

## THE EARLY CHURCH vs. THE GNOSTICS ON MAN'S NATURE

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(Excerpt from "Free Will & Conscience")

The Early Church taught that free will was an essential element of our God given nature [constitution], and that we abuse that free will when we choose to sin. 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." Again 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." 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." Origen said that "the heretics [the Gnostics] introduce the doctrine of *different natures*."

The sin of Lucifer, Adam, Eve, and the rest of the world could not have occurred without free will. Sin implies free will. Sin does not imply a "sinful nature" (*sin is a criminal choice, not a crippled nature*). Lucifer, Adam, and Eve, were all created perfect by God, and sinned without a sinful nature because they had a free will. And the entire world has followed their example, using their free will in the same way. The universality of sin proves the universality of free will and the universality of temptation. The universality of sin does not prove the universality of a sinful nature or that sin is unavoidable. Where causation or necessity exists, neither sin nor temptation can exist.

For the first three hundred years of the Church the Christian's preached that free will was a part of our nature [constitution] and that sin was an abuse of that free will. These Christian leaders earnestly contended against the Gnostics and Manicheans who preached that we sin necessarily out of defect of our inherited nature. The Gnostics and Manicheans taught that our nature did not have any free will and we necessarily sin as a result. For that reason Jerome said, "Free will.... Let the man who condemns it, be condemned."

The orthodox doctrine of the Early Church was that all men inherit *original ability* at birth. John Calvin admitted that "The Greek fathers above others" have taught "the power of the human will." And Calvin also said, "The Latin fathers have always retained the word free will..." Episcopus 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!" 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." Rather, we find that the Early Church affirmed free will while the Gnostic heretics denied it and affirmed a slaved will through a totally corrupted nature. David Bercot, a modern expert on early Christian beliefs and doctrines 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." 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."

Around the time of 370-430A.D. Gnostic and Manichean influence started to actually infiltrate the Christian Church, polluting it with their heretical doctrines. Some of the Church began to embrace and teach the doctrines of necessity and inability. Pelagius was a monk who earnestly yet meekly defended the doctrines of the Early Church, particularly the doctrine of free will. Dr Wiggers said, "All the fathers...agreed with the Pelagians, in attributing freedom of will to man in his present state." Pelagius heroically refuted the Semi-Gnosticism or Semi-Manichaeism which was corrupting Christian theology. And he severely suffered persecution for his stand against the rising heresy.

Pelagius said, "Those who are unwilling to correct their own way of life appear to want to correct nature itself instead." He goes on to say, "And lest, on the other hand, it should be thought to be nature's fault that some have been 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." And also, "Obedience [and disobedience] results from a decision of the mind, not the substance of the body." And as has been shown throughout this treatise, the Early Church Fathers prior to Pelagius taught explicitly the same things regarding sin and free will. Free will was a Christian doctrine while a crippled nature was a Gnostic heresy.

"Certain ones of those [Gnostic's] who hold different opinions misuse these passages. They essentially destroy free will by introducing ruined natures incapable of salvation and by introducing others as being saved in such a way that they cannot be lost." Origen