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A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL APPRAISAL OF CONCUPISCENCE
WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Jared Heath Moore
December 2019

APPROVAL SHEET

A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL APPRAISAL OF CONCUPISCENCE WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

Jared Heath Moore

Read and Approved by:

Mark T. Coppenger (Chair)

Bruce A. Ware

Kenneth T. Magnuson

Date_____

To Amber,
Beautiful, you are
Far more precious than jewels.
Many women have done excellently,
But you surpass them all.

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PREFACE

I have spent ten years studying at SBTs. I am forever changed as a result. My family and church are thankful. Thank you to President Albert Mohler for remaining biblically and confessionally faithful and steadfast for these many years. I owe my theology in part to you and to several other professors, in no particular order.

First, to my doctoral supervisor, Mark Coppenger, and to committee members Bruce Ware and Kenneth Magnuson, thank you for sharpening and pushing me to think biblically and logically about concupiscence and same-sex attraction. Thank you for standing on Scripture and teaching me to do the same.

Second, Stephen Wellum, thank you for teaching me the doctrine of God, the Trinity, Christology, the atonement, and the authority of Scripture as the infallible and inerrant word of God. Also, thank you for encouraging me to build my theology in light of those faithful Christians who have come before.

Third, Bruce Ware, thank you for teaching me the doctrine of God, divine simplicity, the Trinity, and the authority of Scripture as the infallible and inerrant word of God. Also, thank you for being passionate about theology, ministry, and the gospel.

Fourth, Greg Allison, thank you for teaching me anthropology. I owe much of my love for others to you, from my spouse, and our children, to my church, the unborn, and orphans.

Fifth, Russell Moore, thank you for teaching me to preach, and to be passionate about engaging culture, loving God and my neighbor. Thank you for teaching me that the Bible is a book for humanity, not merely the church.

Crossville, Tennessee
December 2019

Jared Moore

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an explosion of writings in evangelicalism on whether same-sex attraction is sinful. The writings are spurred largely by the changing culture around Western evangelicalism. As the surrounding culture becomes more pro-homosexual, the church is forced to wrestle more with whether homosexual acts and same-sex attraction are sin. Many Christians compromise as a result, embracing the culture over against the inerrant Bible.

Yet, the culture is not the only reason for the increase in writings. The evangelical church has a poor public track-record in showing love towards homosexuals. Thus, evangelical writers have sought to present a clearer Christ-like example when responding to those ensnared in homosexual sin. Additionally, many of these evangelical authors struggle with same-sex attraction themselves, and they hope to offer healing to those who possess the same struggles they do.

Reformed Theologians Who Believe Same-Sex Attraction Is Not Sinful¹

Wesley Hill

One representative from Reformed theologians who believe same-sex attraction is not sinful is Wesley Hill. He is a Professor of New Testament at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania.² Hill desires to be faithful to Scripture

¹ By “sinful,” I mean that all humans since Adam, except Christ, are morally culpable sinners by nature. Sinners are morally culpable for every sinful desire, urge, inclination, or attitude because these are contrary to the perfect moral law of God. Also, by “Reformed,” I mean that one affirms a non-Arminian confession of faith within the Reformed tradition.

² Trinity School for Ministry is an evangelical seminary in the Anglican tradition. The school’s statement of faith includes the “39 Articles of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of

and orthodoxy while being empathetic towards Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction. He has written two books on being a faithful “gay-Christian,” *Washed and Waiting* and *Spiritual Friendship*. In *Washed and Waiting* he argues that his identity is in Christ, and that in Christ he is already washed, and he is waiting for final redemption, the redemption of his body.³ Therefore, he seeks to be celibate but not a heterosexual. Yet, Hill refers to himself as a “gay-Christian,” meaning that he is a same-sex attracted celibate evangelical Christian who fully affirms and embraces repentance and faith in Christ alone for salvation.⁴ Hill identifies with this “gay-Christian” moniker by parsing out his same-sex attraction as a neutral unwanted reality.⁵ He distinguishes between same-sex attraction and same-sex sexual attraction, describing his sexual orientation as a sensibility that colors everything about him.⁶ He believes same-sex attraction should be celebrated and can be redeemed while same-sex sexual attraction should be rejected.⁷

“America” from their convention on September 12, 1801. Interestingly, Article IX, Of Original or Birth-Sin, reads, “Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek, φρονημα σαρκος, (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh), is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized; yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.” Trinity School for Ministry, “The 39 Articles,” accessed July 16, 2019, http://www.tsm.edu/the_39_articles/. The confessional statement of Trinity School for Ministry, where Hill teaches, is contrary to his position on same-sex attraction, as chap. 3 of this dissertation shows.

³ Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 181.

⁴ Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 21-25.

⁵ Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 21-28.

⁶ Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 80-81.

⁷ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 80-81.

Hill pursues and emphasizes same-sex friendships because he prefers the company of men due to his same-sex attraction.⁸ Now, the reader must take note again that Hill distinguishes same-sex attraction from same-sex sexual attraction. He is not saying that he prefers the company of men because he is sexually attracted to men; he is trying to argue something less than that, but something that is fixed in his ontology, something he believes God can use for good. Hill believes that homosexual acts are sin. Yet, he argues that the answer for those who struggle with same-sex attraction is to pursue celibate life-long same-sex friendships, hence turning his affliction from the fall of Adam into a God-glorifying reality.⁹ He is the co-founder of a ministry called Spiritual Friendship, where he encourages other “gay-Christians” to reject their same-sex sexual attraction and to turn their same-sex attraction to intimate same-sex celibate friendships.¹⁰

Robert Gagnon

Another Reformed theologian to consider is Robert Gagnon, Professor of New Testament Theology at Houston Baptist University in Houston, Texas. His book *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* is one of the most important works ever written that argues from the Bible that homosexual acts are sin. Thomas Schreiner, James Buchanan Professor of New Testament Interpretation and Professor of Biblical Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville,

⁸ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 80-81.

⁹ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 80-81. This dissertation argues that it is unwise for Hill to encourage celibate Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction to pursue same-sex celibate friendships because they “desire male intimacy.” It would be wiser to direct these strugglers away from temptation into opposite-sex friendships or into the covenant of marriage with an opposite-sex friend, or into same-sex friendships devoid of same-sex attraction, where the friends are viewed as fathers or brothers (1 Tim 5:2, by implication).

¹⁰ The website for Hill’s Spiritual Friendship ministry can be found at <https://spiritualfriendship.org/>.

