 26:4).

Since Jesus Christ was a child of Abraham, the children of Abraham are called His "brethren." The Bible says, "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, a prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you *of your brethren*" (Acts

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3:22). “Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his *brethren*” (Heb. 2:14). If Jesus was not a descendant of Abraham, He could not be called the “brethren” of Abraham’s offspring.

Jesus Christ was genuinely an Israelite. He belonged to the tribe of Judah. The Bible says, “For it is evident that our Lord *sprang out of Judah*” (Heb. 7:14). “And one of the elders saith unto me, weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5).

Clearly, Jesus was a descendent of Abraham since He was born of Abraham’s seed, He was a brother to Abraham’s children, and He was a member of the tribe of Judah.

Second, Jesus Christ was also the offspring or descendant of David. The Bible says, “Hath not the Scripture saith, that Christ cometh of the *seed of David*, and out of the town of Bethlehem, were David was? (Jn. 7:42) “Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the *fruit of his loins*, according to *the flesh*, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30). “David, the son of Jesse... *Of this man’s seed* hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus” (Acts 13:22-23). “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of *the seed of David* according to *the flesh*” (Rom. 1:3). “Remember that Jesus Christ of *the seed of David* was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8). “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, *the Root of David*, hath prevailed to open the book” (Rev. 5:5). Jesus testified of his own heredity when he said, “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the Churches. *I am the root and the offspring of David*, and the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16).

When the Bible says, “The book of the *generation* of Jesus Christ, the *son of David*, the *son of Abraham*” (Mat. 1:1), the Greek word “generation” literally means “source”

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“origin” lineage” “progeny” and “ancestry.”¹²¹ The Scriptures also says, “Mary, *of whom was born Jesus*, who is called Christ” (Mat. 1:16). These many passages that teach that Jesus Christ was of the posterity of Abraham and David and the child of Mary have very great theological implications. What can we conclude from these passages but that if Jesus Christ was of the root, offspring, or seed of Mary, Abraham, and David, then He was also of the root, offspring, or seed of Adam, since Mary, Abraham, and David were descendants of Adam? This logical conclusion cannot be avoided granted the premise given to us in Scripture.

- Jesus Christ was a descendant of Mary, David, and Abraham
- Mary, David, and Abraham were descendants of Adam and Eve.
- Therefore, Jesus Christ was a descendant of Adam and Eve

If “Christ” was the “fruit of his loins” in regards to David, then Christ must of necessity been of the fruit of Adam’s loins, since David was of the fruit of Adam’s loins. If Jesus was “of the seed” of David and Abraham, and David and Abraham were the seed of Adam, then Jesus Christ was necessarily of the seed of Adam.

Dr. Zacharius Ursinus, who was a major figure and leader in the Protestant Reformation, even said, “The argument which is drawn from these declarations made in relation to the Messiah, is most convincing; for if the humanity which he assumed was from the seed of Abraham, and of David, then he had a real human nature... Christ took this upon himself, and not a nature created out of nothing, or bought down from heaven... The flesh of Christ is the flesh of Adam...”¹²²

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Where did Jesus Christ get his humanity from? Where did the human nature of Christ come from? How did Jesus Christ become part of the human race? It was all through his earthly mother Mary who was a descendant of David, Abraham, and ultimately Adam and Eve. Jesus certainly did not get His *human* nature from His Heavenly father side of the family. Christ received His human nature from His earthly *human* mother, receiving His human attributes from her side of the family. Therefore, Jesus actually inherited His human nature from Adam and Eve.

While I was open air preaching on the University of Alabama in Birmingham, a student said to me, "We are all born sinners." I said, "No, we are born innocent babies and become sinners by choice. It is your own fault." He said, "Don't we descend from Adam?" I said, "Yes, just like Jesus Christ was a descendant of Adam." He said, "No, He was the son of God." I said, "He was also the son of man. Wasn't Jesus the descendant of David?" He said "Yes, through his mother." I said, "Then through his mother he was also the descendant of Adam. If Jesus was a descendant of David and Abraham, and David and Abraham were descendants of Adam, then Jesus Christ was a descendant of Adam." He was completely unable to respond to this argument or to refute this logic.

Jesus certainly did not get his human nature from His Heavenly fathers side of the family.

God's own statements on this topic should forever settle this controversial issue. God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and *her seed*; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). This passage is understood to be prophetic of the incarnation of Jesus Christ and His victory over Satan. John Wesley noted, "A gracious promise is here

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made of Christ as the deliverer of fallen man from the power of Satan... Notice is here given them... concerning Christ... His incarnation, that he should be the seed of the woman.”¹²³

If Jesus Christ was of the seed of Eve, He was necessarily of the seed of Adam, because Eve could not have any offspring at all independent from Adam. Therefore, no passage could make it any clearer than this one that Jesus Christ was in fact a descendant of Adam and Eve through his human mother Mary.

The ancestors of an individual on their mother side are *no less* their ancestors than the ancestors they have on their fathers side. The ancestors of an individual on their fathers side are *no more* their ancestors than the ancestors they have on their mother's side. The ancestors a person has through their mother and through their father are both *equally* their ancestors. Therefore, the Adamic lineage or heredity of Jesus Christ is by no means nullified, negated, or excluded by virtue of his virgin birth.

