

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

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(A section from the booklet "Free Will & Conscience")

Irenaeus said, "God has always preserved freedom and the power of self-government in man."³⁷ Origen said, "...the faculty of free will is never taken away..."³⁸ 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."³⁹ 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.

*37 Irenaeus, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers

*38 Origen; *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 289, published by Hendrickson Publishers

*39 Origen; *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* by David Bercot, p. 291, published by Hendrickson Publishers