Kentucky, writes about Gagnon's book, "Gagnon's work represents a *tour de force* on the whole issue, and is the work that must be reckoned with by those advancing pro-homosexual interpretations."¹¹ Gagnon is the leading scholar today who defends the orthodox view that Scripture condemns homosexual acts. However, when it comes to sexual orientation, Gagnon does not believe a sinner is morally culpable for it:

A homosexual impulse, while sinful, cannot take shape as accountable sin in a person's life unless one acquiesces to it. Thus a reasoned denunciation of homosexual behavior and all other attempts at nurturing and justifying homosexual passions is not, and should not be construed as, a denunciation of those victimized by homosexual urges, since the aim is to rescue the true self created in God's image for a full life.¹²

For Gagnon, same-sex urges are sinful, but one is only morally culpable for them if one submits to them. He believes that people who experience unwanted same-sex attraction are victims of this attraction rather than complicit participants. He also does not believe that the Bible is concerned with same-sex urges:

The focus of this book on same-sex intercourse or homosexual practice, as opposed to homosexual orientation, is a reflection of the Bible's own relative disinterest toward motives or the origination of same-sex impulses. What matters is not what urges individuals feel but what they do with these urges, both in their fantasy life and in their concrete actions.¹³

Concupiscence, therefore, for Gagnon is a result of the fall, much like a disease or illness instead of a morally culpable condition of one's nature. He even says that the Bible is not concerned with one's motives or the source of same-sex impulses, only with one's fantasy life and concrete actions. Others in the Reformed tradition disagree.

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, "A New Testament Perspective on Homosexuality," *Themelios* 31, no. 3 (April 2006): 62n2.

¹² Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 31-32.

¹³ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 37-38.

Reformed Theologians Who Believe Same-Sex Attraction Is Sinful

Denny Burk

Since two Reformed theologians who believe same-sex attraction is not sinful have been considered, now I will interact with two Reformed theologians who believe same-sex attraction is sinful. One representative from this group is Denny Burk. Burk is Professor of Biblical Studies at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky and the President of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Commenting on Jesus' words in Matthew 5:27-28 where he says that to lust in one's heart is to commit adultery, Burk writes, "Considering the fact that the Mosaic Law requires sacrifices for unintentional sin, it is not difficult to see that the closeness of a desire does not ultimately determine its sinfulness. The sinfulness of a desire is determined solely by its conformity or lack of conformity to the law of God."¹⁴ The morality of God as expressed in the law of God determines what is holy and what is sinful, not the volitional subject, not the person acting. As Wayne Grudem helpfully summarizes, "Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature."¹⁵ Burk later argues that same-sex attraction is sinful and must be repented of:

When a person feels themselves experiencing an attraction or a desire toward a person of the same sex, what is their responsibility before God at that point? Is a desire for sexual activity with a person of the same sex a morally benign desire? In the terms that Jesus teaches us, it is always sinful to desire something that God forbids. And the very experience of the desire becomes an occasion for repentance. And it is pastoral malpractice to tell someone who is feeling a sexual attraction for a person of the same sex that they need not repent. In the moment they feel their sexual desire aroused in such a way—in that moment—they must confess the desire as sinful and turn from it.¹⁶

¹⁴ Denny Burk, "Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?" *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (2015): 100.

¹⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics: An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 138.

¹⁶ Burk, "Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?," 108.

Burk argues that any desire that has a telos (goal) contrary to God's definition of morality in the Bible must be repented from. It cannot be redeemed or sanctified. He is saying that same-sex attraction is contrary to God's law, and therefore, based on this reality, it is sinful. One does not need to wrestle with whether or not a person "chooses" the sin or desire, for the volitional subject's self-examination does not condemn or sanctify the desire; the desire's conformity to or lack of conformity to God's moral law reveals the desire as either sinful or righteous.

Wayne Grudem

Another Reformed theologian to consider is Wayne Grudem, Research Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary in Phoenix, Arizona. He argues that God not only requires purity of action but purity of heart as well "in all areas of our lives," including same-sex attraction.¹⁷ He writes, "Therefore, the Bible prohibits not only adultery but also the *desire* for adultery (Ex. 20:14, 17; cf. Matt 5:28); not only theft but also *coveting* (Ex. 20:15, 17). This is because 'the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart' (1 Sam. 16:7)."¹⁸ He continues,

So it is not surprising that not only homosexual conduct but also homosexual desires are viewed as contrary to God's will. Homosexual desires are regarded as "dishonorable passions" (Rom. 1:26), and Paul says that homosexual partners are "consumed with passion for one another" (v. 27), giving an image of a powerful but destructive inward craving.¹⁹

Grudem believes that God, as shown in the Bible, is concerned with sinful actions and the sinful urges and desires that lead to the sinful actions in his image-bearers. Furthermore, God's goal for his children is total moral purity. God communicates this reality in

¹⁷ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 858.

¹⁸ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 858.

¹⁹ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 858-59.

numerous places in Scripture, and he even explicitly condemns homosexual desires through the apostle Paul in Romans 1:26 and 27, calling these desires “dishonorable passions” that “consume” the guilty parties.

Thesis

Concerning the thesis, a dissertation on this subject is necessary for the sake of clarity for Christian professors, churches, and church leaders. The Revoice Conference held in St. Louis, Missouri, at Memorial Presbyterian Church, a church affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in July of 2018, reveals the need for clarity. The goal of the conference was to discuss how to be a faithful “gay Christian.” The President of Revoice, Nate Collins, is a former Southern Baptist with a PhD in New Testament from SBTS. Many evangelicals responded negatively to the conference with concern. Owen Strachan, Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, was one of the most vocal against it:

There is a spectrum of presenters at the conference (to be held in July 2018 in St. Louis), but the material available already on the website shows clearly that “gay Christianity” will be promoted at the event. One presenter will speak on how “queer treasure, honor, and glory” will be brought into the New Jerusalem; another presenter identifies as “bisexual” and is “actively involved” in the Chicago “LGBTQ community”; a third key participant argues that “Simply experiencing attraction to the same sex (or being gay) is not in itself a morally culpable sin.”

This sampling of material should show the biblical Christian that this event is biblically unfaithful and fundamentally unsound. There will be no “queer treasure” in the New Jerusalem. There will be nothing unholy in the celestial city, nothing sinful that will be brought to the worship of the crucified and resurrected Lord of the church. There is no righteousness in a believer, a truly born-again Christian, identifying as “bisexual.” This identification alone would not qualify a man or woman to serve at a Vacation Biblical [sic] School event, let alone instruct the church on sexual ethics. Finally, “experiencing attraction to the same sex” is in biblical terms the very definition of a “morally culpable sin” (Romans 1:22-27). We observe a crucial distinction here: I can note that a fellow man is good-looking, but if I am attracted to him (even for an instant), I am sinning, and I should instantaneously confess my sin to God, repent of it, and seek in the fullest possible extent to build in ways of preventing said sin in the future.²⁰

²⁰ Owen Strachan, “The Revoice Conference and the Hope of Every Sinner,” *Center for Public Theology at Midwestern Seminary*, May 31, 2018, <https://cpt.mbs.edu/2018/05/31/the-revoice-conference-and-the-hope-of-every-sinner/>.

