

their nature, and those choices will not be any the less the product of human free agency just because they will always be good and right.

Free will, however, has been defined by Christian teachers from the second century on as the ability to choose all the moral options that a situation offers, and Augustine affirmed against Pelagius and most of the Greek Fathers that original sin has robbed us of free will in this sense. We have no natural ability to discern and choose God's way because we have no natural inclination Godward; our hearts are in bondage to sin, and only the grace of regeneration can free us from that slavery. This, for substance, was what Paul taught in Romans 6:16-23; only the *freed* will (Paul says, the freed person) freely and heartily chooses righteousness. A permanent love of righteousness—that is, an inclination of heart to the way of living that pleases God—is one aspect of the freedom that Christ gives (John 8:34-36; Gal. 5:1, 13).

It is worth observing that *will* is an abstraction. My will is not a part of me which I choose to move or not to move, like my hand or my foot; it is precisely me choosing to act and then going into action. The truth about free agency, and about Christ freeing sin's slave from sin's dominion, can be expressed more clearly if the word *will* is dropped and each person says: *I* am the morally responsible free agency; *I* am the slave of sin whom Christ must liberate; *I* am the fallen being who only have it in me to choose against God till God renews my heart.

COVENANT

GOD TAKES SINFUL HUMANS INTO A COVENANT OF GRACE

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

GENESIS 12:1-3

✚ Covenants in Scripture are solemn agreements, negotiated or unilaterally imposed, that bind the parties to each other in permanent defined relationships, with specific promises, claims, and obligations on both sides (e.g., the marriage covenant, Mal. 2:14).

When God makes a covenant with his creatures, he alone establishes its terms, as his covenant with Noah and every living creature shows (Gen. 9:9). When Adam and Eve failed to obey the terms of the covenant of works (Gen. 3:6), God did not destroy them, but revealed his covenant of grace to them by promising a Savior (Gen. 3:15). God's covenant rests on his promise, as is clear from his covenant with Abraham. He called Abraham to go to the land that he would give him, and he promised to bless

him and to bless all the families of the earth through him (Gen. 12:1-3). Abraham heeded God's call because he believed God's promise; it was his faith in the promise that was credited to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:18-22). God's covenant with Israel at Sinai took the form of a Near Eastern suzerainty treaty, that is, a royal covenant imposed unilaterally on a vassal king and a servant people. Although that covenant required obedience to God's laws under the threat of his curse, it was a continuation of his covenant of grace (Exod. 3:15; Deut. 7:7-8; 9:5-6). God gave his commandments to a people he had already redeemed and claimed (Exod. 19:4; 20:2). The promise of God's covenant was made stronger through the types and shadows of the law given to Moses. The failure of the Israelites to keep the Mosaic covenant showed the need for a new redemption and covenant if God's people were to be truly his and he theirs (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:38-40; cf. Gen. 17:7; Exod. 6:7; 29:45-46; Lev. 11:44-45; 26:12).

God's covenant with Israel was preparation for the coming of God himself, in the person of his Son, to fulfill all his promises and to give substance to the shadows cast by the types (Isa. 40:10; Mal. 3:1; John 1:14; Heb. 7-10). Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant, offered himself as the true and final sacrifice for sin. He obeyed the law perfectly, and as the second representative head of the human race he became the inheritor of all the covenant blessings of pardon, peace, and fellowship with God in his renewed creation, which blessings he now bestows upon believers. The typical and temporary arrangements for imparting those blessings were done away with through the realizing of that which they anticipated. Christ's sending of the Spirit from the throne of his glory seals God's

people as his, even as he gives himself to them (Eph. 1:13-14; 2 Cor. 1:22).

As Hebrews 7-10 explains, God brought in an enhanced version of his one eternal covenant with sinners (13:20)—a better covenant with better promises (8:6) based on a better sacrifice (9:23) offered by a better high priest in a better sanctuary (7:26-8:6; 8:11, 13-14), and guaranteeing a better hope than the former version of the covenant ever made explicit, that is, endless glory with God in "a better country—a heavenly one" (11:16; cf. v. 40).

The fulfillment of the old covenant in Christ opens the door of faith to the Gentiles. The "seed of Abraham," the defined community with which the covenant was made, was redefined in Christ. Gentiles with Jews who are united to Christ by faith become Abraham's seed in him (Gal. 3:26-29), while no one outside of Christ can be in covenant with God (Rom. 4:9-17; 11:13-24).

The goal of God's covenantal dealings is, as it always was, the gathering and sanctifying of the covenant people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9), who will one day inhabit new Jerusalem in a renewed world order (21:1-2). Here the covenant relationship will find its fullest expression—"they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God" (21:3). Toward this goal God's shaping of world events still moves.

The covenant framework embraces the entire economy of God's sovereign grace. Christ's heavenly ministry continues to be that of the "mediator of a new covenant" (Heb. 12:24). Salvation is covenant salvation: justification and adoption, regeneration and sanctification are covenant mercies; election was God's choice of future members

of his covenant community, the church; baptism and the Lord's Supper, corresponding to circumcision and Passover, are covenant ordinances; God's law is covenant law, and keeping it is the truest expression of gratitude for covenant grace and of loyalty to our covenant God. Covenanting with God in response to his covenanting with us should be a regular devotional exercise for all believers, both in private and at the Lord's Table. An understanding of the covenant of grace guides us through, and helps us to appreciate all the wonders of God's redeeming love.

LAW

GOD LEGISLATES, AND DEMANDS OBEDIENCE

Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them.

DEUTERONOMY 5:1

✚ Man was not created autonomous, that is, free to be a law to himself, but theonomous, that is, bound to keep the law of his Maker. This was no hardship, for God had so constructed him that grateful obedience would have brought him highest happiness; duty and delight would have coincided, as they did in Jesus (John 4:34; cf. Pss. 112:1; 119:14, 16, 47-48, 97-113, 127-128, 163-167). The fallen human heart dislikes God's law, both because it is a law and because it is God's; those who know Christ, however, find not only that they love the law and want to keep it, out of gratitude for grace (Rom. 7:18-22; 12:1-2), but also that the Holy Spirit leads them into a degree of obedience, starting with the heart, that was never theirs before (Rom. 7:6; 8:4-6; Heb. 10:16).

God's moral law is abundantly set forth in Scripture, the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments), other Mosaic statutes, sermons by the prophets, the teaching of Jesus, and the New Testament letters. It reflects his holy character