

FREE WILL  
&  
CONSCIENCE

The Necessary Conditions of  
Moral Accountability  
In God's Moral Government

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This is a theological treatise on the required conditions of moral accountability, or the prerequisites of moral agency, along with their necessary connection to the extent of moral obligation and the proper measure of moral guilt.

The freedom of the will and the knowledge of its proper use are prerequisites to moral responsibility and moral accountability; ability (*free will*) and knowledge (*conscience*) are necessary preconditions of moral agency, being the proper boundaries and limitations of moral responsibility and moral accountability.

## DEFINITIONS OF KEY WORDS AS USED IN THIS TREATISE

**Accountability:** [*account-ability*] Synonymous with liable; the giving of account for the usage a moral agent has made of his or her moral ability; being accountable according to moral ability, conditioned by knowledge of moral obligation.

**Responsibility:** [*response-ability*] Synonymous with moral obligation and requirement. Regarding that which a moral agent ought to voluntarily choose, which an intelligent, free moral agent will be accountable for and judged by; the affirmation of the intelligence, or the demands of the conscience, according to the perceived value of an object that necessitates the requirement of the committal of the will. A responsible individual is an individual able to respond to obligation, one who is capable of fulfilling his requirement.

**Moral Agent:** An individual subjected to moral law or moral government; one subjected to moral obligation and moral accountability upon condition of intelligence and free will, thereby capable of virtue, vice, blameworthiness, and praiseworthiness.

**Free Will:** Synonymous with capable, able, and ability. Relating to contingency and to possibility [*possible-ability*]; the freedom of the will to choose between two or more alternatives; the power of contrary choice; the potency to will one ultimate end with its necessary means, or to will its opposite; the ability of voluntary choice without coercion; a faculty operating under the law of liberty as opposed to the law of necessity or force; to have the option of willing or nilling, receiving or rejecting; a requisite quality, condition, or attribute of personality for moral agency, a condition without which moral agency, moral obligation, moral character, and moral accountability is rendered nonexistent and impossible.

**Unable/Inability:** Synonymous with incapable. Relating to impossibility [*impossible for ability*] or a nonfunctional faculty; without ability, or a crippled ability; when one is forced to choose an object or direction without the option of rejecting it, or without the option of choosing its opposite; without power or capability to properly perform.

**Knowledge:** Synonymous with conscience [*con science* = *with knowledge*]. The reasonable perception of the mind; the affirmation of the intelligence; when morally speaking, pertaining to the idea of what is ethically right and ethically wrong as intuitive to the reason or declared by the conscience; relating to intelligence as a requisite quality or

attribute of personality for moral agency, without which moral agency, moral obligation, moral character, and moral accountability are rendered nonexistent and impossible.

**Prerequisite:** Synonymous with precondition. A preceding or prior condition, requirement, or requisition demanded by logical or natural necessity for a proper function, without which the result would be improper, unjust, impossible, or illogical.

**Moral Character:** Synonymous with moral intention. Relating to moral action or moral conduct; the moral quality of a moral agent, derived from the continual, voluntary choices of the will, not derived from the involuntary states of the agent's nature, or from the physical constitution; the overall analysis of a moral agent's moral conduct or moral state; the moral quality of one's heart or intention; moral character is not to be confounded or confused with constitution, inherited nature, or natural capacities and capabilities; it is neither the substance of the body nor the substance of the soul, but strictly belongs to the voluntary state of the heart or intention.

## **SECTION ONE: MORAL ABILITY OR FREE WILL A Necessary Condition of Moral Accountability**

### **MAN'S MORAL ABILITY AND THE RELATION IT HAS TO THE MORAL LAW**

Moral ability and free will are synonymous terms, being identical in nature and meaning. Inability and free will are antonymous terms, being contrary in nature and meaning. Free will is the power of contrary choice. A man is able to do only what a man is free to do; and a man is free to do only what a man is able to do. Freedom speaks of the contingent, not of the necessitated, of that which was voluntarily chosen under liberty, and not that forced by necessity. A freewill choice is a choice that did not have to be chosen, but that was voluntarily chosen when the person could have chosen the opposite.

To be required or obligated to do better, and to be accountable or judged for failure to do better, one must be capable of doing better. To be capable of doing better, one must be free, or able, to do better. What a man is free to do, a man is capable, or able, of doing. If a man is not capable, then a man is not able or free, and if a man is not a free agent, then he is a necessitated agent who can no more have moral character than a puppet or a machine can have moral character. Moral character relates to voluntary or intentional choices commanded or condemned by the God-given intelligence, knowledge, revelation, or conscience, and moral accountability relates to moral character. Therefore, what a man is accountable for, he must not have been necessitated to do, but must have voluntarily committed.

A man is responsible only for that which he is intentionally the cause of, and a man is only the intentional cause of that which is voluntary, since what is voluntary is intentional, and what is intentional is voluntary. And since moral character consists only in free, voluntary, intentional choices, and moral accountability is according to moral character, a man is only accountable for his free, voluntary, intentional choices.

Thomas Chalmers said, "The morality of any act is with its willfulness." And then again, "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."<sup>1</sup>

Respecting the moral government of God (Isa. 9:6-7), or the ruling and reigning of God in the realm of morality over moral agents (Lk. 17:21), in which God is the Governor (Matt. 2:6), the moral commandments of God never exceed the moral ability of men. The

commands of God are directed to the ability of man, being instructions as to how a man is to use the liberty of his will, or how a man is to properly use his ability. Since God's moral commandments are directions for man's moral ability, as to how to use this God-given ability, God's moral requirements never exceed this God-given moral ability. Since God's Moral Government is the governing of man's moral agency (*through persuasion and influence, not through force or necessity*), God's moral commandments never can, never do, and never will exceed man's moral ability or moral agency. Because God's commandments are directions to man, as to how a man is to use his ability, God's commandments are in fact a declaration or a revelation of what man can do and what man should do.

The moral law of God's Moral Government is: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37) and "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39). The moral law of God, in essence, is the law of love, love being the total and complete fulfillment of the whole of the law (Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8).

The law of love, or the life of love, is commanded, and the law of selfishness, or the life of selfishness, is condemned. Love is not an involuntary emotion or feeling, but it is a voluntary, impartial committal of the will towards the highest well-being of all (Jn. 3:16; 15:13); it is the intention of the heart, and is synonymous with "good will" (Lk. 2:14; Eph. 6:7; Php. 1:15), and is the same as benevolence.

If love is truly love, it must of necessity manifest itself into action and conduct whenever possible and whenever necessary, performing the required means to secure the end of the well-being of others. The "readiness to will" results in the "performance" or in the "doing" (2 Cor. 8:11). If the inside of the cup (*inward intention*) is first clean, then the outside of the cup (*outward actions*) will be clean as well (Matt. 23:26), because what is inside will manifest in what is outside whenever possible. A good tree can only produce good fruit, while a bad tree can only produce bad fruit (Matt. 7:17), because the heart, or intention, determines the outward life (Matt. 12:35; Lk. 6:45).

Love, good will, or benevolence satisfies the whole of the law (Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8), but selfishness or self-centeredness is a total and complete violation of the whole of the law (Jas. 2:10). To break one letter of the law is to break the whole spirit of the law; which the entire letter of the law is derived from. The letter of the law is derived from the spirit of the law; therefore, to break one letter of the law is to break the whole spirit of the law. He that breaks the one breaks the whole. Therefore, to "offend in one point" is to be "guilty of all" (Jas. 2:10).

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. 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. It is possible to keep the law because we are capable, and we are capable because it is possible to keep the law; our God-given commandments and our God-given ability directly correspond with each other. 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 highest that our ability is capable of is all that the law of God commands, no more and no less. 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, “with all thy.”

Clemens of Alexandria said that the call of “the Divine word... requireth but that which is according to the ability and strength of every one.”<sup>2</sup> Gordon Olson said, “The words ‘all thy’ express our obligation. It is the exertion of ‘thy’ personality and ability that is required – ‘all’ this ability.”<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> Again Finney said that the law “simply requires us to use what strength we have. They 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.”<sup>5</sup> And 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.”<sup>6</sup>

God commands that you use “thy heart” and “thy soul” and “thy mind.” Clement of Alexandria said, “What the commandments direct are in our own power...”<sup>7</sup> 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 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.

Man’s moral ability is naturally and obviously limited by moral possibilities; therefore, God’s moral commandments never require moral

impossibilities, for that which is morally impossible cannot be morally commanded. God cannot morally demand a moral impossibility. Augustine said, “God does not demand impossibilities.”<sup>8</sup> Charles Finney said, “The law of God requires nothing more of any human being, than that which he is at present naturally able to perform, under the present circumstances of his being.”<sup>9</sup>

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; each one establishes and determines the limitations and boundaries of the other, and since man will be judged by the commandments, the extent of man’s accountability will be 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.

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.

All sin is, therefore, inexcusable since all sin is voluntary and avoidable; that which brings moral guilt is always voluntary and avoidable. What is unavoidable is excusable, but what is inexcusable must be avoidable. What is punishable must be voluntary, and what is voluntary must be avoidable. What is punishable must be vice, and what is vice must be voluntary. Only sin can be punishable, and only what is voluntary and avoidable can be sin. Therefore, sin is inexcusable and punishable because sin is voluntary and avoidable, and it is voluntary and avoidable because God has given man free will.

Justin the 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 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.”<sup>10</sup>

Charles Finney said, “Moral agency implies the possession of free-will. By free-will it is intended the power of choosing or refusing to choose, in every instance, in compliance with moral obligation. Free-will implies the power of originating and deciding our own choices, and

of exercising our own sovereignty, in every instance of choice upon moral questions, of deciding or choosing in conformity with duty or otherwise in all cases of moral obligation . . . unless the will is free, man has no freedom; and if he has no freedom he is not a moral agent, that is, he is incapable of moral action and also of moral character. Free-will then, in the above defined sense, must be a condition of moral agency, and, of course, of moral obligation.”<sup>11</sup>

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 alternation.”<sup>12</sup> L. D. McCabe said, “Accountability necessitates the origination of choice between obedience and disobedience.”<sup>13</sup> And again, “A free, original, independent, conscious choice between good and evil, is the *sine qua non* [condition] of every act that involves morality.”<sup>14</sup>

A man is only accountable for his moral character. His moral character is his heart or intention (*which necessarily manifests into action whenever possible*). A man’s intention is within the realm of his control (*or else it cannot be his*). Intention must be voluntary, and what is voluntary must be avoidable. Therefore, a man is only accountable for his intentional, voluntary, avoidable choices or intentions.

God holds men accountable to their responsibility. What God requires of man God expects from men, what God expects from men is possible for men, and what is possible for men is the same as what men are capable of. Accountability implies requirement, requirement implies expectation, expectation implies possibility, and possibility implies capability.

Man is accountable for choosing sin only because he is capable of choosing righteousness over sin. A man is accountable for choosing darkness over the light only because he is capable of choosing the light over darkness. A man is accountable for disobedience because he is capable of choosing obedience over disobedience. A man is accountable for rejecting Jesus only because he is capable of following Jesus. A man is responsible and accountable according to that which is within his realm of control, according to that which is within his power. A man will be judged by his ability, no more and no less, since the commands of God require nothing more than that which is within man’s moral ability, that which is within the realm of moral possibilities.

Consider the great disappointment of God over mankind (Gen. 6:5-6, Ps. 81:13, Eze. 6:9). Now consider the logical implications of disappointment. Disappointment requires expectation, and reasonable

expectation requires capabilities or potential. Disappointment arises when failed expectations, which were based upon potential possibilities, occur. God's great disappointment with mankind is rooted in mankind's great potential, moral capabilities, or open possibilities, which were given to mankind by God Himself. And if God's disappointment comes from God's expectations, and if God legislates according to His expectations, that is, if God's requirements are the same thing as His expectations, then all of God's requirements are perfectly matched by mankind's capabilities or potential because God's expectations are according to man's capabilities or potential. Once again we clearly see that God's requirements never exceed man's capabilities. What God genuinely requires God must genuinely desire. And if God genuinely desires it, then God will enable man to do it.

Irenaeus said, "God made man free from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the commandments of God voluntarily."<sup>15</sup> If God does not grant man the genuine ability to obey it must be because God does not genuinely want man to obey. But if God genuinely wants to be obeyed it must be understood that God grants man the ability to genuinely obey. If God wants man to voluntarily obey, God must make it possible for man to voluntarily obey since it is in His power to make this ability available to man. That which He requires He supplies the ability to achieve. If God commands the parting of the red sea, God will supply the power to do it (Ex. 14:26-27). If God commands moral perfection of heart from men (Gen. 17:1, Deut. 18:13, Matt. 5:48) God supplies the ability for it to be achieved (1 Cor. 10:13). Those whom God holds morally responsible and morally accountable are those whom God has made or created morally free, morally capable, or morally able with open possibilities and natural potential.