Strachan's evaluation is accurate, and his concerns are warranted. This dissertation argues that same-sex attraction, since it is a form of concupiscence, is always sinful, because this is, most importantly, what Scripture teaches, and secondly, this is what the Reformed tradition teaches. By "sinful" I mean "morally culpable"; that a person, the volitional subject, is a participant in everything the subject's nature does because the subject is the one doing whatsoever the nature does.²¹ As Herman Bavinck helpfully summarized,

"Person" is what exists in and for itself, the owner, possessor, and master of the nature, a completion of existence, sustaining and determining the existence of a nature, the subject that lives, thinks, wills, and acts through nature with all its abundant content, by which nature becomes self-existent and is not an accident of another entity.²²

Whether one remembers choosing or not, natures do not act independently of persons. Rather, persons act through their natures. Every urge, thought, desire, or action of a human nature is the urge, thought, desire, or action of a human person owning, possessing, and mastering his or her human nature.²³ Sin is not determined by a volitional subject's memory of choosing the sin or one's ability to discern the sin's origin. Sin is determined based solely on a person's conformity to or lack of conformity to God's perfect moral law.²⁴

Moreover, same-sex attraction is a form of concupiscence, a sinful urge or desire, not merely temptation. This dissertation distinguishes the temptation of Christ from the temptation of sinners since Christ has neither had nor ever will have a sinful

²¹ Stephen Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 425-29.

²² Herman Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 306.

²³ Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 425-29.

²⁴ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 138.

urge or desire (Matt 4:1-11; Heb 4:15).²⁵ Christ was tempted from without not from within, while sinners are tempted from without and from within. Same-sex attraction is a sinful urge or desire from within since it is a desire that is contrary to the law and design of God. Again, the focus should not be on whether a person is aware of his or her choice to be attracted to the same sex, rather the focus should be on the holiness of God's perfect moral law and the reality that same-sex attraction is always contrary to this law.

Background

Personal Interest

The implications of what the local church teaches on this subject does not merely impact those men and women who struggle with same-sex attraction today, but also impacts those young children who will be taught to embrace or reject any experience that might suggest same-sex attraction in their lives from a young age. The more that homosexual sin is celebrated in our culture, the more we will have young boys and girls, and men and women who are tempted to accept and act on same-sex attraction. All churches need to be prepared to respond and teach in a thoroughly gracious and biblical manner.

Moreover, if the church accommodates a popular definition of “sexual orientation” as an ontological reality for which one is not morally culpable, then as the culture continues to celebrate sexual perversion and accepts “sexual orientation” as a distinct category for every possible sexually perverse attraction, the church will need to affirm every distinct sexual orientation as an ontological reality for which one is not morally culpable. Medical experts are already arguing that sexual attraction to children is a sexual orientation. For example, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in its

²⁵ The difference between Christ's temptation and sinful man's temptation is explained in chap. 4 and chap. 5 of this dissertation.

latest edition of the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 2013 referred to pedophilia as a sexual orientation:

If individuals also complain that their sexual attractions or preferences for children are causing psychosocial difficulties, they may be diagnosed with pedophilic disorder. However, if they report an absence of feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety about these impulses and are not functionally limited by their paraphilic impulses (according to self-report, objective assessment, or both), and their self-reported and legally recorded histories indicate that they have never acted on their impulses, then these individuals have a pedophilic sexual orientation but not pedophilic disorder.²⁶

People were outraged that the APA referred to sexual desire for children as a “pedophilic sexual orientation” and the APA released a statement saying it was an error; they meant to put “pedophilic sexual interest” instead.²⁷ Yet, they still changed the wording from previous manuals to say that sexual attraction to children is not a disorder; rather, it is only a disorder if a person acts on the sexual attraction. One logical conclusion of same-sex desire not being defined as sinful is that sexual desire for children cannot be defined as sinful either. The implications of this subject are far-reaching. If one affirms that same-sex attraction is not always sinful one must also affirm that every unnatural attraction under the sun is also not always sinful.

History of Research

To understand the history of research, one must have a clear understanding of concupiscence. Concupiscence is that sinful desire, urge, inclination, or attitude that comes from within according to one’s sinful guilt and nature inherited from Adam. The will is involved but is concomitantly involved.²⁸ Then, there is the sinful concrete willful

²⁶ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders*, 5th ed., (DSM-5) (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 698.

²⁷ Cheryl Wetzstein, “APA to correct manual: Pedophilia is not a ‘sexual orientation,’” *The Washington Times*, October 31, 2013, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/oct/31/apa-correct-manual-clarification-pedophilia-not-se/>.

²⁸ Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706) taught that even the first stirring of concupiscence in the human heart involves the will, concomitantly, and is therefore truly sinful. He was a Reformed Theologian and Professor who later influenced Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards. Stephen Hampton, “Sin, Grace,

act that submits to the concupiscence. As Wayne Grudem helpfully summarizes, “Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”²⁹ Although the Roman Catholic tradition and the Reformed tradition disagree on their understanding that concupiscence is always sinful, they both can trace their understanding of concupiscence back to Augustine.

Augustine and concupiscence. Augustine may be the greatest theologian, outside the Bible, in church history. He is surely the most influential. Roman Catholics and Protestants both claim him as a theological forebearer in their traditions. His understanding of concupiscence (sinful desire) is of particular interest for this dissertation.

Augustine was not as clear that concupiscence is sinful in his earlier writings. For example, in his book “Of True Religion,” written between 388 and 391, he wrote,³⁰

If the defect we call sin overtook a man against his will, like a fever, the penalty which follows the sinner and is called condemnation would rightly seem to be unjust. But in fact sin is so much a voluntary evil that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary. This is so obvious that no one denies it, either of the handful of the learned or of the mass of the unlearned. We must either say that no sin has been committed or confess that it has been willingly committed.³¹

Augustine argued that man does not sin apart from voluntary action. He taught that if man does not voluntarily will to sin, he has not sinned and cannot be justly condemned by God. The will must be *actively* involved in the desire or act, or sin has not occurred.

and Free Choice in Post-Reformation Reformed Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, and A. G. Roeber (New York: Oxford University Press), 232. Also, Aza Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625-1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessens*, Brill’s Series in Church History 26 (Boston: Brill, 2006), 14-15.

