



A Biblical and Doctrinal Study on the Concept of Original Sin

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The Nature of Free Will Examined Through Scripture

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God did not make Adam and Eve sin; His most holy nature makes Him unable to sin or tempt others to commit transgressions of disobedience against Him. Satan did not make them sin; he did not force Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit or Adam to disobey God. There is absolutely no evil or defect inside Adam or Eve that forced them to sin; God created man in His Image, and formed both man and woman perfectly. Adam and Eve chose to be disobedient to God through their own self-determination, a privilege given to them through the bestowment of free will by their Creator.¹

The freedom to choose the direction of one's self has consequences attached. Each free choice made by an individual is not enacted within a vacuum; rather, it influences the activity within the realm of humanity that it touches. God's divine plans are implemented above the choices made by mere humans. While human choices change the direction of life as the various forces collide, change, build, grow, destroy, and fester, God's plans are unaffected. He is God. His works unfold perfectly, at the time He chooses, and those works are not affected by the faulty free choices made by human beings.

It seems a simple concept. God gives human beings free will that allows them to choose their life and make it what they will, with the counter-balance of all other humans having free choice that regulates those choices. That becomes the connected life force that free choice gives all human beings. And God's will reigns and acts perfectly in the time He chooses far above the

¹ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Three: Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 86.

doings of mankind. But, that simple concept is not quite as unobtrusive in the relationship between God and mankind that it seems at first glance, especially in the affairs of spiritual connectedness between natural and spiritual lives interrelating to the divine nature of God.

Historical traditions formed by religious doctrines have connected the doctrine of free will with the doctrine of original sin. The common religious consensus of the union of these two doctrines reflects that sinners cannot save themselves because of their fallen condition, and that free will has no choice but to sin and receive the punishment of damnation for eternity. Thus, it is my intentions in this study to fully explore the nature of the free will of human beings before I tackle the possibly conflicted doctrine of original sin that has developed in traditional religious doctrines over time.

Understanding Free Will through Sarai, Abram, and Hagar

Sarai and Abram are able to make free choice as all humans possess, and Sarai uses that right by choosing her maid Hagar to fulfill God's divine promise to give her husband an heir (Genesis 11:30; 16:1-16; 21:1-20). Hagar, with much less free choice because of life circumstances but fully endowed with free choice by God, becomes the surrogate. Things go miserably wrong for Sarai as her free will fights against the will and movement of God. This leads to the removal of Hagar and Abram's son Ishmael, to ensure their younger son Isaac's full inheritance from his father Abram and to receive the everlasting covenant with God (Genesis 17:10-27). Hagar and Ishmael have done nothing wrong; yet, they are captive of the times and the social structures that allow Sarai to act against her servant as a human agent representing God's will.²

² James A. Andrews, "On Original Sin and the Scandalous Nature of Existence," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 5, no. 2 (2011): 239.

That Sarai's actions are not in God's plans are not at issue. Rather, the absolute predicament that Hagar and Ishmael find themselves, unable to prevent the events that cascade toward them, brings them to cry out to God for salvation. Though Hagar had acted according to the customs of the day, and lay down with Abram at Sarai's orders, she was not guilty. She had done nothing wrong. Yet, as the account advances, the unchangeable direction of Hagar and Ishmael is rolling, and there is absolutely nothing they can do to prevent this from happening.

Genesis 21 reflects the results of the free choices of Sarai that brought adverse times to Hagar. Yet, the Lord is with both Sarai and Hagar and His will and ways guide them to His desired consequences and conclusions in spite of the errors made in the exercise of Sarai's free will. The Lord's divine plans cannot be changed or affected by human freedom even when His will unfolds in humanity's messed up environment.

Similarly, the poor choices made by Adam and Eve bring the curse of death to every living creature made in God's Image when life forces grow uncontrollable. In the midst of the curse of death, is life, and it is life that is formed according to God's desired consequences and conclusions. Every person is subject to the penalty given by God to Adam and Eve for their sins of disobedience to Him. Sin cannot be conquered without death; it is the natural order of things once the curse by God toward sinful human beings was applied.