So man has a free will because man was made with one, because man was made in the image of God. Winkie Pratney said, "Free choice is a reality with man because it is a reality in God."<sup>16</sup> Gordon Olson said, "God designed man's constitution, with its profound abilities and reactions, to enable him to achieve great heights of comprehension and moral nobility in the imitation of his Creator."<sup>17</sup>

## **RELATION OF THE MORAL CHARACTER OF GOD TO THE MORAL LAW OF GOD**

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."<sup>18</sup>

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 (Ex. 5:16). The moral fault was with the commander, not with the command breakers. The infallible testimony of Divine Inspiration declares that when an impossible law is broken, the problem is with the law itself and with the one who issued the law.

That which is a vice in Pharaoh would not and 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 of one must mar the character of all, and that which is a blemish to one must be a blemish to all.

Tertullian said, God granted man the 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 [or demerits] of his free will.”<sup>19</sup>

God does not command obedience when He gives 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. The fault would, according to the Divine Scriptures, be with the commander, not with the command breaker, when the commands are broken. Sin would ultimately be the fault of the one who gave the unreasonable 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); therefore, transgression of the impossible law is the fault of the law itself, and the fault of the one who decreed the law. Sin, then, would not and could not be the fault of the one who broke the law that naturally could not be kept. The one who decrees an impossible law must be the ultimate author and actual 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 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. Sinners are misusing and abusing their God-given free will. Tertullian said that the person who chooses to sin chooses to “make a bad use of his created constitution”.<sup>20</sup>

God’s moral government, or moral Kingdom, is not a tyrannical one, but a reasonable and just one. God does not condemn the incapable for failure to perform the impossible, but condemns the able, those “who have received the law . . . but have not kept it” (Acts 7:53), for failure to

perform the possible, for voluntarily and freely choosing darkness over the light (Jn. 3:19). Sinners abide under the wrath of God for being criminals by choice, not for being cripples 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's execution of condemnation is justly exerted 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 hadn'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, well within their ability of will, to obey and conform to all of their moral obligations and requirements.

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?'"<sup>21</sup>

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 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."<sup>22</sup>

To assume that God commands the impossible at the threat of eternal torment is to directly slander the character of God; it is to 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, but only for failure to perform moral possibilities, for being unwilling, but not 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's 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 own sin. Sinners cannot blame God or His laws for sin. God blames them, that is, He blames their own will for their own sin.

John Fletcher asked "if you take away free will, how does he [God] judge the world?"<sup>23</sup> Justin Martyr said, "Unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions."<sup>24</sup> 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."<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup> 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."<sup>27</sup> 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."<sup>28</sup> Again he said, "It is by one's own fault that he does not choose what is best."<sup>29</sup> 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."<sup>30</sup>

The Bible exalts God and glorifies His moral character, and says that, because of God's eternal character, He never, in any circumstance, allows anyone to be tempted beyond his or her moral ability. A sin-hating, sin-punishing God provides a way for all sin to be avoided in all cases, always, without exception, providing a way of escape so that we are all, always, able to obey instead of disobey. This is an immutable principle of justice rooted in the immutable character of God. "There has 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 to escape, that ye may be *able to bear it*" (1 Cor. 10:13). Origen said, "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear.' That is, each one is tempted in proportion to the amount of his strength or power of resistance."<sup>31</sup>

Temptation would not be tempting if it were forced; what is forced cannot be considered temptation. Temptation is the inclination towards one choice over the other, the influence towards a decision or

direction. Temptation is not the forcing of one choice over the other; it is not the necessitating of one decision or direction. Force, or causation, is not the nature of temptation, but inclination or influence is. Causation and influence are different by nature. Temptation can only respect contingent volitions, relating to that which may or may not occur, but temptation cannot respect certain or necessitated volitions, relating to that which will and must occur. So if man is not a free agent, if man is not an individual personality possessing free will, man could never suffer temptation. And if man never faced temptation, man could never create a moral character. And if man did not have a moral character, man could not be accountable for anything.

Where sin is forced, there could neither be sin nor temptation. But where there is sin and where there is temptation, there must be the freedom of the will. All men are tempted to sin, but no man is forced to sin, because all men are capable of not sinning. If this were not true, neither temptation nor sin could exist for the sinner or for the saint. For sin to be sin, for temptation to be temptation, and for a person to have moral guilt, sin must be voluntary and avoidable, never necessitated or forced. For temptation (*or motive*) to be temptation, it must be only influence, never causation. And so “temptation” is “common” to all men, because the power of contrary choice is common to all men. All men have the freedom of their wills, and so the Scripture is undeniably true that “ye are able” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Charles Finney said, “Now a moral agent must be able, in the proper sense of this term, to resist every degree of moral influence, or else he cannot be a moral agent. His action must be responsible action, and therefore must be performed of his own free will and accord; no power can interpose in such measure as to overbear or interfere with his own responsible agency.”<sup>32</sup> We are never overpowered by internal or external temptation, we are never forced by internal or external motives, because God always provides a way of escape; He never allows it to be beyond our ability, so that we are always “able” to resist and escape. So sin is always voluntary and requires the consent of the will (Job 11:14; Ecc. 11:14; Matt. 23:26; Rom. 6:12). Clement of Alexandria said, “Sin, then, is voluntary on my part.”<sup>33</sup>

1 Corinthians 10:13 directly and explicitly depicts the eternal character of God as it relates to man’s ability and temptations. God is always just towards all men, faithful at all times. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). Because of the eternally holy, eternally good, eternally just character of God, the commandments of God are never tyrannical or burdensome, but are always moral and reasonable, and are always able to be kept by all who are obligated to keep them.

“God is faithful,” therefore “ye are able” (1 Cor. 10:13). “Able” signifies possibility, power or ability. The only reason “ye are able” is

because “God is faithful.” To declare that “ye are not able” would require the declaration that “God is not faithful.” God’s character determines what God commands, and what God commands is always in accordance to our ability; the moral law always respects our ability by brilliantly declaring “with all thy” (Matt. 22:37).

Since God’s moral character determines what God publicly declares as a command, then when dealing with the moral commandments of God, we are directly dealing with the moral character of God, and only subsequently dealing with the capabilities of men. The moral character of God is the primary issue while the moral capacities of men are only the secondary or necessarily connected issue.

*(I properly recognize that God’s commandments are ultimately derived from the intrinsic value of His well-being, seeing that His well-being is naturally and eternally of intrinsic value, whose likeness we were made in the image of (Gen. 1:26). Treatment is determined by value (Lk. 12:7). God commands that which promotes the highest well-being of all, and condemns that which demotes the highest well-being of all (Deut. 6:3, 24; 10:12-13; Jer. 7:23; 32:39; Lk. 6:9), commanding the means that are relatively good and condemning the means that are relatively harmful (Matt. 22:37; Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27; Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8), in relation to or in accordance with the end which is intrinsically good (well-being) and the end which is intrinsically evil (ill-being) (Lk. 16:25).)*

*All moral agents necessarily presuppose the intrinsic value of well-being, their consciences condemning that which is harmful to others while commanding that which is helpful to others. God morally requires of men that which is good for all, and forbids that which is harmful to all, except in those cases when a moral agent forfeits that right by disregarding the intrinsic value of the well-being of others, therefore bringing upon himself the deserved punishment of torment. Because God commands the good and forbids the evil, we can never question the wisdom and goodness of God’s moral commandments without questioning the character and intelligence of the Commander.*

*God’s will acts voluntarily in accordance with His intelligence, His character being derived from His will, which voluntarily declares and determines His public and universal commandments. So while the ultimate foundation of God’s commandments is found in His eternal nature, that is, in the intrinsic and eternal value of His well-being, as demanded by His Divine Intelligence, it is still properly true that “God’s character determines God’s commandments,” that is, God’s character ultimately determines what He voluntarily, publicly declares, and universally requires, of all moral agents. Therefore, to attack the goodness and reasonableness of God’s commandments is to directly attack the character of God; it is to accuse God of not being good and reasonable in His moral government.)*

God declares, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30). “His commandments are not grievous.” (1 Jn. 5:3) Because His yoke, burden, and commandments are easy and light, and are not grievous, “ye are able” to keep them. To say “ye are not able” is to say His yoke, burden, and commandments are hard, heavy and burdensome, which would be contrary to the direct and explicit declarations God has given of Himself. The one who misrepresents the commandments must of necessity misrepresent the Commander.

Therefore, the declaration of the ability of man is an exaltation of the character of God, and the renunciation of the ability of man is a denunciation of the character of God. The one who rejects the ability of man thereby slanders and undermines the wisdom of God’s Divine Intelligence and the goodness of God’s Divine Character.

### **THE CONDITION OF THE MORAL CHARACTER OF SINNERS, AND THE CONDITION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL FACULTIES OF SINNERS**

We must distinguish between what sinners *can do* and what sinners *actually do*. All sinners can obey God but, until conversion, they don’t obey God. The wicked are totally *morally* deprived by choice, that is, they never do anything righteously because what they do (even if they pray and read their bibles) is done supremely selfishly and not for the glory of God. The bible describes the moral condition of unconverted sinners as being totally and completely morally deprived, as never doing any good at all, entirely destitute of all virtue, bankrupt of all real righteousness, and deplete of all true holiness (Matt. 6:22-24; 7:17-18; Lk. 11:34-36; Rom. 3:10-18; 2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 1:15-16; Jas. 3:11-12).

But total *moral* depravity is not synonymous with *constitutional* or *metaphysical* inability; inability meaning that the will is no longer free to make the contrary choice, that the faculty of the will is crippled or impaired. An important distinction must be made between the condition of the *moral character* of sinners and the condition of the *constitutional faculties* of sinners. Moral character and constitutional capabilities must not be confused; they are not identical. For a sound theology, one must clearly distinguish between that which is constitutional or metaphysical and that which is moral or ethical. Moral depravity is not the absence of moral ability. Moral depravity is the voluntary abuse of moral ability.

L. D. McCabe said, “In self-originating volition we locate the origin of [moral] character.”<sup>34</sup> Julius Mueller said, “Character is formed by internal decisions. Moral Character is of moral significance only so far as it has been produced by an act which is simply internal, that is the free inclination of the will.”<sup>35</sup> Moral character absolutely cannot exist without moral agency, and moral agency absolutely cannot exist without constitutional faculties, specifically, as relating to this discourse, the freedom of the will (*and conscience*). Both the morally virtuous and the

morally depraved conditions of men, which make up their moral character, are dependent upon the functional faculty, or uninjured freedom of the will. Where this freedom does not exist, moral agency, moral responsibility, and therefore moral character, good or bad, cannot exist. And where moral character does not exist, moral accountability cannot exist.

Individuals that are totally morally depraved still maintain the ability of choosing the good over evil; they still have the faculty of freewill. Moral depravity is not a crippled faculty, but it is the abuse, or improper function, of an existing, functioning faculty. Sin is not the inability to do right, but is an abuse of the liberty of the ability; sin is an unwillingness to use the faculty of the will rightly, to use the gift of free will according to the intended purpose of the faculty Creator and Designer. Moral depravity is depravity of *character* not of *constitution*.

God has given all men the gift of free will and the gift of conscience so that man can choose to have the same moral character God chooses to have. God Himself uses His free will to obey His own Eternal and Divine Conscience (Gen 3:22, 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:16). Free will is a gift from God so that man could rightly choose the good over the evil. Man has no strength or ability of *his own*, but only the strength or ability God *supplies*, namely free will granted at creation. Sin consists in voluntarily choosing wrongly, opting for the evil over the good. Man could not be capable of evil if he were not capable of good; neither could man be capable of good if he were not capable of evil. True virtue and true blameworthiness consist in that which is voluntarily chosen, not in that which is necessitated. That which is necessitated cannot have moral character, but moral character can only be in connection with voluntarily choices, which choices are morally right or morally wrong. Moral character is derived from choices, and choices are derived from free will.

Inability to do right is not, and could not be, sin, for inability to do good does not allow for the existence of character or guilt; it does not allow for voluntary transgression in which sin alone consists. Inability to do good would inevitably be the inability to sin, for sin is the voluntary choice, or voluntary violation, of God's reasonable and good law (1 John 3:4). Sin consists in the voluntary moral choice to choose the evil over the option of good, in the voluntary attitude of the heart, in the voluntary moral quality of the intention. Inability to sin would inevitably be the inability to be virtuous, for virtue consists in voluntarily choosing the good over the option of evil. What a man does out of inability a man does involuntarily, and moral character is derived from voluntarily choices alone. Therefore, inability for vice means inability for virtue, and inability for virtue means inability for vice, because virtue and vice are voluntary choices. Character (*good or bad*) cannot be derived from anything involuntary.

