

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

**Jesse Morrell**

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

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).

<sup>40</sup>Basil; *An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* by John Fletcher, Volume Two, p. 201, Published by Carlton & Porter

<sup>41</sup>Augustine; *City of God*, 1950 Edition, Book V, ch. 9, Catholic University Press

<sup>42</sup>Augustine; *An Equal Check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* by John Fletcher, Volume Two, p. 205, Published by Carlton & Porter

<sup>43</sup>Augustine, *Freedom of the Will*, Book III, ch. 3, sec 6

<sup>44</sup>Augustine; *Doctrine of the Will* by Asa Mahan, p. 63, published by Truth in Heart