²⁹ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 138.

³⁰ The dating for when Augustine wrote the book *Of True Religion* comes from Malcolm Alflatt. See Malcolm Alflatt, “The Development of the Idea of Involuntary Sin in St. Augustine,” *Revue d’Etudes Augustiniennes Et Patristiques* 20, no. 1/2 (1974): 115.

³¹ Augustine, “Of True Religion,” in *Augustine: Earlier Writings*, ed. and trans. John H. S. Burleigh (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 238.

Augustine's later writings present a more mature and clearer understanding than his earlier writings on the proposition that concupiscence is always sinful. For example, consider his sermon on Romans 8:1-11 that he delivered on October 15, 419, over twenty-five years after he wrote "Of True Religion."³² He discussed Romans 7:20 and 25, and argued that concupiscence is always sinful:

Yesterday the reading from the holy apostle ended where it says, *I myself therefore with the mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin* (Rom 7:25). In concluding like that, the apostle showed why he said what he said above: *Now it is no longer I that perform it, but the sin that lives in me* (Rom 7:20); it was because he wasn't performing it by consenting with the mind, but by lusting with the flesh. He gives the name of sin, you see, to that from which all sins spring, namely to the lust of the flesh.

Whatever kinds of sin there are, in words, in deeds, in thoughts, they spring from nothing else but evil desire, they spring from nothing else but unlawful pleasure. So if we stand up to this unlawful pleasure, if we don't consent to it, if we don't provide it with our members to be its weapons, then sin doesn't reign in our mortal bodies. Sin, after all, first has to lose its power to reign, and that is how it fades away. So in this life, where holy people are concerned, it loses its power to reign, in the other life it fades away. Here, you see, it loses its power to reign when we don't go after our lusts (Sir 18:30); where there it fades away, when they will say, *Where, death, is your striving?* (1 Cor 15:55)³³

For Augustine, concupiscence, that predisposition to sin that is inherited from Adam, the lust of the flesh, was "evil desire." The way to defeat it was to reject it, to not submit one's members to it. If one rejects concupiscence, sin then loses its ability to reign in one's heart. Augustine preached that Paul called his fleshly desire sin even when Paul did not knowingly volitionally act on these desires. The Christian who does not repent at the root, at the point of sinful desire, will eventually be mastered by the sinful desire. Concupiscence is not neutral, sinful desire is always sin; sinful desire is the lust of the flesh.

³² Augustine, "Sermon 155," in *Sermons 148-183*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 84, 94n1.

³³ Augustine, "Sermon 155," 84-85.

Moreover, late in life Augustine wrote a book in 427 called *The Retractations* where he sought to correct or clarify anything that offended him or might offend others in his earlier writings.³⁴ He explained the meaning of his quote from “Of True Religion,” “Sin is so voluntary an evil that it is by no means sin if it is not voluntary,” when he wrote,

Even those sins which are not unjustly called involuntary, because they are committed by those who are ignorant or constrained, cannot be committed entirely without the will, since, in truth, he who sins through ignorance in any case sins voluntarily, because he thinks he should do something that should not be done. He who does not do what he wills because "the flesh lusts against the spirit," certainly lusts without the will and, therefore, does not do what he wills. If, however, he is overcome, he yields to concupiscence voluntarily, and, therefore, does only what he wills, free, so to speak, "as regards justice" and 'a slave of sin.'"³⁵

Augustine wanted to be clear that the mind being self-aware of its involvement in the desire or act does not determine whether the desire or act is sin. Even if one is “ignorant” of his flesh or “constrained” by his flesh, he still sins. When one thinks and desires to do something contrary to the law, he sins, regardless whether he acts on the desire or not. The desire itself is some sort of volitional action involving the will even prior to the sinner being aware of such desire, according to Augustine.

Roman Catholic tradition. Roman Catholics at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) rejected Augustine’s teaching that concupiscence is always sinful, morally culpable. Peter Kreeft is a Roman Catholic who is a Professor of Philosophy at Boston College in Boston, Massachusetts and The King’s College in New York City. In a time when the Roman Catholic Church is currently in turmoil over those compromising on

³⁴ M. Inez Bogan, introduction to *St. Augustine: The Retractations*, by Augustine, vol. 60 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. M. Inez Bogan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), xiii.

³⁵ Augustine, *St. Augustine: The Retractations*, vol. 60 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. M. Inez Bogan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 53-54.

their historic teaching that homosexual acts are sin, Kreeft has stood strong on Roman Catholic tradition:

"Homosexual persons are called to chastity" (CCC 2359) just as heterosexual persons are. They need the virtue of self-control to conquer powerfully attractive desires for illicit pleasures just as heterosexual persons do. And they can be serious and even saintly Christians just as heterosexual persons can.

However, we must distinguish persons who experience homosexual desires from persons who choose to embrace the homosexual (or "gay") life-style. "Dignity" is an organization of "gay Catholics" who justify their homosexual acts and seek to change the Church's perennial teaching against these acts. "Courage" is an organization of homosexual Catholics who support each other in the sincere effort to live in chastity and in fidelity to Christ and his Church. The difference between them typifies the fundamental difference between two kinds of morality (on any issue, not just homosexuality): the first seeks to conform the teaching of Christ's Church to fallen human desires and sinful life-styles; the second seeks to conform human lives to the teachings of Christ's Church. The first group treats the Church as their pupil; the second treats her as their teacher.³⁶

Kreeft clearly emphasizes that homosexual acts are sin; however, he appeals to the authority of the church and not the Scriptures. Unfortunately, this means he stands on the Roman Catholic Church's historic teaching that concupiscence is not always sinful as well. In his book *Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Kreeft summarizes and explains the Catholic catechism's teaching on concupiscence:

Coveting your neighbor's wife/husband is similar to lust after her/him (see the first point in section II of this chapter). We are responsible for it, for we choose to do it or not do it. (There is no sin where there is no free choice.)

Coveting is to be distinguished from concupiscence, which is not our free choice but our condition (as original sin is our condition and each actual sin is our choice). Concupiscence means "the movement of the sensitive appetite contrary to the operation of human reason" (CCC 2515). What reason says No to, concupiscence says Yes to. "Concupiscence stems from the disobedience of the first sin. It unsettles man's moral faculties and, without being in itself an offense, inclines man to commit sins" (CCC 2515). No one can avoid concupiscence. But we can avoid obeying it and being dominated by it. It is like an albatross around our neck, but it need not be our master.³⁷

³⁶ Peter Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity: A Complete Catechism of Catholic Beliefs Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 249.