So heart obedience is possible only insofar as heart disobedience

is possible. Voluntary submission is possible only insofar as voluntary rebellion is possible. The possibility of one cannot exist without the possibility of the other. A man is capable of being good only insofar as he is capable of being evil, and he is capable of being evil only insofar as he is capable of being good. God gave man free will, with the power to disobey, so that man could genuinely obey from his own heart, so a man could genuinely love with free will.

Since sin does not consist in the inability to choose good over evil, but rather in the voluntarily choosing of evil over the good, an unwillingness to do rightly, and not an inability to do rightly, sinners truly *deserve* hell, not because of any involuntary inability, but rather because of their voluntary unwillingness. They are criminals through their own will, and not cripples by nature or victims of Adam. They are sinners by *choice*, not by birth, by constitution, by nature, or anything else external to their own free will. Their own will is the reason for their sin (Isa. 14:13-14; Lk. 19:14, 27; Jn. 5:40). They are rebels who *choose* to rebel (Ps. 5:10; Isa. 1:2; Eze. 2:3). They have chosen to *become* sinners or to *make themselves* 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). Men *choose* to *become* dead in their sins (Rom. 5:12, Rom. 5:14, Rom. 7:9, Rom. 7:11, Col. 2:13).

Charles Finney said that this was “a very different view of total [moral] depravity from” those “which regards depravity as physical, or constitutional, or as belonging to the substance of the body or mind.” But rather, “all depravity” is “voluntary, as consisting in voluntary transgression. As the sinner’s own act. Something of his own creation. That over which he has a perfect control, and for which he is entirely responsible.”<sup>36</sup>

And so it must be distinctly understood that total moral depravity is respecting moral character, but it is not at all any sort of total inability respecting the capabilities of the faculties of the personality. Total moral depravity is rather the utter and absolute unwillingness to choose good over evil. A man who is totally morally depraved still has the capacity of good, just as the man totally morally righteous has the capacity of evil, because righteousness and wickedness are respecting voluntary choices or voluntary character and not at all the capabilities or incapacibilities of the faculties of the personality.

The wicked and the righteous both have the faculty of free will imbedded in their personality, and it must exist as long as they themselves exist. Therefore, the righteous man can turn away from his righteousness and choose sin (Eze. 18:24), and “the wicked” can “turn from all his sins” and choose righteousness (Eze. 18:21). Jesus taught that a man can make up his mind to disobey and then later change his mind and choose to obey, and a man can make up his mind to obey and then later change his mind and choose to disobey (Matt. 21:28-30). The

character, or choices, of an individual can always change, because the faculty of the will always remains intact and functional, always operating under the law of liberty, always possessing moral freedom.

A man is unable only in the sense that he is unwilling, but not in the sense that he does not possess the needed and necessary faculties. He is always free to choose contrary to his previous choice. If this were not true, neither falling from a state of perfection (*like Lucifer, Adam, or Eve*), nor recovering from a fallen state of sin (*like the converted*), could be possible at all. Neither falling, nor converting, nor backsliding, would be, or could be, possible at all, if a man could not choose contrary to his previous choice, if the faculty of the will was not functional.

But a man is unable only in that he is unwilling, but not in that he is incapable in respect to his faculty. He is unable only because of his character, because of his choices, because of his will, not because of his constitutional faculties or natural capabilities. A man who willingly chooses sin cannot willingly choose righteousness, as he is unwilling to choose righteousness while he is willingly choosing sin (Rom. 8:5-8), and a man who willingly chooses righteousness cannot willingly choose sin, as he is unwilling to choose sin, while he is willingly choosing righteousness (1 Jn. 3:8). But the faculty of the will is always free to choose, always maintaining the power of contrary choice. The faculty of the will can, at all times, either submit itself to the sensibilities, that is, to the lusts of the flesh (1 Jn. 2:16), or to the truth and instruction of God revealed to the intelligence by the Spirit of grace (Gal. 5:16; Tit. 2:11). The will is free because it always has these two opposite choices, to do what *feels good for self*, or to do what one *knows is good for others*.

Since sin does not consist in the inability to choose good over evil, total moral depravity is not, and could not be, total inability or a crippled constitutional faculty. Total moral depravity simply could not exist without moral ability. Character is not capabilities. That which is constitutional and that which is ethical are completely separate in nature. A proper distinction between the two is vital to a biblically sound and accurate theological view of sin, sinners, God, and His government.

### **FREE MORAL AGENCY CONTINUED EVEN AFTER THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE**

Irenaeus said, “God has always preserved freedom and the power of self-government in man.”<sup>37</sup> Origen said, “...the faculty of free will is never taken away...”<sup>38</sup> Adam has not made all men morally crippled, but God has created all men morally capable.

Free moral agency did not terminate with the fall of Adam and Eve when they ate from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:9). Eating from the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” did not *eliminate* or *eradicate* moral agency, which would thus eliminate or eradicate moral accountability, but it rather *expanded* and *enlarged* it.

The “eyes of them both were opened” (Gen. 3:7), and they became like God, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:22). With this increase of moral knowledge came the increase of moral obligation and moral accountability. The increase of moral knowledge never terminates moral agency or moral accountability, but rather enhances and enlarges it.

God Himself addressed Cain as a free moral agent, capable of both good and evil even after the fall of Adam and Eve: “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 well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Gen. 4:6-7). “If” signifies open possibilities in the moral realm. Cain had no reason to be “wroth,” he had no reason for his “countenance” to be “fallen,” because his free moral agency still remained intact. His moral capabilities remained functional. He had a contingent choice that he could make to do well or to do it not. He still had the ability to “rule over” sin instead of allowing sin to rule over him (Job 11:14; Ecc. 11:10; Rom. 6:12); both required the consent of his will.

So even after the fall of Adam and Eve, mankind maintained the ability to “doest well” and to “doest evil” and to “rule” over sin. The contingent choice or open possibility to do good or evil, to be righteous or to be wicked, still remained a part of man’s realm of capability. Cain and Abel, who had the same exact parents, who inherited the same exact nature, both born after the fall, were still free moral agents. But one was righteous and the other was wicked because of their voluntary choices. Abel’s works were “righteous” (1 Jn. 3:12), and Abel himself was “righteous” (Matt. 23:35), but Cain was wicked and did evil works (1 Jn. 3:12). Cain could have done well just as his blood brother Abel did; he could have done righteously and could have been righteous, and he could have been acceptable to God. He was not forced to sin by circumstances, by fate, by nature, by his parents, or by God. His will still operated under the law of liberty, not the law of necessity. He had the contingent choice of two moral possibilities, and he voluntarily selected one over the other. Therein is the first condition of moral accountability – the moral ability or the power of contrary choice.

Because free will is a faculty of the human personality created in the image of God, this faculty can remain uninjured or unharmed even after the physical fall of man’s physical constitution. For the faculty of free will is not derived from the physical body, but is an essential element of the personality of man. The human personality was made in the image of the *immaterial* or *invisible* God, whose personality, nature, or constitution consists in intelligence, free will, and emotions. These faculties of the personality or capabilities of nature must exist as long as the person exists. Neither of these faculties derived their existence from the physical constitution of man, God is immaterial and invisible and His nature possesses all of these faculties. Therefore, mankind can maintain

the functional faculty of free will, even with a fallen body, just as those beings who don't have a body still have the faculty of free will. As Origen said, "A soul is always in possession of free will – both when it is in the body and when it is out-side of it."<sup>39</sup> Moral accountability is therefore preserved even after the fall of Adam, with all of its physical effects hereditary to his posterity, because moral ability is preserved after such an event. And even though all men misuse their free will when they sin, they still have free will when they sin, otherwise they could not sin at all.

### **GOD'S MORAL LAW, OR MORAL GOVERNMENT, ADDRESSES ALL MORAL AGENTS AS FREE, APPEALING TO THEIR MORAL CAPABILITIES**

Those that are totally morally depraved sinners still maintain the constitutional faculty of free will, which is the power of contrary choice. Throughout the Bible we see that God addresses the moral ability of those that are totally morally depraved. God often appeals to the free will of sinners to turn away from sin and be converted.

#### **God appealed to the *natural ability* of men in the Old Testament:**

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

"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);

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15);

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. 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. 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. 1:16-20);

"Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye 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" (Isa. 55:6-7);

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground" (Hos. 10:12);

“And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death” (Jer. 21:8);

“Turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions . . . make you a new heart and a new spirit . . . For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Eze. 18:30-32);

“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);

### **God appealed to the *natural ability of men in the New Testament:***

“Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40);

“God . . . commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30);

“Ye have obeyed from the heart” (Rom. 6:17);

“Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh” (2 Cor. 7:1);

“If a man therefore purge himself” (2 Tim. 2:21);

“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);

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth” (1 Pet. 1:22);

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

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 shows that a man can change his mind about sinning even 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; he can will contrary to his previous will, he can choose contrary to his habit of choice, because the will is at all times a free faculty with the power of contrary choice. If this were not true, this parable could not be true, and Christ would be

found a liar, which He most certainly is not. So both sinners and saints have a free will. Both sinners and saints can change their mind. Those who make up their mind to sin still have the ability to change their mind about sinning (repent), that is, they can make up their mind to sin no more. The will is always free so choices can always change. (Eze. 3:20, Eze. 33:19)

Basil said, “What is forced is not pleasing to God, but what is done from a truly virtuous motive: and virtue comes from the will, not from necessity... the will depends on what is within us; and within us is free will.”<sup>40</sup> Forced obedience and forced disobedience are contradictions in terms. Obedience and disobedience must be willful, voluntary, and intentional; they must be from the heart (Matt. 12:35, 15:18-19, Rom. 6:17).

Augustine 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.”<sup>41</sup> And again, “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.”<sup>42</sup> And again, “...we sin voluntarily and not by necessity.”<sup>43</sup>

The unconverted are totally responsible for their impenitent state, for their hardness against the truth (Rom. 2:5), as all sinful men are completely responsible for their immoral state, because of the freedom of their will. God, therefore, appeals in Scripture to the will of man to turn away from sin and to turn to Him, to be completely and utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit for instruction and guidance into all the ways of righteousness and holiness, to be entirely dependent upon His grace and mercy for the forgiveness of all repented sins. The only thing that keeps sinners from the forgiveness of God is an unwillingness to turn from sin and to seek after Him (Matt. 7:7; 2 Pet. 3:9).

The Bible’s doctrine of salvation is the doctrine of synergism not monogism. Conversion requires a free and voluntary decision on the part of the sinner to yield and submit to the truth of God presented by the Spirit. So God is not to be blamed for the impenitence of men. Augustine said, “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.”<sup>44</sup> Ambrose said, “God affords to all the means of recovery, that whoever perishes may impute his own destruction to himself...”<sup>45</sup> Jerome said, “Even to those who shall be wicked, God gives power to repent and turn to him”<sup>46</sup> The only thing that keeps men back from God is their own *unwillingness*, not any *inability* (Matt. 11:20-21, Matt. 23:37, Mk. 6:6, 7:30, 13:34, 14:17-18, 19:14, 19:27, Jn. 5:40, Rev. 2:21).

## THE CRIMINALITY OF TRANSGRESSION: SINNERS ARE REBELS NOT VICTIMS

If man did not have free will, but had a nature that did not allow for contingent or alternative choices, it would follow that punishment could not be justly executed upon anyone for their choices. Those who believe in punishing different types of choices, like the choice of being selfish instead of loving, are themselves presupposing the existence of contingent or alternative choice, that is, they themselves are assuming the freedom of the will. Unless they assumed the existence of free choices they could not affirm the justice of punishing choices.

Any man who has ever regretted his past actions, or had remorse over his past sins, has presupposed the freedom of the will. Regret and remorse necessarily assume the contingent element of reality, consciously or unconsciously affirming the contingency of moral action. If this were not so, regret and remorse could never exist in the minds of men. Conversion requires such regret and remorse, so conversion requires the presupposition or belief (*conscious or unconscious*) of the freedom of the will. All men assume it, especially all converted men, since it is absolutely necessary for conversion, necessary for the acknowledgment of personal responsibility and guilt.