Every person is also born with free will. But, free will is not free ever. Just as Hagar was at the whims of Sarai, and unable to prevent the casting away, so too are all human beings that are subject to death and stopped from having control over life. Just as Sarai's free will results in her creating the situation that she thinks reflects God's intentions, she instead, guesses wrong

and makes a mess of things. End analysis shows that even Sarai, blessed by God with a son in her old age and able to receive words from Him, could not use her free will to accomplish the things of God perfectly.

There is not a human being ever created that controls life and none that can act perfectly as a human agent to carry out God's divine plans with their inferior free will. Even the most pure hearts, those able to express free will in the most righteous of ways, will run into a wall of end life that cannot be controlled. Most notable, the end of lives begins with unpreventable, uncontrollable situations and always results in death. Death is the curse given to mankind for the sins of Adam and Eve. It is inevitable. It will come to all human beings and when it comes, the unfolding events for each death are completely uncontrollable, even if free will is declared and applied by the dying.

Time, space, and limited knowledge of all the key players in this drama are affected by fallen humanity that allows human frailties to become errors and transgressions against God. If Sarai had waited on the Lord, the birth of Isaac would have been the first son of Abram, done in God's time. But, Sarai takes matters into her own hands with her free will, and mucks things up, and creates an impossible situation of conflict that eventually requires the intervention of God to save Ishmael's life. Sarai, even though she exercises her free will and has confidence that she is fulfilling God's will, is not in control of anything. God's intentions are done in His way and time, in deference to the human error of the free will of Sarai.

The Penalty for Sin is God's Curse of Death

If free will leads a human being to commit disobedience to God, then free will has led that person to sin. According to 1 John 1:5-8, the truth of God reveals that all human beings have sin:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

And since all have sinned through their free will to be disobedient to God, then the penalty for that sin activates the curse that God placed upon all sin that moves humanity away from His presence. Ultimately, death will come to all, in spite of human error or perfection:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:12-21)

Death will come even though some human beings have free will that seems to make righteous choices always; don't let the semblance of perfection fool you. Every adult human being has sinned at some time. The nature of free will gives opportunity to choose righteousness or transgression, and the nature of humanity in relationship to each other leads to some disobedience to God always.

Death is God's curse placed upon mankind because of the transgressions made by the first human beings that released the component of sin into the natures of mankind (Genesis 3:19). Only death to the physical body releases the cling of sin. God is not going to change His curse against sinful humanity with even one degree deviation. It's too late; sin is part of the fabric of human life, and only His curse against it can release its hold upon his beloved humanity.

The Grace of God Frees Sinners from the Curse

There is no deviation from the curse against sin; death is the only thing that releases a human being from the power of sin. However, God has granted grace unto a select group of people, by allowing them to symbolically experience death while they are still alive, thereby releasing the hold that sin has upon them. This grace of salvation is given to all human beings that receive the Baptism of Jesus Christ:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For

he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Romans 6:1-14)

Simply stated, human beings are sinners and remain sinners until death is brought to sin. When death comes, sin releases its hold upon a person. Followers of Jesus Christ can have this hold released by experiencing death through His Baptism because God has offered His grace by promising release from the His penalties of disobedience to His law that He bestowed upon humanity because of sin. God loosens man from the requirement of the law that brings death to sin:

Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to *her* husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of *her* husband. So then if, while *her* husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, *even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not *in* the oldness of the letter. (Romans 7:1-6)

Next Focus of Study Concerning Free Will

We have explored a bit of Scripture in this study concerning free will and what it looks like in Scripture with an examination of Sarai's poor choice. We have examined Scripture that clearly states the curse that is brought against sin, and how death will come to every living thing as a result. We have also recognized the special provision of grace that God grants believers of Christ in allowing a symbolic death to come upon their sins while yet alive, giving them hope in eternal life through the promise of the forgiveness of past sins.

Romans 6 begins with an expression of the effects of faulty free will and carefully leads the reader into Romans 7 and 8 with the development of the condition of sin in humanity. It will be our primary focused text to discover the different connections that original sin has in its attachment to mankind. Free will Scripture has been introduced in this first study; in our next we will take a more detailed look at the development of the Doctrine of Free Will that will ultimately lead to our study of the Doctrine of Original Sin, and reveal God's truth in this important spiritual matter.

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