³⁷ Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity*, 254.

According to Roman Catholic doctrine, concupiscence is distinct from coveting. There is desire that is not always sin (concupiscence) and desire that is always sin (coveting). The Roman Catholic Catechism applies this assumption to homosexual orientation as well. Kreeft summarizes the difference between homosexual orientation and homosexual acts, writing, “It is also necessary to make a clear distinction between homosexual desires, or a homosexual orientation, and homosexual acts. We are responsible for the acts we choose to perform, but not for the desires we experience (unless we freely will them or consent to them). Homosexual desires are disordered, but they are not sins.”³⁸ Only disordered desire that one clearly chooses or consents to may be called “sin” and is worthy of punishment from God according to Roman Catholicism.

Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition, on the other hand, adopted Augustine’s teachings, arguing that concupiscence is always sinful.³⁹ For example, Zacharias Ursinus, the main author of “The Heidelberg Catechism” (1563), in his commentary on it argues that concupiscence is always sin: “Sin is the transgression of the law, or whatever is in opposition thereto, whether it be the want of righteousness (defectus), or an inclination, or action contrary to the divine law, and so offending God, and subjecting the creature to his eternal wrath, unless forgiveness be obtained for the sake of the Son of God, our Mediator.”⁴⁰ Ursinus identifies any lack of righteousness or any inclination as sin if it is in opposition to God’s law. The goal of the desire determines whether the desire is sin, not the perceived “source” of the desire. For Ursinus, the goal

³⁸ Kreeft, *Catholic Christianity*, 249.

³⁹ Even Jacob Arminius agreed with Augustine that concupiscence is sinful and morally culpable. Th. Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stanglin, and Marijke Tolsma, eds. *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe: Jacobus Arminius (1559/60-1609)*, Brill’s Series in Church History 39 (Boston: Brill, 2009), 60-61.

⁴⁰ Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 3rd American ed., trans. G. W. Williard (Cincinnati: T. P. Buchner, 1851), 37.

of the desire determines the source of the desire. He later anticipated and responded to a potential objection that concupiscence (sinful inclination or desire) is always sinful:

Obj. 1: That which we do not will, as well as that which we cannot avoid, is no sin. But we do not will this want of righteousness, neither can we prevent disordered inclinations from arising within us. Therefore, they are no sins. Ans. The major proposition is true in a civil court, but not in the judgment of God, before whom whatever is in opposition to his law, whether it can be avoided or not, is sin, and as such deserves punishment. The Scriptures clearly teach these two things, that the wisdom of the flesh cannot be subject to the law of God, and that all those who are not subject thereto, stand exposed to the curse of the law.⁴¹

If there was any doubt about what Ursinus meant, the above quote leaves no room for debate. He argued that any desire or action against the law of God is sin and deserves God's punishment. God's court and a civil court are not the same, for God looks upon the heart. These types of quotes are found throughout the Reformed tradition and are not unique to Ursinus alone.⁴²

Methodology

Concerning methodology, the following dissertation is a historical, biblical, theological, and philosophical examination of concupiscence, about whether it is always sinful. In chapter 2, Augustine's earlier writings are compared with his later writings, for the sake of showing the maturing of his understanding of concupiscence. Chapter 3 follows the truth that if one wants to know what a theological tradition believed in church history, one looks at their confessions and catechisms. The chapter contrasts the documents of the Council of Trent of the Roman Catholic tradition with the catechisms

⁴¹ Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 38.

⁴² Consider John Calvin, for example, quoting Augustine favorably to argue that concupiscence is always sinful: "We accordingly teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness. And Augustine does not always refrain from using the term 'sin,' as when he says: 'Paul calls by the name 'sin,' the source from which all sins rise up into carnal desire. As far as this pertains to the saints, it loses its dominion on earth and perishes in heaven.' By these words he admits that in so far as believers are subject to the inordinate desires of the flesh they are guilty of sin." John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 603.

and confessions of the Reformed tradition, along with Augustine, on concupiscence and if it is always sin.

In chapter 4, the writings of four current Reformed theologians are contrasted to show which position is within the Reformed tradition and which position is borrowing from the Roman Catholic tradition. Then, in chapter 5, pertinent Scriptures are exegeted within their historical and biblical theological frameworks to prove the thesis of the dissertation. Next, chapter 6 shows the philosophical, theological, and logical conclusions of rejecting or accepting the thesis of this dissertation. Hypothetical scenarios are used to show that concupiscence, same-sex attraction or any other sinful desire, cannot be sublimated to holiness.

Finally, chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the arguments of each chapter and providing guidance for further research. This dissertation is informed by a host of primary and secondary sources within the Reformed tradition along with works from current scholars. The following chapter outline offers the structure for this dissertation.

Outline

Chapter 1 introduces the subject of same-sex attraction. Then, the thesis is presented—same-sex attraction is always sinful. Next, the warrant for the dissertation is presented, along with my personal background and the historical background for the Roman Catholic and the Reformed understanding of concupiscence. Finally, the methodology is stated, along with a summary of each chapter.

In chapter 2, Augustine's understanding of concupiscence is explained. This chapter shows that in Augustine's earlier writings he argued that concupiscence is not always sinful. However, it also shows that in almost all of the rest of his writings, as his understanding matured, he argued that concupiscence is always sinful.

The third chapter distinguishes the Reformed tradition from the Roman Catholic tradition concerning whether concupiscence is always sinful. Roman Catholics rejected Augustine's teachings on concupiscence. But the Reformed tradition built upon Augustine's understanding that concupiscence is always sinful.

Chapter 4 summarizes the current debate in evangelicalism over whether same-sex attraction is always sinful. Those following the Reformed tradition within evangelicalism today, arguing that same-sex attraction is always sinful, is represented by Denny Burk and Wayne Grudem. On the other side, those evangelicals who agree with the Roman Catholic view that same-sex attraction is not always sinful, is represented by Wesley Hill and Robert Gagnon. Finally, this chapter evaluates and rebuts Hill's and Gagnon's arguments.