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. “The reason you were angry with yourself was that you knew you were capable of better things, but did not do them.” Likewise, “God is angry with the wicked every day because He knows what they are capable of and to what depth they have fallen.”<sup>47</sup>

Jesus Christ taught that punishment would be inflicted upon the unwilling, not upon the unable. Jesus said, “But those mine *enemies*, which *would* not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” (Luke 19:27). The enemies of God are those who are willfully in rebellion against His reign. And it is in that willfulness that they rightly deserve punishment. Jesus did *not* say, “But those mine enemies, which *could* not have me reign over them...slay them before me.” But rather, it was those who *would* not have Jesus reign in their lives that He will righteously and justly slay on Judgment Day.

The justice of punishing disobedience necessitates the existence of the possibility of obedience. Only what is voluntarily chosen, and not what is forced by nature or necessity, is justly punishable. The same injustice that would exist if someone was punished for the color of their skin would also exist if someone was punished for some sort of necessitated or involuntary sin. One can be justly punished for their voluntary character, but cannot be justly punished for their involuntary constitution.

Justin Martyr said, “Every created being is so constituted as to be capable of vice and virtue. For he can do nothing praiseworthy, if he had not the power of turning either way.” And, “unless we suppose man has the power to choose the good and refuse the evil, no one can be accountable for any action whatever.”<sup>48</sup> 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.”<sup>49</sup> Origen said, “The soul does not incline to either part out of necessity, for then neither vice nor virtue could be ascribed to it; nor would its choice of virtue deserve reward; nor its declination to vice punishment.” And again, “How could God require that of man which he [man] had not power to offer Him?”<sup>50</sup>

True total moral depravity is when a sinner never chooses to do rightly or benevolently, but only wickedly or selfishly. Those who never choose to do rightly, which are all men prior to conversion to Christ, are totally morally depraved. But moral depravity is not moral inability; it is moral unwillingness to use moral ability rightly. Depravity of constitution could not be depravity of character. Character and capabilities must not be confused; character and constitution are not identical. Character does not consist in your faculties, but in the usage of those faculties. Constitutional inability would not be, could not be, and is not sin. Only unwillingness to do rightly, when there is the capability of doing rightly, is sin, sin that is punishable by eternal torment.

Sinners sin because they *want* to, not because they *have* to, and that is where the criminality of transgression consists. Sinners are *criminals* not *cripples*. Sinners are criminals in their will, criminals through their choice, not victims of their parents, victims of their birth, or victims of their nature (*constitution or faculties*). Sinners are criminals because they sin when they do not have to sin. Sinners are sinners because they rebel against God when they could surrender to and obey God. Sinners are criminals because they sin, and they sin because they want to, when, in fact, they don't have to. A sinner is a sinner by choice, not by birth or by necessity. A sinner is, therefore, a *rebel* and not a *victim*, a *criminal* and not a *cripple*, with nobody to blame for his sin but himself. On the Day of Judgment, God will not blame Adam or our nature for our sin, God will blame us and us alone for our sin, because sin is a choice of free will, and we alone are in control of our free will.

A man's guilt is proportioned to his degree of ability, with the man being guilty only to the extent that he was capable of doing better. Justice does not allow guilt to exceed ability; ability must always precede guilt. Capability determines responsibility, and responsibility determines accountability. Capability (*ability*), responsibility (*obligation*), and accountability (*judgment*) are in an inseparable relation with each other, so that none can exist if one does not exist; they equally limit each other.

They are an inseparable chain that stands or falls together. One is not accountable unless he is responsible, and one is not responsible unless he is capable.

Gordon 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.”<sup>51</sup>

God calls all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31) and God blames them if they do not repent (Matt. 11:20, Matt. 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 the free choice nature of repentance and the voluntary refusal or unwillingness that is required for impenitence. The impenitent have a wicked moral character or are in a rebellious condition by their personal voluntary choice. They utterly refuse to obey the gospel (Rom. 10:13, 2 Thess. 1:8). And for that very reason they are guilty, blameworthy, and are personally held responsible and accountable on the Day of Judgment.

Jesus rightly rebuked the unrepentant because they were unwilling; He did not cruelly rebuke the unable for not doing (Jn. 5:40). They were criminals who rightly needed rebuking, because they were unwilling, not because they were unable. Sinners are voluntarily unwilling, not constitutionally unable. Men cannot blame Adam, Eve, Satan, God, society, or nature for their sin and impenitence. Those who are unconverted are unconverted not because of God or anything else, but because of themselves, because they “would not come” unto Jesus that they “might have life” (Jn. 5:40), because they were too proud to seek after God (Ps. 10:4) even though God has revealed His existence to all men through natural revelation (Rom. 1:20). Sinners have nothing but their own will to blame for their rebellion against the law of God and for their refusal to seek after Him.

A. W. Tozer taught this profound truth in a simple manner, “What man ought to do, he can do.”<sup>52</sup> Men are accountable only to their obligations. A man cannot be accountable for that which he was not obligated to do, and our obligations are respecting our abilities only, “with all thy”. A man cannot be obligated to do that which he was unable to do. Therefore, those who should do better can do better, and those who can do better should do better. Account-ability is the giving of account of one’s use of ability, being accountable in accordance to one’s capabilities. You are accountable only for what you can do, and what you can do you are accountable for.

A man determines his heart, that is, he determines his will or intention (1 Ki. 6:61; Zech. 7:10; Eze. 18:31 Ps. 119:112). The inward moral character of a man is totally voluntary, determined by the man

himself (Job 11:14; Ecc. 11:14; Matt. 23:26; Rom. 6:12), and a man's heart determines his conduct (Matt. 12:35; 15:19; Lk. 6:45). Men are voluntarily servants of sin. Jesus taught that those who voluntarily choose to sin are servants of sin (Jn. 8:34). Paul taught that those who choose to obey sin are servants of sin (Rom. 6:16). It is not that they sin because they are first servants of sin, but they are servants of sin because they first voluntarily sin, because they first choose to obey sin. Likewise, those who voluntarily yield and present themselves to God (Rom. 6:13, 19; 12:1) are now voluntarily servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-20). Men are dead *in* sin (Rom. 7:9; Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13) or they are dead *to* sin (1 Pet. 2:24) by voluntary choice. Being dead *in* sin and dead *to* sin are voluntary moral states (Lk. 9:23; 1 Cor. 15:31, Col 2:13), or are voluntary moral characters, determined by free will. "Dead in sin" and "dead to sin" are reflections upon the moral character of man not the moral constitution of man. Dead in sin and dead to sin are states of the will, being derived from the will, not from the nature or constitution. If these moral states were not voluntary states of the will, these states could not have moral character, and if they have no moral character, they could not be moral states at all. They are voluntary states, and therefore men are accountable for them.

Likewise to be "carnally minded" (Rom. 8:6) is to intentionally be "minding the flesh" (Rom. 8:5), which is choosing or purposing to serve the flesh. And to be "spiritually minded" (Rom. 8:6) is to purposely be serving the Spirit, or voluntarily choosing to walk after the spiritual. The decision to be either fleshly or spiritually purposed is made by the mind. That is why repentance is a change of mind, when a person makes up their mind to sin no more, when a person changes their mind about sinning. And because those who are carnally minded choose to mind the flesh, they are utterly responsible and damnable for choosing to be in that condition, they justly deserve hell for being carnally minded.

Sinners are the authors of their own sin, the creators of their own character, and the causes of their own rebellion. All sinners voluntarily choose to sin, to abuse their ability; and to do what they know is wrong. Sinners are horrible criminals, not helpless cripples. And therein is the criminality of transgression, the guilt of rebellion, and the justice of eternal damnation.

## **SECTION TWO: MORAL KNOWLEDGE OR CONSCIENCE**

### **A Necessary Condition of Moral Ability**

### **A Necessary Condition to Moral Accountability**

#### **THE RELATION OF MORAL KNOWLEDGE TO MORAL ABILITY**

Clement of Alexandria said, “To obey or not is in our own power, provided we do not have the excuse of ignorance.”<sup>53</sup> And Origen said, “Our own power – when separated from the knowledge of God – does not enable us to make progress.”<sup>54</sup> Pelagius said, “For it is impossible for anyone to please someone, if he does not know what it is that pleases him.”<sup>55</sup> That is why the Psalmist said, “Teach me good judgment and knowledge” (Ps 119:66), “Give me understanding and I shall keep thy law” (Ps 119:34), and “I have chosen the way of truth” (Ps 119:30).

To be accountable to do better, one must know to do better. One could not be capable of fulfilling their obligation without knowledge of their obligation. One is capable only so far as they are knowledgeable. Since accountability never exceeds ability, accountability never exceeds knowledge, as knowledge is a prerequisite of ability.

What a man does not know to do, a man is not, and could not be, capable of doing. And what a man is not capable of, a man cannot be accountable for. Accountability is always in accordance with ability, and accountability is always in accordance with knowledge, because knowledge is a precondition of ability.

Neither disobedience nor obedience can occur without light. A man can neither obey nor disobey what he does not know. Men are always capable of obeying or disobeying the knowledge that they do have, but men are never capable of obeying or disobeying knowledge that they don't have. Obedience and disobedience require light; obedience and disobedience require a law or commandment. When there is knowledge, both obedience and disobedience are possibilities, the will choosing the one or the other. Under light, there can be no neutrality, the will must yield or resist, accept or reject. When revelation is perceived by the mind, the will must either embrace it or suppress it. Men are capable of obeying, and capable of disobeying, only insofar as they are under light, only to the degree that their moral obligation is revealed unto them, only to the extent that their requirement is clearly known and perceived, only to the length as they are granted the revelation of conscience. All men are either evil or good because they either obey or disobey the law of love, which God has written on their conscience.

Knowledge of obligation and ability to obey or disobey are interwoven. By logical connection, since ability is the unalterable and undeniable condition of accountability, knowledge must also be an

unalterable and undeniable condition of accountability, since knowledge is a necessary requirement of ability.

Without knowledge, people may have the capability of ability, but not the actuality of ability; that is, they may be capable of achieving or capable of learning before having the required knowledge (such as capability of learning being a prerequisite to the attainment of any knowledge), but they are not capable of performing or doing until the acquisition of the knowledge has been attained.

Therefore, one is only capable or able of what one is knowledgeable of, and since the extent of accountability is the extent of ability, and the extent of ability is the extent of knowledge, personal accountability cannot, does not, and will not exceed personal knowledge.

### **THE RELATION OF MORAL KNOWLEDGE TO MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

Accountability never can, does, or will exceed ability, and ability never can, does, or will exceed knowledge. One is only accountable to what one is capable of, and one is only capable of what one is knowledgeable of. One cannot be morally accountable if one is not morally capable, and one is not morally capable of what one is not morally knowledgeable of. Therefore, a revelation from God, as to what is required, is a necessary condition of accountability. Accountability is in accordance with known or revealed obligation, never being less than, or more than, this knowledge:

“Where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15);

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

Charles Finney said, “A . . . condition of moral obligation is light, or so much knowledge of our relations as to develop the idea of ought-ness . . . the perception or idea of the intrinsically valuable.”<sup>56</sup>

Let it be understood that increased knowledge equals increased responsibility, which necessitates an increase in accountability. The more knowledge that one has, the more that one will be accountable for. Therefore, increased disobedience to increased knowledge equals an increased guilt. Violation of greater knowledge is a “greater sin” (Jn. 19:11), which necessitates a “greater condemnation” (Matt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 20:47; Jas. 3:1). A “greater sin” is a violation of greater knowledge. All sin is equal in its nature, being rebellion against light, but not all sin is equal in its degree of guilt or in its deserved degree of punishment, which is measured and determined by the amount of light a person sinned against. A sin is “more atrocious,” said John Fletcher, which is committed “against greater light and knowledge.”<sup>57</sup> All men know that they are obligated to the law of love, but knowledge of what

love truly entails and requires may vary in degrees from one person to another; the end demanded by love is clearly known by all (*the highest well-being of all*), but knowledge of the means demanded by love depends upon the amount of knowledge one has. All men, however, are obligated to do what God has clearly revealed to them as to what they should or ought to do.

Judgment is according to revelation. Wrath is according to light. Not a single soul has ever gone to hell for sinning when he lacked the knowledge that it was wrong. But all souls have gone to hell because they knew better than to sin and to rebel against God. All who sin do so against their better judgment; they do so contrary to the demands of their conscience. All sin is a violation of what is intelligent, it is against what is reasonable, against the intuitions of the reason and against the clearly perceived dictations of the conscience. Sin is always against known moral law. Sin is never reasonable or intelligent (Ps. 111:10; 119:34, 100; Matt. 7:24), but is always contrary to reason and intelligence (Matt. 7:26), and is therefore inexcusable (Rom. 1:20). God has given a conscience, which testifies of His own existence and declares His reasonable moral demands, to all men of all nations (Jn. 1:9; Rom. 2:15; 1:21). Con-science is “con” and “science,” which means “with knowledge.” All intelligent individuals have knowledge, and know better than to sin, and therefore ought to will in accordance with their knowledge. All sinners who have a conscience choose to sin with knowledge that what they are doing is wrong, and therein lay their guilt.

