

## **THE LIMITATION OF MORAL GUILT Is Guilt or Character Hereditary?**

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

### **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, weather 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 Kng. 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 voluntarily 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). Each individual originates their own sin (Matt. 12:35, Lk. 6:45). 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 accountable for their sins alone (Deut. 24:16, 2 Kng. 14:6, 2 Chron. 25:4, Jer. 31:29-30, 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 exhortation 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 led 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 voluntarily 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.

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