Even though God was the Heavenly Father of Christ, His ancestors through His mother were legitimate ancestors. Otherwise, His ancestry from Abraham and David could also not be spoken of in Scripture. Christ was a descendant of Abraham and David through His mother despite His virgin birth; and likewise, Christ was a descendent of Adam and Eve through His mother despite His virgin birth. If the virgin birth excludes Christ's lineage or ancestry from Adam, it would also negate his heredity from Abraham and David.

Since Christ is said in the Scriptures to be of “the seed of Abraham” and of “the offspring of David,” all despite his virgin birth, there is no reason to think that Christ is not also the seed or offspring of Adam, despite the virgin birth. His miraculous birth did not somehow make his human ancestry illegitimate. Jesus was both human and divine. He was born of God and born of man. Jesus had both a divine

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and a human nature. His virgin birth made Him both the son of God and also the son of man.

The term “son of man” is actually a phrase used one hundred and eight times in Old Testament. In Hebrew the phrase is son of “*âdâm*.” It is interesting that the Hebrew word for man is Adam. Therefore, the phrase “son of man” actually means “son of Adam.” That is because in order to be a member of mankind you must be a child of Adam. If a person is a son of man, or a member of mankind, then they necessarily are a child of Adam. If they are not a child of Adam, then they are not a member of mankind or a son of man.

The New Testament applied this Old Testament phrase, “son of man,” to Jesus Christ eighty five times. This phrase is used in all four Gospels and in the Epistles in reference to Christ. Jesus often used this phrase in reference to Himself. What could the Bible mean by the use of this phrase in reference to Christ, but that

Jesus was truly a part of mankind because He was truly a son of Adam through his mother? If Jesus was not a son of Adam, then He was not truly a part of mankind. If Jesus did not take upon Himself human nature, then He was not part of the human race. It was absolutely essential for Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, to become a descendant of Adam and to take upon Himself human nature, if He was going to actually be a part of mankind or become a member of the human race.

The descriptions of Jesus’ lineage and genealogy laid in the Scriptures gives us specific insight into the earthly identity of Jesus Christ.

In order to be a member of mankind you must be a child of Adam.

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- Being a child of Mary put Jesus Christ into a particular *family*.
- Being a descendant of David put Jesus Christ into a *lineage of kings*.
- Being of Judah made Jesus Christ of a certain *tribe* of Israel
- Being a descendant of Abraham made Jesus Christ a *Jew* and an *Israelite*.
- Being a child of Adam made Jesus Christ a *human being* that was part of the *human race*.

Some people have rightly recognized that Jesus inherited His human nature through His mother, but they falsely assumed that human nature was sinful. Therefore, they concluded that Jesus Christ inherited a sinful nature through his mother. Abraham Tucker said, "...the sinful nature of Jesus; for that he did partake of a sinful nature by his birth from the woman, I see no reason nor scruple to doubt... He was a descendant of Adam, and when it is declared that in Adam all have sinned, no exception is made of him..."¹²⁴

Their reasoning on this point is as follows:

- The nature transmitted from Adam to his descendants is a sinful nature.
- Jesus was a descendant of Adam and inherited human nature from His mother.
- Therefore, Jesus inherited a sinful nature.

If you grant their premise it would be impossible to avoid their conclusion. But the fault in their logic is the presupposition that human nature, or the human constitution and composition, is itself sinful. They inevitably come to the wrong conclusion because they start with the wrong premise.

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They should have reasoned the following:

- Jesus was a descendant or posterity of Adam and inherited His human nature from him.
- Jesus was not formed or born with a sinful nature.
- Therefore, a sinful nature is not transmitted from Adam to all of his descendants or posterity.

If Jesus Christ was sinless, which He undoubtedly was, then it cannot be affirmed that a sinful nature is transmitted from Adam to all of His descendants. Neither can we say that Adam's guilt is imputed to all of his descendants as their representative. And we cannot believe that all of Adam's descendants sinned in him being in his loins. The fact that Jesus Christ was a descendant of Adam, and the fact that Jesus Christ was sinless and guiltless, proves beyond question the fact that men are not sinful or guilty merely for descending from Adam. Sin and guilt are originated by the individual, not inherited from their ancestors.

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ancestors.

The reason that the Gnostic's denied that Jesus Christ had a real flesh is because they viewed the flesh as sinful. But when we understand that flesh is a tool that can be used sinfully or righteously, we would have no problem admitting the Scriptural truth that Jesus had a flesh through His earthly mother. When Augustine converted from Gnosticism, he brought modified Gnostic views into the Church. Now many seem to deny that Jesus Christ had a real human or Adamic nature because they view human nature as sinful. But when we understand that our nature is a tool that we can use for sin or for righteousness, we would have no problem admitting

the Scriptural truth that Jesus had a human or Adamic nature through His earthly mother.

Choices Create Habits

Some today may think that they have a sinful nature, or that sin is natural, because they have developed a habit of sinning through their own free will. Choice creates character and character creates habits. Through the continual choice of disobedience men have made sin “natural” or “normal” for them, in the sense that it has become their habit. When men do something so often and regularly, it becomes like “second nature” to them.

When men do something so often and regularly, it becomes like second nature to them.

This habit of sin, or tendency towards unlawful gratification, is the result of their own will and not the product of the hands of God. Their habit comes, not from their God given constitution or nature, but from their own free will. This “second nature” is the fruit of their own doings and they are therefore entirely responsible for it.