Sin is voluntary disobedience to moral light (Jas. 4:17). Sin is the hearts rebellion against perceived reality and truth (Rom. 1:18, Rom. 1:28). Charles Finney said, “To be in bondage to sin... is a most guilty state, because it is so altogether voluntary, so needless, and so opposed to the dictates of a person’s reason and understanding of God’s righteous demands. To go counter to such convictions he must be supremely guilty.”<sup>58</sup> Winkie Pratney said, “To be morally perfect then is to conform our lives to moral light; to live up to that which God reveals in His word and By his Spirit as best for all of us.”<sup>59</sup> If moral perfection is to obey moral light, moral depravity is to disobey moral light, it is to live contrary to perceived knowledge, to rebel against the revelation of God, to walk opposed to the received truth of reality (Jn. 3:18-20, Acts 6:10, Acts 7:57, Rom. 1:18, Jas. 4:17). Gordon Olson said, “Holiness is a descriptive term applied to moral beings who voluntarily obey their moral obligation, conforming to their moral light or perception of truth.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore the word wicked is a descriptive term applied to moral beings that voluntarily disobey their moral obligation, who walk contrary to their moral light or perception of truth.

The measure of responsibility/obligation and accountability/guilt is in exact proportion to the mind’s perception of moral law, proportioned exactly to the degree of the individual’s knowledge of right

and wrong. A man's guilt is proportioned to his ability, and his ability is proportioned to his knowledge, causing him to be guilty only to the extent that he was capable of better, and making him capable of being better only to the extent that he knew better. Guilt cannot exceed ability, and ability cannot exceed knowledge; ability must precede guilt, and knowledge must precede ability. So, moral guilt can only proceed out of moral knowledge and moral ability. Therefore, personal accountability will never exceed personal knowledge. All are judged by the knowledge that they possess, and are found innocent or guilty in accordance with that knowledge.

If a man sins a sin of ignorance (Lev. 4:13), doing that which "ought not to be done" (Lev. 4:2), "he shall be guilty" only "when he knoweth of it" (Lev. 5:3), and is held responsible only when it is "known" (Lev. 4:14). There is also the sin of being willingly ignorant (2 Pet. 3:5). One is willingly ignorant when knowledge is available and attainable, within the reach of an individual, yet that person willingly refuses to attain it, refusing to reach out for it. Such knowledge is within the realm of attainability (attainable because of that person's ability), yet it is refused and ignored. Such a sin of ignorance is truly the sin of ignoring the attainable truth. This was, no doubt, connected to the case of the Israelite in Leviticus who could sin a sin of ignorance when knowledge and revelation was made available by God to all of Israel.

Moral responsibility and moral accountability cannot exceed moral knowledge. Conscience is absolutely essential for responsibility, character, and accountability. Moral knowledge is an unmovable precondition of moral guilt. The entire world is guilty of sin because the entire world has a conscience; in other words, the entire world knows better.

The very foundation of *just* wrath and *deserved* condemnation is knowledge of obligation. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, *who hold the truth in unrighteousness*; 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 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. 1:18-20). Men are under the "wrath of God" because they "hold the truth," because of what is already "known" and shown to them, because of what is understood, the truth which they suppress and reject "in unrighteousness." Because of this knowledge, they are "without excuse" for their behavior. Justin Martyr said, "In the beginning, He made the human race with the power of thought and of choosing the truth and doing right, so that all men are without excuse before God."<sup>61</sup>

"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 shew the work of the law written in their *hearts*, their *conscience* also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom. 2:14-15). By “nature,” all men are “a law unto themselves” because of the “thoughts” of conscience all men inescapably have, the natural revelation given to them by God, both of His own existence and of His moral requirements. All men, in all cultures, on all continents, necessarily affirm the existence of God and the requirement of love. God and His law of love are known by all; the consciences of all men make these revelations inescapable.

Irenaeus said, “Yet, at the same time, He issued His own *exhortations*, in order that those who do not obey Him would be righteously judged because they have not obeyed Him.”<sup>62</sup> Natural revelation forms the basis of responsibility and accountability, the very foundation of judgment and condemnation, the reason of guilt and blameworthiness. And as more revelation is granted upon the foundation of natural revelation, responsibility and accountability must increase. And if increased disobedience follows the increased revelation, then judgment, condemnation and guilt must increase as well.

Winkie Pratney said, “Morality is essential the ability to think, to feel, to freely originate choices, and perhaps most importantly perceive and response freely to moral light, the knowledge of what is best and right.”<sup>63</sup> Men are responsible and accountable for the precise reason that God has given them a conscience and a free will. God does not judge and condemn morally ignorant or morally crippled individuals. God judges and condemns rebels who know to do righteously, are capable of doing righteously, but are unwilling to do so.

The very existence of morality and immorality is dependent upon the existence of moral knowledge and moral ability, without these, moral character cannot exist at all. And if moral character cannot exist, moral responsibility and moral accountability cannot exist. The reality of moral character implies the existence of moral responsibility, moral accountability, which must also imply moral ability and moral knowledge.

### **THE CLEAR AND EXPLICIT TEACHING OF DIVINE INSPIRATION RESPECTING MORAL KNOWLEDGE AND MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

That a man is guilty only to the extent that he knew better because of his conscience, that accountability is measured by the knowledge of a man’s conscience, and increased knowledge equals increased accountability, can be clearly derived from the following passages:

“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. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you” (Matt. 11:21-22);

“And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did not commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required” (Lk. 12:47-48);

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34);

“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);

“If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin” (Jn. 15:22);

“Where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15);

“Sin is not imputed when there is no law” (Rom. 5:13);

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17);

The Bible also says that some sinners have a “greater sin” (Jn. 19:11). It teaches that hypocrites (who all know better) will have a greater damnation (Matt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40; Lk. 20:47). It explains that teachers (who by necessity know more) are accountable to a stricter judgment (Jas. 3:1). See also: Matt. 10:15; 11:24; Mk. 6:11; Lk. 10:12, 14; Rom. 1:18-20; Heb. 10:26; 2 Pet. 2:21.

It is abundantly clear that all men are judged and accountable to the knowledge that they have; those with little knowledge are accountable to that little knowledge, no more and no less, and those with greater knowledge are accountable to that greater knowledge, no more and no less. Personal moral responsibility and personal moral accountability never exceed the limits of personal moral knowledge.

### **MORAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE AGE OF MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

The Scriptures teach what is commonly called “the age of accountability,” or “the age of reason,” when a child reaches the age when his mind is developed, and he has a proper conscious idea of right and wrong; when he can knowingly affirm and distinguish between the good and the evil.

“Your children, which . . . had no knowledge between good and evil” (Deut. 1:39);

“For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good” (Isa. 7:16);

“For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil” (Rom. 9:11);

“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

Psychology itself testifies that the mind of a child slowly develops, and is not fully developed at birth. When individuals have the conscious idea of right and wrong, and have the perception of the Divine and of human value and worth, then they are accountable for their moral actions and states. But if they do not know any better, then they cannot do any better, and, therefore, they have no sin or guilt, their character being determined by their knowledgeable choices. Guilt can only be prescribed to the one that knows to do better than what he does, to the one who “knoweth to do right” but “doeth it not,” to him “it is sin” (Jas. 4:17). Moral ignorance would, in fact, be moral innocence, as the moral condition of Adam and Eve was innocent, though they were naked, before the opening of their eyes when they knew right from wrong. What is tolerated because of ignorance is never tolerated when there is knowledge.

One can be guilty or praiseworthy of nothing except for that which is intentionally committed, and nothing can be intentionally committed that was not knowingly committed, that which was known to be right or wrong.

Charles Finney said, “Moral law is a pure and simple idea of the reason. It is the idea of perfect, universal, and constant consecration of the whole being to the highest good of being. Just this is, and nothing more or less can be, moral law; for just this, and nothing more or less, is a state of heart and a course of life exactly suited to the nature and relations of moral agents, which alone is the only true definition of moral law.”<sup>64</sup> All intelligent agents are therefore moral agents; all with a conscience (*moral consciousness*) are accountable to that conscience (*moral consciousness*), no more and no less.

Jesus Christ had “innocent blood” (Matt. 27:4, 24) because he lived and never sinned (2 Cor. 5:21). Newborn babies also have “innocent blood” (Deut. 19:10, 2 Ki. 24:4, Ps. 106:38) because they haven’t yet committed any sin (Rom. 9:11), but they are morally guilty when their consciences (*moral consciousnesses*) develop, and they choose to voluntarily sin for themselves, against their better judgment.

## THE RELATION OF MORAL KNOWLEDGE TO REGENERATION AND REPROBATION

Regeneration is through revelation, when the Spirit changes a man's moral character through the spiritual influence of conviction and instruction. Regeneration is when free will is effectively influenced by the truth; it is the will's embracing of the truth, or the will's yielding and obeying the truth (Jn. 6:45, 63; 8:32; 15:3; 17:17; Rom. 2:8; 6:17; Acts 9:4-6; 1 Cor. 4:15; Tit. 2:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Thes. 1:8; 1 Pet. 1:22-23; 4:17; 2 Pet. 1:2-3; 2:20; Jas. 1:18, 21-22).

Clement said, "The Word, having unveiled the truth, showed to men the summit of salvation, so that either repenting they might be saved, or refusing they might be condemned. This is the proclamation of righteousness: to those who obey, rejoicing; to those who disobey, condemnation."<sup>5</sup> Conversion is the correction of our will. As Augustine said, "If there be no free will, there is nothing to be saved."<sup>6</sup> Charles Finney 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."<sup>7</sup> Again, "Regeneration is nothing else than... embracing the gospel."<sup>8</sup> And again, "...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."<sup>9</sup>

Apostasy, on the other hand, is the heart's utter refusal to conform to the truth of reality. Apostasy is a total unwillingness to embrace, and rejection of, the light of revelation, to such an extent that a point is crossed in which there is no return, and one is a reprobate, given up by God because of their persistent rejection of revelation (Matt. 2:31-32; Lk. 12:10; Eph. 4:30).

The more that one grows in the knowledge of the Lord, yet continues sinning even with their increased knowledge, the closer they are to reprobation, when it would no longer be possible for them to be reached or changed, because it would be impossible to enlighten them anymore than what they already have been.

"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).

There is a point when a person received enough knowledge that should have sufficiently secured their total conversion and perseverance in the faith, when no more knowledge could be added to the knowledge already received, which leaves the individual in total reprobation, or total inability to be saved, because they have refused to submit to all the

possible influence that could have been exerted. Anyone who chooses to sin every day while growing in the knowledge of the Lord every day grows closer and closer to total and incurable reprobation. If they have been “enlightened” and have “tasted” and have been “partakers,” to such an extent, yet they remain disobedient and rebellious, it is then “impossible” to “renew them again unto repentance.”

One who grows “in the knowledge of our Lord” must “grow in grace” (2 Pet. 3:18), or ultimately become reprobate. He that “receives the knowledge of the truth,” but continues in willful disobedience, will face “fiery indignations” (Heb. 10:26-27). Such a one will have “sorer,” or worse, “punishment” (Heb. 10:29). The more knowledge one is given, the more obedience one must increase in. The one who grows in hardness and impenitence of heart, refusing to obey the perceived truth, treasures up wrath which will be poured out on the day of wrath (Rom. 2:5). Those that have once “escaped the pollutions of the world” through knowledge and yet are “once again entangled therein,” it would have “been better for them not to have known” than to “have known” and yet turned “from the holy commandment delivered unto them;” as the Bible says, “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.” (2 Pet. 2:20-21). The sinner with more knowledge is worse than the sinner with less knowledge.

Those who refuse the “knowledge” of God end up with a “reprobate mind” (Rom. 1:28). Those who “resist the truth” become “reprobate” because of their “corrupt minds” (2 Tim. 3:8). Reprobation is when people have rejected in their hearts all the possible light that could be given to their minds to secure their conversion, leaving the will in a state of impenitence and hardness towards all possible knowledge designed to secure repentance unto obedience.