Chapter 5 exegetes several passages to show that desire or attraction is always sinful if it is contrary to God's perfect moral law. For each passage examined, the contrary interpretation of those who believe desire or attraction against God's law is not always sinful, is presented as well. Genesis 3:6 shows that Eve willed her sinful desire for the forbidden tree in her heart, causing her to fall, before she tasted of it. Romans 1:24-27 contends that unnatural desire is entailed in unnatural homosexual acts. Both the homosexual act and the desire are unnatural, forbidden, and always sinful. Matthew 5:27-30 shows that sexual desire for anyone other than one's spouse is always sin. James 1:13-15, a common passage cited by those who argue that same-sex attraction is not sinful, reveals that same-sex attraction is always sinful. James argues that concupiscence is always sinful because it cannot come from God. This chapter concludes by showing that Jesus is completely actively sinless for His church, in every possible way—nature, inclination, desire, thought, and action. Christians cannot diminish the moral culpability of their concupiscence without diminishing the full righteousness of Christ imputed to them as well.

Chapter 6 presents several scenarios that show that concupiscence is always sinful, because it cannot be sublimated. Whether the concupiscence is in the form of same-sex attraction, pride, adultery, or any other sinful desire, it does not matter, for no sinful desire can be turned to holiness. Additionally, this chapter explains that there is only one correct response to same-sex attraction or any other sinful desire—fight! Pastors should tell Christians to repent, to fight, and they should also provide the tools necessary for the battle; such as prayer, memorizing Scripture, singing Scripture, discipleship, accountability, and seeing and enjoying God through his common grace and special grace, in light of Christ.

Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the arguments made in previous chapters. It demonstrates that a biblical, historical, theological, and contemporary analysis of Scripture, Augustine, and the Reformed tradition leads to the conclusion that same-sex attraction is always morally culpable sin. This chapter also suggests areas for further study related to the topics of concupiscence, same-sex attraction, and sin.

CHAPTER 2

A CHRONOLOGICAL SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY OF AUGUSTINE'S TEACHING THAT CONCUPISCENCE IS ALWAYS MORALLY CULPABLE SIN

Introduction

Augustine of Hippo was one of the most influential Christian theologians in church history. He defined concupiscence in his final work, the “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” as “whichever sense of the body the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit.”¹ Concupiscence is that evil desire that is inherited from Adam by all mankind that is opposed to the perfect moral law of God.

Even though Augustine’s influence is undeniable, he was sometimes difficult to understand. His discussion of concupiscence is one example of this difficulty. John Calvin communicated this reality well when he wrote,

But between Augustine and us we can see that there is this difference of opinion: while he concedes that believers, as long as they dwell in mortal bodies, are so bound by inordinate desires that they are unable not to desire inordinately, yet he dare not call this disease "sin." Content to designate it with the term "weakness," he teaches that it becomes sin only when either act or consent follows the conceiving or apprehension of it, that is, when the will yields to the first strong inclination. We, on the other hand, deem it sin when man is tickled by any desire at all against the law of God. Indeed, we label "sin" that very depravity which begets in us desires of this sort. We accordingly teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness. And Augustine does not always refrain from using the term "sin," as when he says: "Paul calls by the name 'sin,' the source from which all sins rise up into carnal desire. As far as this pertains to the saints, it loses its dominion on earth and perishes in heaven." By these words he admits that in so far as believers are subject to the inordinate desires of the flesh they are guilty of sin.²

¹ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 3, part 1 – Books, vol. 25 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 410-11.

² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:602-3. As this chapter shows, the times Augustine said that concupiscence was not morally culpable sin were due to Christ’s redeeming work

Calvin pointed out how Augustine said that concupiscence is not sin and concupiscence is sin. I understand how Calvin could come to this conclusion based on reading a few of Augustine's works, but if one reads all of Augustine's writings on concupiscence, one will understand that he argued pretty consistently that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate. Augustine's doctrine and communication of concupiscence matured over time, which means that his writings vary based on when they were written in his lifetime. This chapter contends that for most of his ministry, Augustine taught that concupiscence is morally culpable sin because of five realities: (1) His earlier writings contended that sin is grounded in the volitional choice of a person's will, arguing if there is no choice, there is no morally culpable sin. (2) His middle to later writings taught that the will is involved in everything a person does. (3) His middle to later writings asserted that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. (4) His middle to later writings argued that baptism is necessary in order to cleanse one's concupiscence of guilt. (5) Most of his writings went back and forth, arguing that concupiscence is morally culpable sin after baptism that needs to be mortified, or that concupiscence after baptism is guiltless evil influence that needs to be resisted.

Methodology

Several realities need to be considered for this chapter's methodology. First, Augustine could not have foreseen the influence his writings would have over Christianity worldwide for well over 1500 years after his death, even up to this day. Thus, one should not expect him to have perfectly consistent thoughts throughout his sermons, writings, and ministry, any more than one expects pastors and theologians today to have perfectly consistent thoughts throughout their sermons, writings, and ministry. Second,

imputed to the sinner through baptism, not due to the transformation of concupiscence into something less than morally culpable sin in and of itself. After all, Augustine argued that non-Christians are condemned by God due to all sin—original sin, concupiscence, and willful sin. Concupiscence for the baptized is counted against Christ. Augustine taught that God's forgiveness removes the moral culpability of concupiscence for the baptized only.

comparing a pastor's or theologian's writings from early in his ministry to late in his ministry will lead to discrepancies and even possibly contradictions. Augustine should not be held to a higher standard than others are held to. Third, much of Augustine's theology went back and forth on his discussion of concupiscence. There are realities one can say with certainty, and others of which one can say, "Augustine, some days believed this while at other times believed that, depending on the text he was preaching or discussing."

Due to these three considerations, this chapter shows that Augustine's doctrine of concupiscence remained the same in some ways, and yet, matured in others. Thus, the above five-point thesis is proven by showing how each point developed from Augustine's earlier writings to his later writings. This chapter focuses almost entirely on primary sources from Augustine.

Furthermore, concerning the research process for this chapter, I sought to read everything Augustine preached or wrote about concupiscence by searching for the term "concupiscence," and related terms, "cupidity," "avarice," "covet," "greed," "desire," and "lust," in the English translations of all of Augustine's writings. Any pertinent quotes found in the Schaff translations were then found in The New City Press and Catholic University of America Press translations and they were used instead. Since the Schaff translation is older Modern English, the New City Press and Catholic University of America Press translations were preferred due to their readability for today's English vernacular. Once everything Augustine wrote on concupiscence was read, the thesis and its five supporting points were formed as a summary of Augustine's works pertaining to concupiscence being morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate.