It should also be understood that we have a natural influence towards virtue when our conscience is developed, but before it is developed, we only have a constitutional influence towards self-gratification. In the development of a child, their flesh with its passions and desires is developed long before their mind or conscience is developed. By the time they reach the age of accountability, children have developed a habit of self-indulgence and self-gratification. That is why children choose to continue in this selfish state even after they know better.

The self-centeredness of a child is natural and normal at first, and even necessary for their survival, but it becomes sinful once they know better (Jn. 9:41; Jas 4:17). Their self-centeredness becomes wicked once the value of other people

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is developed in their minds. Once a person knows that God is supremely valuable and so we ought to love Him supremely, and that our neighbor is equally valuable and so we ought to love them equally, it is sinful, wicked, and rebellious to be self-centered and to live supremely for the gratification of ourselves. Once we know that God should be supremely loved and our neighbor should be loved equally to ourselves, it is sinful if we love ourselves supremely or if we love ourselves above our neighbor.

The Natural Man

Someone might ask, “If men do not have a sinful nature, why does the Bible talk about a sinner being a natural man?” When the Bible talks about “the natural man” (1 Cor. 2:14), the Greek word means a “sensual”¹²⁵ or carnal man. By definition, a sensual man is someone, “Devoted to the gratification of sense; given to the indulgence of the appetites; lewd; luxurious.”¹²⁶ A lewd man is someone, “Given to the unlawful indulgence of lust; addicted to fornication or adultery; dissolute; lustful; libidinous.”¹²⁷ The natural man is someone who chooses to be governed by their passions rather than being governed by their conscience. They are committed to the gratification of their flesh and are living for that end. In the Greek, the natural man refers to, “the sensuous nature with its subjection to appetite and passion.”¹²⁸

When the Bible says that sinners are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), it is not saying that men are under the wrath of God merely for being born or for possessing the constitution which God formed them with. What a monstrous notion to represent God as having wrath for men merely for being born, especially when He is the one who gave them life. And how awful it is to view men as being under God’s wrath for having the composition which

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He Himself gave them! This would make the wrath of God unreasonable and unjust.

If a man is “by nature” a child “of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), it could be because he chose to use the faculties of his nature for sin, thus making himself a proper object of the wrath of God. The Greek word “by nature” in this passage can mean “constitution or usage.”¹²⁹ If this is what the Apostle meant by using that word, he means that men are children of wrath because of the usage they make of their constitution.

Or this particular passage could be talking about those who have developed a habit to live for the gratification of their flesh through continual choice. The phrase “by nature” in the Greek could also mean, “a mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature...”¹³⁰ Those who are “children of wrath” in verse three are described as “children of *disobedience*” in verse two. Disobedience is a choice or state of the will. Therefore, those who are “children of wrath” in context are children of wrath by choice. They are children of wrath through the choice of their will to be disobedient. They choose to be disobedient to God by choosing to live a carnal or sensual life. They are under God’s wrath because they live for the pleasure of their flesh instead of obeying the demands of their conscience.

The context of men being under God’s wrath by nature describes a former manner of life, addressing a previous natural or carnal lifestyle. The context says, “Wherein in time past ye *walked* according to the course of this world... among whom also all had our *conversation* in times past in the *lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind*; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:2-3). The terms “walked” and “conversation” indicates a manner of living or a lifestyle. It necessarily involves the choice of man.

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The context says that they “were dead in *trespasses* and *sins*” (Eph. 2:1). This shows how this state was altogether voluntary and caused by their own choice, since sins and trespasses are voluntary choices. Instead of obeying their conscience, living for God, and putting their flesh in its proper place (*a spiritual life*), they ignore their conscience and live for themselves by making their purpose of life the gratification of their flesh (*a carnal life*).

This is what is meant by a natural life as opposed to a spiritual life. Living a natural or carnal life is when a person is selfishly living for the gratification of their flesh. It is not that the flesh is itself sinful, but that the choice to live for our flesh is sinful. The natural man is sinful through his own volition. He is a sinner by choice. A sinner chooses to be governed by the desires of his flesh but a saint chooses to be governed by his conscience. The *constitution* of the natural man and the spiritual man is the same but their *choices* or *character* is different.

It is not that our flesh is itself sinful, but that the choice to live for our flesh is sinful.

When a man is truly saved by the power of the gospel, the committal of their will goes from pleasing themselves to pleasing God. True conversion is a turning away from a selfish life to a benevolent life. That is why before conversion occurs there is conviction of sin. This is when the Spirit of God quickens a man’s conscience to condemn his selfishness. The quickening of a man’s conscience (conviction) influences his will to change his moral choices.

The “old man” and “new man” are not descriptions of our constitution but describe our character. The “old man” is a wicked person who chooses to live for himself while the “new man” is a holy person who chooses to live for God

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(Eph. 4:24). Paul said, “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have *put off* the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9). “That ye *put off* concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22). We are told to “put on the new man” (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The phrase “put off” and “put on” means that it is our own responsibility and choice.

To say, “We cannot stop sinning,” or to say, “We cannot keep the law of God,” is to say that we have to live after the flesh or to live a selfish life. It is to say that we cannot deny ourselves, pick up our cross, and follow Christ! Yet this is the very beginning of true conversion (Matt. 16:24; Mk. 8:34; Lk. 9:23). Until a man ceases his commitment to live after his flesh, he is yet to be converted to Jesus Christ. You cannot be devoted to Christ while being devoted to sin at the same time.