Cyrillus Alexandrius said, “Let not the world accuse the word of God and his eternal light... for the Sun enlightens, but man rejects that grace that is given him, blunts the edge of the understanding granted him, and, as a prodigal, turns his sight to the creatures, neglecting to go forward, and through laziness and negligence buries the illumination, and despises this grace.”<sup>70</sup>

### **THE CRIMINALITY OF TRANSGRESSION: SINNERS ARE CRIMINALS NOT CRIPPLES**

Criminality, or guilt, is prescribed to the inward intention of the heart, or to the purpose or motive of the will, and does not consist solely in the outward actions. God is not at all described in the Scriptures as being impressed with outward actions, but rather as looking upon and judging the motives and intentions of the heart (Gen. 6:5; 1 Sam. 16:7; Joel 2:12-14; Matt. 5:8; 6:1-5; 12:35; 15:11, 17-20; 23:25-28; Mk. 7:15-23; Lk. 10:27; Heb. 4:12; 1 Tim. 1:5; Tit. 1:15).

The intention, or motive, is what God is concerned about. As your intention is, so are you (Prov. 23:7). The intention to commit adultery is the same as adultery (Matt. 5:28). The intention to murder is the same as murder (1 Jn. 3:15). A man is as guilty as his intention is. Moral character, or the quality of a person's moral state, consists in the moral condition of their inward intention, being either that of criminality or of rectitude. The Pharisees appeared "outwardly righteous" but were "inwardly full of iniquity" (Matt. 23:28) because they fasted and prayed with the intention to be seen of men (Matt. 6:5; 23:5). They were as their inward motive was, not as their outward works were. They were not even in the least bit righteous, but were "full of iniquity" because what they did, they did selfishly and not benevolently; they did it for themselves and not for God and others, and virtue consists solely in benevolence of heart (Rom. 13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14; Jas. 2:8; 1 Cor. 13:1-3), while sin consists solely in selfishness of heart.

When the inward intention is morally wrong (*selfish*), the outward action which follows from it, no matter what sort it is (*even praying and fasting*), does not grant any moral character to the moral agent except from its relation to the individual's motive. And where the intention is morally right (*benevolent*), there can be no moral guilt (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23; Tit. 1:15), since guilt is prescribed solely to a wrong (*selfish*) intention. If the inside of the cup (*inward intention*) is first clean, then the outside of the cup (*outward actions*) will be clean as well (Matt. 23:26). "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).

Charles Finney said, "The fact is, that moral agents are so constituted that it is impossible for them not to judge themselves, and others, by their subjective motives and intentions. They cannot but assume, as a first truth, that a man's character is as his intention is, and consequently, that moral obligation respects, directly, intention only."<sup>71</sup>

Responsibility, accountability, and, therefore, criminality, do not exceed the boundaries of the inward intention, which, of necessity, inevitably manifests itself in outward action and conduct whenever possible and required (Lk. 6:45).

Because criminality is prescribed to intention, and intention depends upon knowledge (*to intend to do something, one must know they are intending to do something; and for them to be guilty, they must know that their intention is wrong. An intentional choice is of necessity a choice knowingly made*), sinners are therefore sinners not because they do not know any better, but rather because they do not will any better, because they do not intend in accordance with their conscience, in alignment with the intuitions of their reason. Their guilt lies in their knowledge of good and evil, combined with their refusal to choose, will, or intend the good over the evil. If there was no knowledge, there could

be no guilt, for moral guilt is measured by moral knowledge. Total ignorance would necessitate total innocence, but knowledge, combined with unwillingness to obey knowledge, necessitates guilt in proportion to the knowledge.

You are as your character is, your character is as your intention is, and your guilt is as your knowledge is. One is as morally guilty as he is unwilling to obey the moral knowledge that he has, no more and no less. A sinner is a criminal for intentionally going against the demands of his conscience. A sinner is a criminal for sinning against his better judgment; for voluntarily, knowingly, and intentionally choosing what he knew was evil when he had the power or ability of choosing the good.

### THE EXTENT OF PERSONAL MORAL GUILT

Because the extent of personal guilt or sin cannot, does not, and will not exceed the boundaries of personal ability (*and therefore personal knowledge, and therefore personal intention*), a moral agent is only accountable for their own personal actions. The extent of personal guilt is the extent of personal sin, no more and no less.

A child is, therefore, not accountable for the sins of the father. The whole of mankind is not accountable for the sins of the one man Adam, which was entirely without our knowledge and without our consent. That which is beyond the realm of a person's knowledge and consent is beyond the realm of their moral character, moral responsibility, and moral accountability. We are not responsible for Adam's sin; therefore, we are not accountable for Adam's sin. A man is accountable only for that for which he is responsible.

Each man is accountable for their own sins voluntarily done in their own body, not for what Adam did when we were seminally in his loins (2 Cor. 5:10). Divine inspiration clearly ascribes personal guilt to personal sins only. Sinners go to hell for their own voluntary, avoidable, optional, personal violations of God's reasonable and good moral law. The law of God that condemns sinners is reasonable and moral, not burdensome and tyrannical, seeing that all who are obligated to keep it are capable of keeping it. No man has ever gone to hell for the sins of another, just as no man has ever gone to hell for not knowing better, or for failure to performing impossibilities. The one who sins shall die for his own sin. All sinners go to hell for their own transgressions or violations of God's moral law; sinners are condemned for originating their own sin.

“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);

“The Lord commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every

man shall be put to death for his own sin” (2 Ki. 14:6);

“The Lord commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin” (2 Chron. 25:4);

“Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father?

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. 18:19-20);

“God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (Ecc. 7:29);

“[God] will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom. 2:6);

“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).

This is the clear and explicit teaching, the infallible truth of the justice of God, found in the Divine Inspired Revelation: that each man is personally judged and condemned according to his own personal deeds, and not by the deeds of another. Gordon Olson said, “The judge of all the earth will hold each moral being accountable only for his own sins... each moral being is the cause or author of his own guilt.”<sup>72</sup>

John Fletcher said, “All our damnation is of ourselves, through our avoidable unfaithfulness... everyone shall die for his own avoidable iniquity.”<sup>73</sup> 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?”<sup>74</sup> Barnabas said, “He who chooses” to break the commandments “will be destroyed with his works”<sup>75</sup> 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.”<sup>76</sup> Origen said, “... we have freedom of will and we ourselves are the cause of our own ruin.”<sup>77</sup> Titian said, “We die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us.”<sup>78</sup> Again Titian said that because of “free of choice... the bad man can be justly punished, having become depraved through his own fault.”<sup>79</sup> Prosper, a disciple of Augustine, said that those who “perish” do so because of “their voluntary iniquity.”<sup>80</sup> Justin Martyr said, “Each man is what he will appear to be through his own fault.”<sup>81</sup> 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.”<sup>82</sup> And Clement of

Alexandria said about sinners, “their estrangement is the result of free choice.”<sup>83</sup>

Remember, a sharp distinction must be made between the physical and the moral; a difference must be discretely drawn between the constitutional and the ethical. Metaphysics and axiology are related but are not identical. A proper distinction must be made as a vital importance to a sound theology.

**PHYSICAL DEPRAVITY:** We genetically inherit our physical make-up or physical constitution from our parents, with its physical lusts, physical cravings, physical desires, and physical depravities (Gen. 1:21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 38-39; Heb. 2:14), but physical constitutions have no moral character in and of themselves, apart from their voluntary use as controlled by the will or heart of man (Matt. 15:17-20; Mk. 7:15; Rom. 6:13).

**MORAL DEPRAVITY:** We do not inherit the guilt or sin of our parents, being accountable and judged only for our own sins, our own voluntary moral depravity, as well as rewarded only for our own works. Guilt and sin is not hereditary (Deut. 24:16; 2 King. 14:6; 2 Chron. 25:4; Eze. 18:2-4, 19-20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6, 8-9; 9:11; 2 Cor. 5:10; 11:15; Jas. 4:17; Rev. 22:12). Moral depravity is when a person voluntary surrenders to the lusts of the flesh. These lusts are involuntary and so the bible calls them temptations not sin. But these temptations become sin when the will voluntarily obeys them (Jas. 1:14-15).

With such abundant and clear teaching revealed by God Himself, it is a wonder so many have stumbled greatly at this point, bringing much confusion to the consciences and minds of both the Church and the world of lost sinners, with unreasonable and uninspired views of responsibility, character, guilt and accountability, namely that one is accountable for that which was beyond his control, without his consent, without his knowledge, and that one is accountable for the sins of another. Such unsound views that are so contrary to reason and Scripture should be once and for all cast out of the Church! Such views are not derived from scripture, reason, or the early apostolic tradition of the church. But these views are in fact derived from the philosophies and doctrines of Gnostic heretics as we shall soon discuss further on.

The doctrine of free will is of a vital importance to the Christians system of doctrine, to our understanding of reality, and for the advancement of the Church. Any man who has ever regretted his past actions, or had remorse over his past sins, has presupposed the freedom of the will. Regret and remorse necessarily assume the contingent element of reality, consciously or unconsciously affirming the contingency of moral action. If this were not so, regret and remorse could never exist in the minds of men. Conversion requires such regret and remorse, so conversion requires the presupposition or belief (conscious or unconscious) of the freedom of the will. All men assume

it, especially all converted men, since it is absolutely necessary for conversion, necessary for the acknowledgment of personal responsibility and guilt.

Absurd doctrinal dogmas such as necessity and inability do not help in the conversion of souls, bringing no personal conviction of sin, as they are repulsive to the consciences of men. Preaching and teaching such views as those are destructive to a proper perspective of sin and sinners, God and His Kingdom (*or Government*). The minds of men simply cannot affirm guilt beyond the boundaries of knowledge, ability, and intention. Reason, which is a gift from God, cannot ascribe personal guilt to that which was not personal, intentional, and within their control, and neither do the infallible, inspired Scriptures teach such things.

### **THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER**

1. Responsibility is limited to, or exactly proportionate to, ability. Responsibility is the full extent of a person's ability, no more or less (Deut. 6:5, Deut. 10:12, Deut. 30:6, Matt. 22:37, Mk. 12:30, Lk. 10:27, 1Cor. 10:13).
2. God appeals to the natural ability of sinners to turn themselves from their sin (Gen. 4:6-7, Deut. 30:19, Josh. 24:15, Isa. 1:16-20, Isa. 55:6-7, Hos. 10:12, Jer. 21:8, Eze. 18:30-32, Jer. 18:11, Jer. 26:13, Acts 2:40, Acts 17:30, Rom. 6:17, 2 Cor. 7:1, 2 Tim. 2:21, Jas. 4:7-10, 1 Pet. 1:22, Rev. 22:17).
3. Accountability is limited to, or exactly proportionate to, the degree of someone's knowledge. Accountability is according to the full extent of a person's knowledge, no more or less (Matt. 10:15, Matt. 11:21-22, Matt. 11:24, Matt. 23:14, Mk. 6:11, Mk. 12:40, Lk. 10:12, Lk. 10:14, Lk. 12:47-48, Lk. 20:47, Lk. 23:34, Jn. 9:41, Jn. 15:22, Jn. 19:11, Rom. 1:18-20, Rom. 4:15, Rom. 5:13, Jas. 4:17, Jas. 3:1, Heb. 10:26, 2 Pet. 2:21).
4. Sin is entirely voluntary, optional, and avoidable; the existence of sin in the universe is totally contingent (Gen. 4:6-7, Deut. 8:2, Jdg. 2:20-22, Exo. 33:2, Exo. 34:24, Eze. 3:19, Eze. 12:13, Eze. 33:19, Jer. 18:8-10, Ps. 81:13, Job 11:14, Matt. 23:26, Rom. 6:12, 1 Cor. 10:13).
5. Sin is rebellion of the will, not a defect of nature (Isa. 14:13-14, Isa. 30:9, Isa. 30:15-16, Isa. 31:6, Isa. 42:24, Neh.9:29, Lk.19:14, Lk.19:27).
6. Men are fully responsible for *making themselves* sinners. Sinners are entirely the cause of their own rebellion (Gen. 6:12, Exo. 32:7, Deut. 9:12, Deut. 32:5, Jdg. 2:19, Hos. 9:9, Ps. 14:2-3, Isa. 53:6, Ecc. 7:29 Zep. 3:7, Rom. 3:23). And men choose to sin and thereby become dead in their sins ["dead in sin" means *morally* depraved and *relationally* separated from God] (Isa. 59:2, Rom. 5:12, Rom. 5:14, Rom. 7:9, Rom. 7:11, Col. 2:13).

7. Men are accountability for their sins alone (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kng. 14:6, 2 Chron. 25:4, Jer. 32:19, Eze. 18:2-4, Eze. 18:19-20, Ps. 24:12, Ps. 94:23, Matt. 16:27, 2 Cor. 5:10, 2 Cor. 11:15, 1 Pet. 1:17, Rev. 22:12).