Sin Is Grounded in Volitional Choice

Augustine lived from 354 to 430. He was born in Tagaste, North Africa (Algeria) to a pagan father and a Christian mother. He was carnal in his school days but

was serious in his studies and became a master in grammar and rhetoric. In 373, he joined the Manichaean religion, but left it behind in 383 to become a skeptic. His skepticism was chipped away by listening to sermons of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, until one day, he was converted by overhearing an exhortation of Romans 13:13-14 in a garden. He was baptized by Ambrose in 387.³ Shortly before his ordination to the priesthood, in 390, he wrote “True Religion.”⁴ In this work, he grounded sin totally in the will without any distinction or nuance. While trying to prove that man has free will, he argued,

Now, if this defection which is called sin were, like a fever, to grab an unwilling victim, then quite rightly would the punishment that follows on the sinner's heels and that is labeled damnation be seen as unjust. As it is, however, so much is voluntary and deliberate sin an evil that in no way at all would it be sin were it not voluntary and deliberate. This indeed is so obvious that neither the small band of the learned nor the great crowd of the unlearned would disagree. Accordingly, one either has to deny that a sin has been committed or to confess that it has been committed willingly. Now, you have no right to deny that the soul has sinned if you admit that it is put straight by repentance and that, while the penitent is granted pardon, the one who perseveres in sinning is damned by a just law of God. Finally, if we only do evil involuntarily, there is no place either for reprimanding people or for giving them fair warning. Eliminate these, and you have to eliminate Christian law and the discipline of every religion.

So then, committing a sin is an act of will, and since there is no doubt that sins are committed, I do not see how there can be any doubt about this either, that souls enjoy freedom of will. God, you see, decided that his servants would be all the better for serving him freely, which could not possibly be done if they served out of necessity instead of freedom of choice.⁵

Augustine said that if sin takes over a man like a fever, then it would make the man an unwilling victim. Damnation based on something outside the man's will would be unjust, according to Augustine. Then, if there was any doubt concerning what he meant, he argued that sin is so voluntary and deliberate an evil that it would not be sin if it were not

³ N. L. Geisler, “Augustine of Hippo,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 105.

⁴ Michael Fiedrowicz, introduction to “True Religion,” by Augustine, in *On Christian Belief*, part 1 – Books, vol. 8 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005), 15.

⁵ Augustine, “True Religion,” in *On Christian Belief*, part 1 – Books, vol. 8 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005), 46.

voluntary and deliberate. These statements are interesting considering how throughout most of the rest of his ministry, Augustine described concupiscence as something the flesh does without the consent of the will. Of course, the will is involved, but it is not “deliberately” involved.

These realities will be examined throughout the rest of this chapter, but for now, consider Augustine’s own clarification from his book *Retractations*. Augustine wrote this work thirty-seven years later in 427 in order to correct or clarify anything from his earlier writings that offended him or might offend others.⁶ Concerning the above quote from “True Religion,” Augustine clarified,

And in another place, I say: "Sin is so voluntary an evil that it is by no means sin if it is not voluntary." This explanation may seem false, but if it is examined diligently, it will be found to be very true. For, in truth, we should consider sin only what is sin, not what is, indeed, the penalty for sin, as I pointed out above when I was treating certain passages from the third book of *On Free Choice*. Even those sins which are not unjustly called involuntary, because they are committed by those who are ignorant or constrained, cannot be committed entirely without the will, since, in truth, he who sins through ignorance in any case sins voluntarily, because he thinks he should do something that should not be done. He who does not do what he wills because "the flesh lusts against the spirit," certainly lusts without the will and, therefore, does not do what he wills. If, however, he is overcome, he yields to concupiscence voluntarily, and, therefore, does only what he wills, free, so to speak, "as regards justice" and "a slave of sin." And what is called original sin in infants, for they do not as yet use free choice of the will, is not improperly called voluntary also, because, inherited from man's first evil will, it has become, in a certain sense, hereditary. Consequently, what I said is not incorrect: "Sin is so voluntary an evil that it is by no means sin if it is not voluntary."⁷

Augustine dealt only with one sentence of the original paragraph. He pulled the sentence out of context because he said in “True Religion,” not only must sin be “voluntary,” it must also be “deliberate.” Yet, in his clarification in his *Retractations*, he said that there are sins that are justly called involuntary because they are committed by those who are “ignorant or constrained.” Yet, how can the two be true at the same time? How can sin

⁶ Augustine, *St. Augustine*, xiii.

⁷ Augustine, *St. Augustine*, 53-54.

necessarily be an act of the will that is both deliberate *and* ignorant at the same time?

These two explanations are contradictory.

Augustine's "True Religion" was not his only work where he argued that sin must be voluntary in order to be morally culpable, punishable, sin. He taught something similar in his book "The Two Souls," written between 391 and 395. He wrote, "There is no sinning, then, apart from the will. But our will is very well known to us. After all, I would not know that I willed if I did not know what the will was. And so, the will is defined in this way: The will is a movement of the soul, with nothing forcing it either not to lose something or to acquire something."⁸ Similar to the quote from "True Religion," Augustine argued that sin must be voluntary and known. The will cannot be coerced or constrained for it to be held accountable. He also clarified this quote in his *Retractations*:

Similarly, in another place, I defined the will itself in these words: "Will is a movement of the soul, under no compulsion, either toward not losing or acquiring something." This was said so that, by this definition, one who wills might be distinguished from one who does not will, and so the meaning might be applied to those who, the first in paradise, were the origin of evil for the human race by sinning under no compulsion, that is, by sinning with free will, because knowingly, indeed, they acted contrary to the command, and that tempter urged but did not compel them to do this. For, in fact, he who has sinned through ignorance, not inappropriately can be said to have sinned unwillingly, although, indeed, ignorant of what he did, nevertheless, he did it willingly. Hence, the sin of this man could not be without the will. This will, certainly, as it was defined, was "a movement of the soul, under no compulsion, either toward not losing or acquiring something." For he was not compelled to do something which he would not have done unless he had willed. He did it, then, because he willed, even though he did not sin because he willed, for he did not know that what he did was sin. Hence, a sin of this kind could not have been without the will, but by the will to act, not by the will to sin. This act, nevertheless, was sin, for this was an act which should not have been committed. But he who sins knowingly, if without sin he can resist the compulsion to sin but does not, without a doubt, sins willingly, for he who can resist is not compelled to surrender. But he who cannot resist insistent passion by will, and, accordingly, acts contrary to the precepts of justice, this, now, is sin in that it is in reality the penalty of sin. For this reason, it is very true that there can be no sin without the will.⁹

⁸ Augustine, "The Two Souls," in *The Manichean Debate*, part 1 – Books, vol. 19 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2006), 127-28.

⁹ Augustine, *St. Augustine*, 65-66.