When the Bible says that Christians are “partakers of the divine *nature*, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4), again the word “nature” in the Greek means, “a mode of feeling and acting which by long *habit* has become nature.”¹³¹ And it could mean, “constitution or *usage*.”¹³² In this case, it is not that we had a sinful substance or composition and now we have received a divine substance or composition, but that we begin to *use* the faculties of our constitution the same way that God *uses* the faculties of His constitution, that is, the usage of our constitution is now for righteousness like His is. And that we now develop holy *habits* and live a holy life like God does, instead of living a natural or carnal life seeking to gratify our lusts, so that choosing holiness like God does has become our normal mode of acting.

In Summary

Our constitution is not sinful in and of itself. God is the author of our nature and He does not give us a sinful nature. Our constitution could be used as a tool for righteousness or for unrighteousness. Whether our flesh is an instrument of righteousness or unrighteousness depends upon our own free choice to yield it to the service of the one or the other.

Our flesh doesn't make us sin. Neither is our flesh itself sinful. Therefore, we do not need a new flesh to be free from sin. We can be sanctified in this life even if we do not have glorified bodies. Jesus Christ was sinless and had the same type of flesh that we have. He too inherited his human nature from Adam through His earthly mother.

God did not design our nature to be used for sin. God designed us for holiness. Therefore, sin is unnatural. If a person uses their nature for wickedness, they are misusing and abusing their God-given nature. Sin is contrary to the proper function of our spirit, soul, and body, and is contrary to the intention of God in creating these elements of our nature.

Mankind has a constitutional influence towards virtue when our conscience is developed. We naturally know good and evil because God has written his laws upon our conscience. Consequently, we naturally feel good when we do what is right and we naturally feel bad when we do what is wrong. Our conscience is bothered and disturbed by sin but it is satisfied and pleased by virtue. This is the way God has designed our constitution or nature to be.

Feeling convicted is an undesirable state. It is a state of misery. Feeling good is a desirable state. It is a state of happiness. Therefore, even though all men have chosen to sin contrary to their nature, we are naturally influenced

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toward virtue. We have a natural predisposition towards goodness. That is, as far as our conscience and subsequent feelings or sensibilities are concerned. Our sensibilities respond to the knowledge of our mind in regards to the moral quality of the choices of our will, which is why we start to feel bad when we recognize that we have chosen what is wrong.

Regarding our flesh, which is part of our nature, it simply wants gratification. We do not have a constitutional tendency towards “sin” per say because of our flesh. Rather, we have a constitutional influence towards gratification. Our flesh doesn’t care if we gratify it lawfully or unlawfully. It just wants gratification.

Our flesh feels good if we gratify it lawfully or unlawfully, but if we gratify it unlawfully we start to feel the pains of conscience. Our flesh inclines us towards gratification, but our conscience or intelligence inclines us towards virtue. Our conscience tells us to gratify our flesh only through lawful means, to put our flesh in its proper place, and to do the revealed will of God in all our moral activities. But neither our conscience nor our flesh necessitates our choices but our will is free to choose between virtue and vice. We are free to choose between living for God supremely and our neighbor equally, in accordance with our conscience, or to live for ourselves supremely by selfishly pursuing the gratification of our flesh.

God designed us and formed us in the womb and He gave us natural desires which are good in themselves. We make the choice to gratify these desires through natural and lawful means or through unnatural and unlawful means. If we choose to gratify our God-given desires unnaturally and unlawfully, this constitutes sin.

It was the God-given desires which Adam, Eve, and Jesus had, which the devil used as the occasion to tempt

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them. Sin itself does not consist in these involuntary and natural desires, but in the actual committal of the will to gratify these desires unnaturally and unlawfully. Sin and temptation must not be confused. Temptation is not sin, since Jesus was tempted and He was sinless.

Spiritual life, spiritual death, moral character, damnation, and salvation, are not transmitted from parent to child. Our spirits are not inherited or transmitted from our parents but are created by God in the womb. Men become spiritually dead or relationally separated from God when they first choose to sin. Moral character consists of voluntary attributes which are chosen by a person's will. Men are sinners by free choice, not by the necessity of their nature. Damnation is personally deserved because of personal sin. No man is accountable for the sins of another. And salvation requires the personal choice to repent and believe. These things do not depend upon ancestry or heredity but depend upon the choices of an individual's free will.

It makes sense that if God did not design our nature to be used for sin, and if He gives us the constitutional influence to obey Him, that He would also give us the natural ability to avoid sin and choose holiness. Since God wants us to obey His will, He has given us the natural influence and the natural ability to do His will. Our Creator designed us for holiness and He has given us everything necessary for living that type of life.

APPENDIX II

ORIGINAL SIN PROOF TEXTS EXPLAINED

The following is an explanation of the passages commonly used in support of the “born a sinner” or “born sinful” doctrine.