8. The only thing that keeps men back from God is their own *unwillingness*, not any *inability* (Isa. 30:9, Isa. 30:15, Isa. 30:16, Matt. 11:20-21, Matt. 23:37, Mk. 6:6, 7:30, 13:34, 14:17-18, 19:14, 19:27, Jn. 5:40, Rev. 2:21).

Men are obligated and accountable according to their highest moral possibility, no more and no less. And men are obligated and accountable for all of their knowledge, no more and no less. The highest of our ability, and the full extent of our knowledge, is the measure of both our responsibility and accountability.

God requires all men to use their free will to obey their conscience. Judgment day exists for all moral agents for the very reason that free will and conscience exists in all moral agents. On the Day of Judgment all of us will have to give an account for what we did with the ability and the knowledge God has given us. On Judgment Day none can plead inability or ignorance because God has granted free will and conscience to all men. Clemens of Alexandrinus said, “The divine word has cried; calling all... because it is in our power, either to obey or not to obey, that none can plead ignorance...”<sup>84</sup> 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.”<sup>85</sup>

Morality and character can only exist within a moral system of influence and response, not cause and effect. Morality and character requires an open system where moral choices are contingent, that is, where they may or may not occur. That is because moral character can only be derived from free will choices, from voluntary decisions. But in a deterministic system of cause and effect, only one (*the ultimate cause*) can have moral character. In a system where God caused and determined everything, only God could have a moral character. But God has created an open system with moral possibilities, granting man the gift of free will, so that we could choose to be like Him, so that we would choose to love Him and love each other.

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.”<sup>86</sup>

Much of reality is intricately linked into free will, particularly man's relationship to God. The anger of God, the wrath of God, the disappointment of God, the appeals of God, the instructions of God, the reasoning and persuading of God, the commandments of God, would make absolutely no sense at all without the reality of free contingent choice. Moral reality especially ties into free will. Obligation, character, guilt, reward, punishment, nor any truth of God's moral government would be sensible at all if man was not free to obey or disobey the light granted him by God. The whole moral system presented in the bible would be nonsense but for the underlining presupposition of self-originating choices.

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..."<sup>87</sup> Charles Finney said, "The moral government of God everywhere assumes and implies the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God. Every command, every threatening, every expostulation and denunciation in the Bible implies and assumes this... The very ideas of right and wrong, of praiseworthiness, and blameworthiness of human beings, imply the assumption, on the part of those who have these ideas, of the universal freedom of the human will, or of the natural ability of men as moral agents to obey God.... But for this assumption, the human mind could no more predicate praiseworthiness or blameworthiness, right or wrong of man, than it could of the motions of a windmill."<sup>88</sup>

Moral character must be derived from voluntary choices or attitudes. Moral character must be developed by the one to whom it is prescribed to. Bernard said, "The will alone can make a man deservedly just or unjust, and can deservedly render him fit for bliss or misery, as it consents either to righteousness or to iniquity; forasmuch as the will, according to its innate liberty, cannot be forced to will or nill any thing against its own dictates."<sup>89</sup> Clement 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."<sup>90</sup> Winkie Pratney said, "...good and evil are not qualities of substance or essence but character.... Sin is a moral (not physical) creation of rebellious moral beings, and each moral member of the creation will be held responsible for his own actions."<sup>91</sup> And again, "The closest parallel to God that exists in man is our ability to make, or to be maker in miniature. It is entirely possible that the ability of free will or choice is

one facet of God's own personality that makes us most like Him. (It certainly underlines all the biblical judgments of our character and appeals to our responsibility.) We never come nearer to an act like God than when we originate a choice based on what is given to us as the highest good. Our choices actually call into existence moral paths and realities that never before existed in the universe... Here then is an absolute basis for all analysis of personality as well as questions of axiology – of morals, values, judgments, and ethics. Because God is a Creator, a person able to originate that which has never before been, so man, made in His image, is able to originate choices for which we must be held responsible. This leaves us with one awesome conclusion: everything we do is important. Choices are creations that can never be recalled; sin and righteousness are real; and heaven and hell are real. Man is not a nothing, whether he is a sinner or a saint; man is himself an originator, a creator and the choices he makes will affect both the universe and the future.”<sup>92</sup> L. D. McCabe said, “The only possible creator of character is the free-will of an accountable being.”<sup>93</sup> Man is responsible and accountable for his moral character because he originates his moral character; he is the author of his own moral condition.

Charles Finney said, “the assumption has lain deep in the mind as a first truth, that men are free in the sense of being naturally able to obey God; and this assumption is a necessary condition of the affirmation that moral character belongs to man.”<sup>94</sup> Moral character is not some abstraction which is *given* to man, but it is an internal condition which is *developed* by man. Each man brings forth into action his own conduct out of his own evil heart (*selfish motive or sinful intention*) and is therefore the source of his own sin (Matt. 12:35). Man is responsible and accountable for his moral character precisely because man determines his own moral character (*or else it cannot truly be his*). Sinners are severely punished for their wicked hearts, for their immoral character, for their rebellious state, precisely because they have *made themselves* this way. None are *born* sinners, all *become* sinners. Moral knowledge plus moral choices equal’s moral character. Character is derived from knowledgeable choices only. One has an evil character only when he willingly refuses to obey perceived moral light. Light plus decisions equal’s character. Character is determined by choice not by constitution. Sinners are sinners by voluntary personal choice and not by involuntary inherited constitutions.

Clement of Alexandria said, “In no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice... originates sins... punishments are justly inflicted.”<sup>95</sup> 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.”<sup>96</sup> So who is the source of sin? Each man is the source of his own sin! Who is the author of sin? Each man is the author of his own sin. Who is to blame for sin? The one who committed

the sin! Men create their own moral characters by using their free will to obey or to disobey their conscience, by living according to or contrary to their knowledge by voluntary decision.

God is by no means the author of sin. Isaiah curses the one who issues unrighteous decrees (Isa. 10:1) Sinners reject the reigning of God in their life (Lk. 19:14, Lk. 19:27) they reject the counsel of God for their life (Lk. 7:30). Sin is rebellion against God's Sovereign decree regarding sin, "Thou Shalt Not". To deny this rebellion would be to deny the fall of man. 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."<sup>97</sup> Felgentius, another disciple of Augustine, 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."<sup>98</sup> Sovereignty means that God is the ultimate authority on all things and that God can use all things or adopt all things into his plans. But Sovereignty does not mean that God is the ultimate cause all things. God is sovereign enough to be able to work with all things, sovereign enough to be able to incorporate and adopt into His plans the free will decisions of men. We see this in God's dealings with the situation of Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 50:20). We also see this in also when God was able to change His plans for a lump of clay when the clay marred itself. (Jer. 18:4)

We also see that God tests men to know their response because their free will choices are open and unsettled (Gen. 22:12, Ex. 16:4, Deut. 8:2, Deut. 13:3, Jdg. 2:20-22, Ex. 33:2, Ex. 34:24, Jdg. 3:4, 1 Sam. 2:30, 2 Chron. 12:6-7, 2 Chron. 16:9, 2 Chron. 32:31, Ps. 81:13-14). Methodius said "there is no fixed destiny."<sup>99</sup> Our choices are open not fixed, being settled only once we determine them. As Epiphanius taught, "It is extreme ignorance, not to say madness, to allow the resurrection of the dead, and a day of most righteous judgment for every action; and at the same time to assert that there is a destiny; for how can these two agree together, a judgment and a destiny?"<sup>100</sup> The existence of sin is entirely a contingent reality since sin is entirely voluntary, optional, and avoidable. Because God has granted man free will, we live in an open system with moral possibilities and alternative courses which we ourselves decide and determine (Gen. 4:6-7, Deut. 8:2, Jdg. 2:20-22, Ex. 33:2, Ex. 34:24, Eze. 3:19, Eze. 12:13, Eze. 33:19, Jer. 18:8-10, Ps. 81:13, Job 11:14, Matt. 23:26, Rom. 6:12, 1 Cor. 10:13).

This doctrine of ability, responsibility, and accountability was universally the doctrine of the Early Church. Clement said, "Neither praise nor condemnation, neither reward nor punishments, are right if the soul does not have the power of choice and avoidance, if evil is involuntary."<sup>101</sup> Jerome said, "God has bestowed us with free will. We are not necessarily drawn either to virtue or vice. For when necessity

rules, there is no room left either for damnation or the crown.”<sup>102</sup> Archelaus said, “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 . . . 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.”<sup>103</sup> Tertullian said, “I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power . . . 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.”<sup>104</sup>

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.”<sup>105</sup> 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.”<sup>106</sup> 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.”<sup>107</sup> Origen said that “the heretics [the Gnostics] introduce the doctrine of *different natures*.”<sup>108</sup>

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."<sup>109</sup>

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."<sup>110</sup> And Calvin also said, "The Latin fathers have always retained the word free will..."<sup>111</sup> 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!"<sup>112</sup> 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."<sup>113</sup> 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."<sup>114</sup> 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."<sup>115</sup>

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.”<sup>116</sup> 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.”<sup>117</sup> 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.”<sup>118</sup> And also, “Obedience [and disobedience] results from a decision of the mind, not the substance of the body.”<sup>119</sup> 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.

None can prove, either with reason or with revelation, that men are accountable beyond their ability or beyond their knowledge. If anyone assumes such views, the burden is upon them to try to prove it. The reasonably sound and explicit teaching of inspiration is that all men are accountable to what they know and to what they are capable of, being judged solely for that which was voluntary, for that which was within their realm of knowledge and control. Moral accountability never exceeds the extents of moral knowledge and moral ability, but divine judgment is directed exclusively towards moral intention, to what was knowingly, intentionally, and voluntarily committed. Men are under the moral government of God because God has given them a conscience and free will.

Every soul trapped and tormented in hell had enough ability and knowledge to condemn them. Every soul punished eternally had knowledge of their obligation, ability to perform their obligation, yet foolishly and selfishly refused to live according their true perception of reality. They are in hell because they deserve hell. And they deserve hell because God graciously granted them ability and knowledge that they might glorify and enjoy Him. But in return they brought nothing but grief and disappointment to God’s very heart and established themselves as enemies of all truth and goodness, choosing to serve themselves instead.

Henry Tappan said, “Responsibility rests upon the possession of conscience, or a faculty capable of making moral distinctions and comprehending the law of duty; and of a free, contingent, and self determining will, or a faculty of obeying or disobeying the laws of duty.”<sup>120</sup> Dr. Wayland said the Scripture, “everywhere declare that every man is guilty simply by his own voluntary transgressions, and that the

guilt of every man is estimated by the degree of moral light which he has voluntarily resisted.”<sup>121</sup>

When there is moral knowledge and moral ability there is moral accountability. But where there is no moral knowledge and no moral ability, there cannot be any moral accountability. Moral agency is conditioned upon these. If a man is not capable of better, and does not know to do better, he could not be obligated to do better, or be accountable for his failure, since without a man having knowledge and ability, a man cannot do better, and consequently he cannot be the cause of his own failure; failure to obey can only occur when there is knowledge of obligation and ability to obey. Man is not accountable for that which he is not the cause of. But whomever God punishes for sin must be the author of sin. Since God punishes men for their sin, they must be the authors of their own sin; they misuse and abuse their free will. Intelligence and freedom are necessary prerequisites for moral agency. Thus, a moral agent is judged according to his moral intelligence and moral ability. Only an intelligent, free moral agent can form his own moral character; only an intelligent, free moral agent is capable of vice, virtue, blameworthiness, and praiseworthiness. Only those who can form their own moral character, that is, only intelligent, free moral agents, are subjected to obligation and accountability, subjected to moral government.

This is why God has given light to every man (Jn. 1:9) and why God calls all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30-31); all men are accountable because all men have a conscience and free will. Nobody sins out of necessity, but sin is always an abuse of liberty or a deviation of God’s intention in granting the gift of free will. God even repented of making men when He saw how they were using their free will for sin (Gen. 6:5-6), because God wanted man to use his free will to genuinely love Him and to genuinely love each other. Instead they used it to selfishly sin against Him and to selfishly sin each other. God gave man a free will and a conscience so that the whole universe could be full of love, but we have used it to fill it with sin.

As the Church must take the message of eternal accountability to the world, confronting sinners who are criminals because of their hearts, as opposed to victims of their circumstances. We must confront the wicked as free moral agents who know better than to sin because of their conscience, as those who are capable of forsaking all their sins and surrendering entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ because of their free will. Cripples are not in need of forgiveness, cripples are not in need of grace. It is the voluntarily rebellious who are in need of the grace of God. Men need the grace that comes through the atonement, not because they couldn’t obey God, but because they didn’t obey God! Jesus shed his blood for sin, for those who have chosen to be criminals, for those who

are voluntarily sinners (Isa. 53:6), not for cripples of their nature or for victims of Adam.