I. “... visiting the iniquities of the Fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me...” (Exo. 20:5)

1. It is strange that this verse would ever be used to suppose the Augustinian doctrine of original sin. If this verse was saying that sin and guilt was hereditary, it would be saying that only the third and fourth generation inherits it. Augustine’s doctrine says that all the children of Adam of all generations inherit his sin and guilt. Therefore, if this verse was saying that sin and guilt was hereditary, it would actually be a refutation of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin.
2. To “the third and fourth generation” means that the actions of a parent have an influence or effect upon his children, but he does not influence or effect all of his generations. One of the greatest influences or

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teachers is example. An example influences those who observe it. One of the great influences upon a child is the example of a parent. When a child see's their father sinning (first generation), or their grandfather sinning (second generation), or their great grandfather sinning (third generation), this has an influence upon their own moral character.

3. We see that a child can imitate the moral character of their parent by the story of Amon who “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, *as his father Manasseh did...*” (2 Kings 21:20) Other examples show us children imitating the moral character of their parents as well. “Nadab.... Did evil in the sight of the Lord, and *walked in the way of his father...*” (1 Kings 15:25-26) “Ahaziah.... did evil in the sight of the Lord, and *walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother...*” (1 Kings 22:51-52) “Amon.... Did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father Manasseh did. And *walked in all the way that his father walked in*, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them...” (2 Kings 21:19-21) “Jehoshaphat.... *walked in the way of Asa his father*, and departed not from it, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:31-32). The second of the Ten Commandments, which says iniquity is visited to the third and fourth generation, is the commandment that forbids idolatry. It forbids bowing down to idols. If a child observes their parent in the worship of an idol, their parent's example could influence them to do likewise. If they bow down in imitation, they partake of their parent's sin.

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4. All throughout the Bible we see how one person's example could lead others into sin (1 Kng. 14:16; 15:26, 30, 34; 16:13, 26; 21:22; 22:52; 2 Kng. 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 21:11, 16; 23:15, Neh. 13:26, Jer. 32:35, Isa. 3:12, Matt. 18:6; Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:2, 1 Cor. 8:9, Heb. 4:11). "But whosoever shall offend [cause to sin] one of these little ones..." (Matt. 18:6). "But take heed lest by any means, this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak" (1 Cor. 8:9). "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Heb. 4:11).
5. The phrase "of them that hate me" is a very important qualification. Children do not share in their father's sin and guilt by inheritance or imputation but by imitation. If the children do not grow up to hate the Lord and bow down to idols as their fathers did, then the iniquity of their fathers is not being visited upon them. If a child does not walk in the sins of their father, they do not share in the guilt of their fathers. God explicitly clarified this when He said, "What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die. *But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right.... Neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel... he is just, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God...* Now lo, if he begets a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth and doeth not such like... he shall not die

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for the iniquity of of his father, he shall surely live... Yet say ye, Why? Doeth not the son bear the iniquity of the fathers? *When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live.* The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Eze. 18:2-6, 9, 19-20).

6. When the Pharisees were seeking to kill Jesus and they admitted that their fathers had killed the prophets, Jesus said to them, “Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers” (Matt. 23:32). They were sharing in the guilt of their fathers by sharing in the sin of their fathers. They were guilty of rejecting and murdering those whom God sent to them just as their fathers were. Children share in the guilt of their fathers by sharing in the sins of their fathers. But if a child does not share in their sin, they will not share in their guilt. No man can possibly be guilty of a sin that he didn’t commit. Under the moral government of God, everyone is accountable for their own deeds (Jer. 17:10; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 11:15; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:11-12; Rev. 22:12).

II. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Ps. 51:5

1. This Scripture is talking about David and his mother. It is not referencing all of humanity and it says nothing about Adam.
2. The sin mentioned is not the sin of Adam, but the sin of David’s mother.

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3. There is a world of difference between being born in sin and having sin born in you, just as there is a world of difference between being born in America and having America born in you. David was formed in sin, but sin was not formed in him.
4. The event spoken of is the *conception* of David, not the *birth* of David. He is not saying that he was born a sinner. David is saying that his mother was in sin when she got pregnant. She was sinning when she conceived him. The conception is the beginning of the pregnancy. The birth is the end of the pregnancy. This passage is talking about the beginning of the pregnancy or the conception.
5. A strong case can be made that this is talking about the defilement of David's mother because she was previously the wife of, or the concubine of, a heathen king.
 - a. David had two half-sisters named Zeruah and Abigail (1 Chron. 2:13-16).
 - b. The father of David's half sisters was not Jesse but Nahash (2 Sam. 17:25).
 - c. Nahash was an Ammonite king (1 Sam. 11:1; 1 Sam. 12:12).
 - d. David's father was Jesse, not Nahash, but David's half sisters were daughters of Nahash. This could explain why Nahash showed kindness toward David (2 Sam. 10:2).
 - e. David's mother was most likely the second wife of Jesse. The first wife of Jesse would have been considered superior to his second wife,

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which had been either the concubine or wife of a heathen king.

- f. This would explain why David's half brothers viewed themselves as superior to David, and why David was considered prideful for thinking he was as good as them (1 Sam. 17:28-30).
 - g. This may explain why David was not called before Samuel the prophet amongst the other sons, as he was viewed as the embarrassment of the family and possibly was an illegitimate child (1 Sam. 16:11).
 - h. David's mother apparently had a good relationship with the Lord (Ps. 86:16; 116:16). But she would have been, in the eyes of Jewish law, considered defiled by her previous relationship with an Ammonite (Num. 25:1,2; Deut. 7:3,4; 1 Kings 11:2-4, Ezra 9:2; Neh. 13:23,25; 2 Cor. 6:14-17).
6. It may simply be that David's mother was not married to Jesse when she became pregnant, or that she was still the concubine of, or married to, Nahash the heathen king when she conceived. This is a possibility.
7. The context of David's prayer of repentance is not consistent with David making an excuse for his adultery by saying, "I was born a sinner. It's not my fault. I was born this way." In true repentance, an individual takes full responsible for their sin and offers no excuses for justification. David was not blaming his sin on his birth. David was simply stating that even the circumstances of his birth were surrounded by sexual sin.

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8. When a sinner repents of his sins, it is not uncommon for them to reflect upon the stronghold that those sins have had throughout their family. A drunkard might reflect upon the drunkenness of his father when he repents of his own drunkenness. They might think to themselves, "I am a drunkard. My father was a drunkard. I come from a whole family of drunkards." In this case, it appears that David reflects upon the sexual immorality of his mother while he is repenting of his own sexual immorality.
9. David said that he was "wonderfully" and "marvelously" made by God in the womb (Ps. 139:13-14). Therefore, he could not have been sinfully made by his mother in the womb. It is not wonderful to be born sinful or marvelous to be created evil. Lest we view David as contradicting himself, or charge the Bible with inconsistency, we cannot interpret Ps. 51:5 to say that David was formed with a sinful nature in the womb or that he was born a sinner. David said that his *mother* conceived him through sin, but *God* created him wonderfully and marvelously. There is no inconsistency or contradiction in that.

III. "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies." Ps. 58:3

1. Psalms is a highly poetic book. Its verses can be taken figuratively or literally depending on the context in which they exist.
2. The context of this passage requires a figurative interpretation as the entire chapter is figurative. All of the surrounding verses are highly poetic.

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- a. This psalm talks of men being like serpents and deaf adders (vs. 4), of God breaking the teeth of the young lions (vs. 6), of men melting away like running water (vs.7), of God bending his bow to shoot arrows (vs. 7), of men passing away as a snail which melts (vs. 8), and of God destroying like a whirlwind (vs. 9).
 - b. It says that children *speak* lies from the womb. Infants do not know how to speak as soon as they are born. Therefore, this passage is poetic and not realistic. It is figurative, not literal.
3. The meaning of this passage seems to be that individuals choose to sin at a very early age, from the dawn of their moral agency, and the first sin which children usually commit is that of lying.

IV. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” Romans 5:19

1. If we are going to apply the first section of the passage unconditionally and universally, we must also apply the second section of the passage unconditionally and universally, since the language for both is the same.
 - A. If the first section means mankind is universally and unconditionally condemned in Adam then the second section would mean that mankind is universally and unconditionally justified through Jesus.
 - B. This verse cannot mean that all men have the imputed sinfulness of Adam because then it

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would be saying that all men have the imputed righteousness of Christ.

- C. Nor can this verse be saying that all men inherit a sinful nature from Adam because then it would be saying that all men inherit a righteous nature from Christ.
2. Paul does not explain how Adam is the occasion of our sin, but simply states that he is. He doesn't explain "why" or "how" but only "that." He gives a fact, not an explanation. Many try to add their own explanation by interposing their personal theories of "federal headship," "imputation," "seminal identity," or "sinful nature," when Paul does not explicitly teach any of these theories.
3. The Calvinistic interpretation of this passage, that all the children of Adam are automatically and unconditionally damned under the wrath of God for the sin of their father, which occurred without their knowledge and without their consent, because Adam was their representative (*Federal Headship*), is a view which is contrary to the explicit justice of God (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kng. 14:6, 2 Chron. 25:4, Jer. 31:29-30, Eze. 18:2-4, Eze. 18:19-20). To represent God as imputing guilt to the innocent is to represent God as arbitrary and unjust.
4. The Augustinian view, that Adam's sin is rightly ours because we were in his loins (*Seminal Identity*), would logically make us guilty, not only of Adam's sin, but of all the sins of all our ancestors. It would mean that we were participants in the repentance, conversion, and salvation of any of our ancestors, since we would have existed in

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their loins as well. We would be punishable, not only for existing in Adam's loins as his semen during his disobedience, but also praiseworthy for existing in Noah's loins as his semen during his obedience.

5. If either the doctrine of *Federal Headship* or the doctrine of *Seminal Identity* were true, God's declaration would be not only meaningless but false when He said, "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father" (Eze. 18:20). Any interpretation of any passage, which makes the Bible contradict itself, cannot possibly be a true interpretation because it violates the law of non-contradiction.
6. The context of Paul's statement shows us that He does not mean that we are damned for Adam's personal sin, and it shows us that He does not mean that we are not damned for our own personal sin.
 - A. Paul said, "...death passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned*" (Rom. 5:12). The reason that Paul assigned for their death was because they personally sinned.
 - B. This must be talking about spiritual death since infants at times physically die and they haven't yet had the chance to sin.
 - C. Paul went on to say, "Nevertheless death reigned from *Adam to Moses*, even over them that had not sinned *after the similitude of Adam's transgression*" (Rom. 5:14). In the time between "Adam to Moses," there were no Ten Commandments, and therefore there could be

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no “transgression.” Paul said “for where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15).