We must witness in accordance with the Holy Spirit who seeks to grip the hearts of rebels with the fear of the Lord at the contemplation of their eternal accountability or their inevitable judgment, convicting or convincing their minds of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come (Jn. 16:8; Acts 24:25). They must see their need of grace for the forgiveness of sins, to be awakened to the dire need of the pardon of their defiance and rebellion in order to have a right relationship with God and eternal life with Jesus Christ. All men need Jesus Christ, not because they can't obey God, but because they haven't obeyed God, and therein lay the reason for the need of the grace and mercy of God, which comes through the cross: the forgiveness of open rebellion.

Present obedience can never atone for past disobedience (Gal. 2:16, 21; 3:21; Php. 3:9), so obedience to the law cannot save sinners. Only shed blood can atone for sins (Heb. 9:22). The atonement was necessary for the pardon of criminals, not of cripples, to atone for the sins of the will, and not for the defects of nature. It is for the intentional, voluntary, avoidable rebellion of men that Christ needed to shed his blood.

Men must also see their need and utter dependence upon God for correction and conviction (Jn. 16:8), for illumination, enlightenment and instruction (Jn. 6:13, Jn. 15:26), for the strength of encouragement and comfort (Jn. 15:26, Eph. 3:16), for leading and guiding (Rom. 8:14, Gal. 5:18), and for the supernatural power of supernatural gifts (Lk. 24:49, 1 Cor. 12:4-11). Tertullian taught that men are utterly dependant upon God for the *disciplining of their powers*, dependant upon the Holy to be their *manager and trainer*. Tertullian said, "Blessed ones, count whatever is hard in this lot of yours as a disciple of your powers of mind and body. You are able to pass through a noble struggle, in which the living God is your manager and the Holy Spirit is your trainer."<sup>122</sup> Methodius said, "For the power is present with man, and he receives the commandment. But God exhorts him to turn his power of choice to better things."<sup>123</sup> All men are in need to be taught all that is right, to be guided into all the ways of holiness, to be lead by the Holy Spirit who alone can infallibly instruct and lead men as to the proper use of their God given abilities and faculties. No man can come unto the Father unless the Spirit teaches him (Jn. 6:44-45), one must be quickened by the Word of God (Ps. 119:50, Jn. 6:63, Jas. 1:18, 1 Pet. 1:23). As one cannot learn Latin without a Latin teacher, one cannot learn all that is needed to live holy without the Holy Spirit. Remember, the Spirit's regeneration or transformation is through spiritual revelation (Jn. 6:45, Jn. 6:63, Jn. 8:32, Jn. 15:3, Jn. 17:17, Rom. 2:8, Rom. 6:17, Acts 9:4-6, 1 Cor. 4:15, Tit. 2:11-12, 1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Thes. 1:8, 1 Pet. 1:22-23, 1 Pet. 4:17, 2 Pet. 1:2-3, 2 Pet. 2:20, Jas. 1:18, Jas. 1:21-22). All men must voluntary yield to and obey the light

that God reveals, the truth imparted by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 2:8, Rom. 6:17, Rom. 8:1, Rom. 8:14, 2 Thes. 1:8, 1 Pet. 4:17).

While free will is what makes a man a man, a personally accountable agent, instead of a mere necessitated machine, the faculties and capacities of men were not intended or purposed to work and operate autonomously. Their proper functions are not independent of God and His revelation, but rather are dependent upon God and His revelation. As He reveals truth to our intelligence, to our reason or our conscience, we must yield and obey, and thereby be led by the Spirit, led by the revelation of the Holy Spirit revealed to our consciousness, allowing it to direct and influence our will. We need the power of the influence of the Holy Spirit within us to properly will and to work according to God's good pleasure (Php. 2:13). Any use of our faculties and abilities, other than the revealed use intended and purposed by God, must be an improper use, and is nothing short of damnable rebellion and sin.

We are dependent upon God for the gift of free will and the gift of revelation, without which we would be totally unable and incapable of doing anything good or right. We can only do what is morally good and right because God both enables us and enlightens us, only because God grants both free will and revelation. We must think the thoughts of God if we are to will the will of God. Man is therefore always and eternally dependent upon God for right and proper conduct, for the right and proper function of his faculties. Man is dependant upon God for instruction, guidance, correction, and encouragement. (Acts 6:10, 1 Cor. 2:10, Gal. 3:24, Eph. 3:16, Tit. 2:11-12). Thus the Holy Spirit always initiates, through influence, the conversion of men (Jn. 6:44-45, Jn. 12:32, 1 Cor. 12:3), being the antecedent to the heart conversion of men, that is, when the heart repents and believes (Rom. 6:17, Rom. 10:10).

We must work alongside the Holy Spirit, being "laborers together with God" (1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 6:1), in a synergistic relationship, both to live holy ourselves (Jn. 15:5), and to help convert the world to Christ (1 Cor. 3:6-7; 2 Cor. 5:20), to press upon the minds of men with their personal guilt (2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 2:15) because of their personal knowledge, and because of their personal ability, thus revealing to them their personal need of the personal Savior Jesus Christ for the personal pardon of all the personal sins of their personal past (Rom. 3:25). Men must see that they are guilty before God (Rom. 3:19), guilty before the God who gave them a conscience and a free will.

God help us in this extraordinary task; aid us in this eternally important mission – the reconciliation of a rebellious world to a holy and good Creator.

## APPENDIX

### MORE QUOTES FROM THE EARLY CHURCH ON FREE WILL

“It is our responsibility to live righteously. God asks this of us, not as though it were dependent on Him, nor on any other, or upon fate (as some think), but as being dependent on us . . . We have freedom of the will and that we ourselves are the cause of our own ruin or our salvation” Origen (*Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*, by David Bercot, pg 74, printed by Scroll Publishing).

“There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man” Melito ( *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers).

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds’ . . . And ‘Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?’ . . . All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man . . . For it is in man’s power to disobey God and to forfeit what is good” Irenaeus ( *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers).

“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 endured us with free agency”. Chrysostom (*An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* by John Fletcher, Volume Two, pg 202, Published by Carlton & Porter)

“We . . . have believed and are saved by voluntary choice.” Clement of Alexandria ( *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

“The Lord clearly shows sins and transgressions to be in our own power”. Clement of Alexandria ( *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

“For man is able to both will and not to will. He is endowed with power to do both.” Hippolytus ( *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 288, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

“It would be more just to punish the stars, which make a wicked action necessary, than to punish the poor man, who doe that wicked action by necessity.” Epiphanius (*An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* by John Fletcher, Volume Two, pg 203, Published by Carlton & Porter)

“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”? Arnobius (*An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* by John Fletcher, Volume Two, pg 205, Published by Carlton & Porter)

“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.” Methodius (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, pg 292, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

“To do good or evil is in our own power”. Methodius (A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 276, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

“Natural will is the free faculty of every intelligent nature, as having nothing involuntary pertaining to its essence.” Alexander of Alexandria (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, pg 293, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

“How will he refute and convict a man who alleges *the frailty of the flesh* as an excuse for his faults [The argument of the Gnostics] – unless he himself will also be clothed with flesh – so he can show that even the flesh is capable of virtue? Lactantius (*A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 293, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

“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!*’ [The argument of the Gnostics] 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!” Pelagius (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, p. 53, published by The Boydell Press)

“Yet we do not defend the good of nature to such an extent that we claim that it cannot do evil, since we undoubtedly declare also that it is capable of good and evil; we merely try to protect it from an unjust charge, so that we may not seem to be forced to do evil through a fault of our nature, when, in fact, we do neither good nor evil without the exercise of our will and always have the freedom to do one of the two, being always able to do either” Pelagius (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, pg 43, published by The Boydell Press)

“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 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.” Pelagius (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, p. 53-54, published by The Boydell Press)

“Whenever I have to speak on the subject of moral instruction and conduct of a holy life, it is my practice first to demonstrate the power and quality of human nature and to show what it is capable of achieving, and

then to go on to encourage the mind of my listener to consider the idea of different kinds of virtues, in case it may be of little or no profit to him to be summoned to pursue ends which he has perhaps assumed hitherto to be beyond his reach; for we can never end upon the path of virtue unless we have hope as our guide and compassion . . . any good of which human nature is capable has to be revealed, since what is shown to be practicable must be put into practice." Pelagius (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, p. 36-37, published by The Boydell Press)

"It was because God wished to bestow on the rational creature the gift of doing good of his own free will and the capacity to exercise free choice, by implanting in man the possibility of choosing either alternative . . . he could do either quite naturally and then bend his will in the other direction too. He could not claim to possess the good of his own volition, unless he was the kind of creature that could also have possessed evil. 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" Pelagius (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, pg 38, published by The Boydell Press)

"If men are thus [sinners] because they cannot be different, they are not to blame." And "Sins ought not to be visited with even the smallest punishment, provided they cannot be avoided." Pelagius (*An Historical Presentation of Augustinism And Pelagianism* by G. F. Wiggers, p. 154)

Pelagius said that sinners, "abuse the liberty granted to them" while the righteous are "rightly using freewill." (*An Historical Presentation of Augustinism And Pelagianism* by G. F. Wiggers, p. 223)

"Grace indeed freely discharges sins, but with the consent and choice of the believer" Pelagius (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, pg 92, published by The Boydell Press)

"The beginning of our salvation flows from the merciful God; but it is in our power to consent to his saving inspiration." Augustine (*An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* by John Fletcher, Volume Two, pg 206, Published by Carlton & Porter)

"Nobody can help what comes into his mind; but to consent or to dissent from involuntary suggestions, is the prerogative of our own will." Augustine (*An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* by John Fletcher, Volume Two, pg 206, Published by Carlton & Porter)

"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." Augustine (*An Historical Presentation of Augustinism And Pelagianism* by G. F. Wiggers, p. 128-129)

"In all laws, warnings, rewards, punishments, etc. there is no justice, if the will is not the cause of sin." Augustine (*An Historical Presentation of Augustinism And Pelagianism* by G. F. Wiggers, p. 129)

"There can be no sin that is not voluntary, the learned and the ignorant admit this evident truth" Augustine (*De vera relig.*, xiv, 27)

"Their fulfillment [the law] would not have been commanded, if our will had nothing to do in it" Augustine (*De. Perf. Just.* Hom. 10.)

"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 uprighteous. 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?" Unknown (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, pg 167, published by The Boydell Press)

"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 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 and that what is justifiable on grounds of impossibility is either a small sin or none at all" Unknown (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, pg 167-168, published by The Boydell Press)

"Under the plea that it is impossible not to sin, they are given a false sense of security in sinning. . . . Anyone who hears that it is not possible for him to be without sin will not even try to be what he judges to be impossible, and the man who does not try to be without sin must perforce sin all the time, and all the more boldly because he enjoys the false security of believing that it is impossible for him not to sin . . . But if he were to hear that he is able not to sin, then he would have exerted himself to fulfill what he now knows to be possible when he is striving to fulfill it, to achieve his purpose for the most part, even if not entirely." Unknown (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, pg 168, published by The Boydell Press)

"Consider first whether that which is such that a man cannot be without it ought to be described as sin at all; for everything which cannot be avoided is now put down to nature but it is impious to say that sin is inherent in nature, because in this way the author of nature is being judged at fault . . . how can it be proper to call sin by that name if, like other natural things, it cannot be avoided, since all sin is to be attributed to the free choice of the will, not to the defects of nature?" Unknown (*The Letters of Pelagius and his Followers* by B. R. Rees, pg 168-169, published by The Boydell Press)

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# FREE WILL & CONSCIENCE

Rapes, murderers, molestations, violence, robberies, adulteries, genocides, sodomy, cults, heresies, and countless other moral crimes haunt the pages of the world's history. Who is to blame for all this moral chaos? Who is cause of the moral horrors of the world? Who is responsible? Who is to be held accountable?

For centuries the Church and the world has debated these doctrinal and philosophical issues and have come to polar opposite conclusions. Some have blamed fate. Some have blamed God. Some have blamed free will. Some have blamed nature. Some have blamed Adam. Some have blamed society. And some have blamed themselves. So who is really to blame for sin?

These ethical and metaphysical questions are worthy of a scriptural answer. This is a thorough examination of the moral doctrines and moral philosophy clearly presented in the Divine Scriptures, designed to shed light on such a dark issue.

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