- D. Nevertheless, those in that time were sinning against their own conscience and the light of nature, as Paul said, “For until the law *sin was in the world*” (Rom. 5:13). There was sin in the world even before the law came through Moses, but there was no transgression before the law because men sinned against their own conscience and did not transgress any commandments.
- E. Therefore, they did not sin “after the similitude of Adam’s *transgression*,” or in the same way and manner that Adam did, since Adam violated a direct commandment.
- F. Paul made a very clear distinction between their sin and Adam’s sin. He said “all have sinned” even though it was not similar or like “Adam’s transgression.”
- G. If Paul meant to argue that all men sinned *in Adam* and are consequently damned for the sin *of Adam*, he would not have said that the reason all die is because all have personally sinned, even though their personal sin is different and distinct from the sin of Adam. If we sinned in Adam, then His sin is not distinct or different from our own. If we sinned in Adam, then we did sin after the similitude of Adam’s transgression. If Paul meant to say that we sinned in Adam, Paul would have been arguing for the opposite of what he intended to prove by

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making a distinction between our sin and Adam's sin.

7. When Paul said by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, he was saying that Adam is the occasion, not cause, of our choice to be sinners. Adam's disobedience contributed to our choice to be sinners.
 - A. Paul does not specifically explain how Adam contributed to our choice to sin, but it could be that by Adam's disobedience of eating from the tree, Adam provided all mankind with the *opportunity* of choosing to be sinners, since moral knowledge has been granted to all men.
 - B. A sinner is an individual who voluntarily chooses contrary to their moral knowledge. To say "many were made sinners" means that many have chosen to sin, since a sinner is someone who first chooses to sin. It means men have chosen to do what they knew to be wrong.
 - C. The result of one man's disobedience of eating from the tree of knowledge was that many were made sinners in that men have chosen to be sinners or have chosen to do what they knew was wrong. "And the Lord God said, behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). "Jesus said unto them, if ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see; therefore your sin remaineth" (John 9:41). "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (Jas. 4:17).

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- D. Adam provided the opportunity for our damnation by opening the eyes of mankind, but our damnation requires our own choice to do what we know to be wrong.
8. When Paul said that through Christ many are made righteous, that does not mean that all men are unconditionally made right with God, but that Christ has given us the occasion of salvation and many are made righteous through that occasion.
- A. By Christ's obedience of hanging on the tree, Christ has provided all mankind with the *opportunity* of choosing to be saved. This is because the remission of sin has been offered to all men upon condition of their repentance and faith, and because it is the knowledge of the gospel which draws us and influences us to repentance. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). "...the gospel of Christ... it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). "...without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).
- B. Christ provided the opportunity and influence for our salvation, but our salvation still requires our own choice. Just as damnation has not unconditionally come upon all but depends upon our choice to sin, so also salvation has not unconditionally come upon all but depends upon our choice to be converted.
9. The parallelism and contrast expressed by Paul, in this case, would be clear. Adam's disobedience consisted in eating from the tree. Christ's obedience consisted in hanging on the tree. Adam's

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disobedience resulted in the knowledge of good and evil, which gives us the opportunity to be sinners. Christ's obedience resulted in the knowledge of the gospel, which gives us the opportunity to be made righteous. Condemnation comes upon those who choose to disobey the knowledge of good and evil. Justification comes upon those who choose to obey the knowledge of the gospel.

10. This passage is not teaching that we contributed to Adam's sin or participated in it, but that Adam contributed to our sin. It is not that our actions resulted in Adam becoming a sinner but that Adam's actions resulted in us becoming sinners. That is, the result of his disobedience of eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that we too have now chosen to sin.
11. The word "made" used in these passages is not referring to a constitutional change, but referring to a conditional position which requires the consent of the will. Being a sinner is conditional upon choosing to sin. Likewise, being justified is conditional upon choosing to repent and believe. No man is damned without first his choice to sin and no man is justified without first his choice to repent. Man's damnation and man's justification both require man's free will choice.
12. The idea that moral character can exist without the choice of the will is an absurdity and presupposes a Gnostic moral philosophy. Any interpretation that makes a man sinful or a sinner independent of his choice must be false and unscriptural, as the Bible has repeatedly condemned and contradicted Gnostic moral philosophy. Moral character and

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consequently moral depravity is always voluntary. To be made a “sinner” can mean nothing more than becoming a person who chooses to sin, to become a person who freely chooses to do what is known to be wrong. Otherwise the word “sinner” is void of all real meaning and would fail to actually describe a moral state or express any moral quality.

V. “...by nature children of wrath” Ephesians 2:3

1. The word nature can at times describe a man’s God given constitution (Rom 1:26; 1:31; 2:14; 2:27; 2 Tim 3:3). It must be kept in mind that our constitution is just dirt and is created by God; and therefore, our constitution cannot be sinful in and of itself.
2. The phrase “by nature” does not always mean “by birth” but can at times mean “by custom or habit.” Otherwise, Paul would have taught that the Gentiles were born sinners but the Jews were not. Paul said, “We who are Jews *by nature*, and *not sinners* of the Gentiles” (Gal. 2:15). The word nature can describe a man’s self chosen character, custom, habit, or manner of life (Jer. 13:23; Acts 26:4; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:2-3; Gal 2:14-15; 2 Tim 3:10; 2 Pet 1:4). This is voluntary and has to do with the heart. Therefore, moral character or sinfulness can belong to this type of voluntary and chosen nature.
3. The context of this particular passage is talking about a former manner of life. Paul is addressing a previous lifestyle. He said, "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world... among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the

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desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:2-3). The "natural man" is the same as the "carnally minded." It is someone who lives for the gratification of their flesh. To say that a person is by nature a child of wrath is the same as saying that they are under the wrath of God because they are living for the gratification of their flesh. Through free choice, men create a habit of self-indulgence.

4. To say that they are "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2, 5:6), and to say they are "by nature children of wrath," is essentially to say the same thing. Disobedience is a choice of the will. Those who choose to disobey God are misusing and abusing their natures. Those who choose to disobey God are rightfully under His wrath.
5. That which brings the "wrath" of God is voluntary moral character, not involuntary constitutions. God is not angry with men for possessing the nature which He Himself created them with. God is angry with sinners because of how they have chosen to use the nature that He has given them. God is angry with sinners because of their sinful choices and sinful habits.
6. A *sinful* nature is moral not physical. It is a person's self chosen character and not his God given constitution. A man's heart or will can be sinful, but a man's constitution or body can only be an occasion of temptation. Though continual choices of self-gratification, man has developed a habit of sin.

VI. The Bible explicitly contradicts the doctrine that all men are incapable, sinful, guilty, spiritually dead, and damned because of the original sin of Adam.

1. Children do not inherit the sin or guilt of their parents (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kng. 14:6, 2 Chron. 25:4, Jer. 31:29-30, Eze. 18:2-4, Eze. 18:19-20).
2. Each moral agent is accountable for their own deeds and for their deeds only (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kng. 14:6, 2 Chron. 25:4, Eze. 18:2-4, Eze. 18:19-20, Jer. 17:10; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:5-6; 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 11:15; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 20:11-12; Rev. 22:12).
3. Moral responsibility is limited and proportionate to moral ability (Deut. 6:5, Deut. 10:12, Deut. 30:6, Matt. 22:37, Mk. 12:30, Lk. 10:27, 1 Cor. 10:13).
4. Moral accountability is limited and proportionate to moral knowledge (Matt. 11:21-22, Lk. 12:47-48, Lk. 23:34, Jn. 9:41, Jn. 15:22, Rom. 4:15, Rom. 5:13, Jas. 4:17, Jn. 19:11, Matt. 23:14, Mk.12:40, Lk. 20:47, Jas. 3:1, Matt. 10:15, Matt. 11:24, Mk. 6:11, Lk. 10:12, Lk. 10:14, Heb. 10:26, 2 Pet. 2:21).
5. Infant children are born morally innocent (2 Kng. 21:16; 24:4; Jer. 13:26-27; Ps. 106:37-38; Matt. 18:3) They have not yet “done anything” morally “good or evil” (Rom. 9:11), until the age of accountability, which is the age of reason, when they know right from wrong (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16), and choose to do wrong (Jas. 4:17). Those who don’t know right from wrong cannot be sinful (Jn. 9:41), and infants do not yet know right from wrong (Deut. 1:39; Isa. 7:15-16). Therefore, infants cannot be sinful.
6. All men have chosen to be sinners from their

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- “youth,” which is when they reach the age of accountability (Gen. 8:21; Jer. 22:21; 32:30).
7. All men have been sinners by choice (Gen. 6:12, Ex. 32:7, Deut. 9:12, Deut. 32:5, Jdg. 2:19, Hos. 9:9, Ps. 14:2-3, Isa. 53:6, Ecc. 7:29, Rom. 3:23, Rom. 5:12).
 8. Each individual originates their sin out of their own heart (Ps. 7:14; 58:3; Matt. 12:35, Lk. 6:45, Acts 5:4).
 9. God is the author of our nature. He forms all of us in the womb (Gen. 4:1; Ex. 4:11; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 27:11; 43:1; 43:7; 44:2; 44:24; 49:5; 64:8; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 26:10; 95:6; 127:3; 139:13-14, 16; Ecc. 7:29; 31:15; 35:10; Mal. 2:10; Rom. 9:20; Eph. 3:9; 4:6; Col. 1:16; Jn. 1:3).
 10. Our spirits are not inherited from our parents but God is the creator of our spirits (Num. 16:22; 27:16; Zac. 12:1; Ecc. 11:5; Eze. 18:4; 1 Cor. 6:20; Heb. 12:9).
 11. Men are not born dead in sins but become morally depraved and relationally separated from God when they personally become sinful or personally choose to sin (Eze. 18:4, 20; Isa. 59:2, Lk. 15:24; Rom. 5:12; 5:14; 7:9; 7:11; 8:6; 2 Cor. 5:14; Col. 1:21; 2:13; Rev. 3:1).
 12. God forms us in His image, so even after the fall of Adam man is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Jas 3:9).
 13. Even after the fall of Adam, mankind continued to have the power of free choice (Gen. 4:6-7; Deut. 30:11, 19; Josh. 24:15; Isa. 1:16-20; 55:6-7; Jer. 4:14; Hos. 10:12; Jer. 18:11; 21:8; 26:13; Eze. 18:30-32; 20:7-8; Acts 2:40; 17:30; Rom. 6:17; 2 Cor. 7:1; 2

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Tim. 2:21; Jas. 4:7-10; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rev. 22:17). God calls all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31), and He rightly blames them if they do not repent (Matt. 11:20; 23:37; Mk. 6:6; Lk. 7:30; 13:34; 14:17-18; 19:14; 19:27; Jn. 5:40; Rev. 2:21).

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