Augustine argued that his definition in “The Two Souls” for sin was based only on Adam and Eve. There literally was no other human being other than Jesus Christ who had a will so free from the corruption of the flesh to fit this definition. Adam voluntarily willed, under no compulsion, to sin. However, his posterity received the penalty of his sin, concupiscence, the law of the flesh, which is an “insistent passion by will” that cannot be resisted in one sense, due to being bound under the law of the flesh. The soul apart from knowledge moves, bound to the lust of the flesh, bound to “insistent passion,” willing its presence, according to Augustine.

A Person’s Will Is Involved in Everything a Person Does

If one compares Augustine’s “True Religion” and “The Two Souls” with his *Retractations* and no other writings, Augustine’s self-clarification appears contrived. However, if one looks at his writings written during the thirty plus years between these three writings, his clarification of “True Religion” and “The Two Souls” in the *Retractations* is more justified. He later strongly argued that the will is involved in everything a person does. There are many sources from Augustine to consider.

“The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” Written Between 401 and 416¹⁰

First, Augustine wrote “The Literal Meaning of Genesis” between 401 and 416 to give a summary of his doctrine of creation.¹¹ About Galatians 5:17, “The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh,”¹² he argued,

¹⁰ Edmund Hill, introduction to “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” by Augustine, in *On Genesis*, part 1 – Books, vol. 13 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 164-65.

¹¹ Hill, introduction to “The Literal Meaning of Genesis,” 155.

¹² All Scripture references in this chapter are taken from the same source as the quotation of Augustine they precede.

How much more suitably, then, is the flesh said to lust when the soul, as well as animating the flesh with "soulish" life, also covets or lusts after things in its wake. It is not in its power not to lust or covet like this as long as sin is there in the members, that is to say, a certain violent allurement of the flesh in the *body of this death* (Rom 7:24), which arises from the punishment of that sin we trace our roots back to, in the wake of which we are all, before grace, *children of wrath* (Eph 2:3).¹³

Augustine was clear that the soul and the flesh participate in concupiscence together. Hence the united person participates in concupiscence so long as one is bound to this "body of death" and its "violent allurement." Christians also battle this allurement and are commanded by God to not permit concupiscence to reign, neither by consenting to it, nor by presenting one's members to be used by it as weapons.¹⁴

"Sermon 128," Preached Between 412 and 416¹⁵

Additionally, in "Sermon 128," preached between 412 and 416, Augustine commented on Romans 7:17, "It is now not I who am doing it, but sin that dwells in me," and its relation to concupiscence:

So let's go back to the words which I put before you from the apostle as being obscure, and we shall see that they are now perfectly plain. What I did put to you, as a matter of fact, is something the apostle didn't say: "Walk by the Spirit, and do not have any lusts of the flesh"; because we can't help having them. So why didn't he say, "Do not act on the lusts of the flesh"? Because we do act on them; I mean to say, we do lust. The very act of lusting is acting. But about this the apostle says, *It is now not I who am doing it, but sin that dwells in me* (Rom 7:17). So what is it you've got to avoid? This, of course: not to go through with it. A reprehensible

¹³ Augustine, "The Literal Meaning of Genesis," in *On Genesis*, part 1 – Books, vol. 13 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 410.

¹⁴ Augustine, "The Literal Meaning of Genesis," 410. Augustine continued, "It is against this sin that those who 'are constituted under grace' do battle, not in order to eliminate it from their bodies, as long as they are mortal in such a way as by rights to be called dead, but to prevent it reigning in them. Now it does not reign as long as obedience is not rendered to its desires, those, that is, which lust against the spirit in the wake of the flesh. Did the apostle say, after all, 'Do not let sin be there in your mortal bodies'? He knew well enough that the attraction of sin, which he calls sin, is there as the result of our nature being distorted by that first transgression. No, but *Do not let sin reign*, he said, *in your mortal bodies for you to obey its desires, and do not offer your members to sin as weapons of iniquity* (Rom 6:12-13)."

¹⁵ Augustine, "Sermon 128," in *Sermons 94A-147A*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 4 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1992), 293.

lust has stirred in you, has risen up, has made its suggestion. You mustn't listen to it. It's burning, it doesn't die down, and you would much rather it wasn't burning. So what about, So that you may not do the things that you would? Don't give it your limbs and organs. Let it burn to no purpose, and it will burn itself out.

So these lusts do occur in you. One must admit it, they do. That's why he said Do not go through with them. So you must take very good care not to go through with them.¹⁶

Augustine preached that the mere experience of concupiscence, lust of the flesh, is an involuntary act of lusting. "Lusting is acting." Persons lust. This action is of necessity due to the regenerate being united with this body of death. However, Christians are commanded to turn a deaf ear to this indwelling lust. And Augustine emphasized the personal responsibility of the believer to starve the lust, to not give it one's members to use as weapons so that the lust of the flesh may burn out or starve. After all, a fire that is not fed dies.

"On the Proceedings of Pelagius," Written Between 416 and 417

Furthermore, Augustine wrote "On the Proceedings of Pelagius" between 416 and 417 to prove that Pelagius was a heretic, since he was acquitted of heresy.¹⁷ He responded to Pelagius' claim: "We stated that a man can be without sin and keep the commandments of God, if he wishes, for God has given him this possibility."¹⁸ Augustine quoted from Romans 7:14-16, "We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under the power of sin. I do not know what I do, for I do not do what I want; rather, I do what I hate. But if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good," and responded,

Behold, he knows the law, praises it and consents to it; that is, he acknowledges that the law is good, because what it commands, this he also desires, and what it forbids

¹⁶ Augustine, "Sermon 128," 300.

¹⁷ Ronald J. Teske, trans., introduction to "The Deeds of Pelagius," by Augustine, in *Answer to the Pelagians*, part 1 – Books, vol. 23 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E Rotelle, (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 319.

¹⁸ Augustine, "On the Proceedings of Pelagius," in *Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, vol. 86 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, trans. John A. Mourant and William J. Collinge (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 131.

and condemns, this he also hates; yet nevertheless, what he hates, he does. Therefore, he has in him a knowledge of the holy, but still his evil concupiscence is not healed; he has in him a good will, but evil action prevails.¹⁹

Augustine's point was that the apostle Paul was not sinless, for evil action, concupiscence, prevailed in him. He reasoned if Paul was not sinless, then Pelagius was not sinless. Paul's nature was corrupt, unable to free itself from bondage to sin, and as a Christian, although in Christ he was cleansed of guilt, he would not be completely healed of sin until his body of death faded away when he entered eternity.

“Sermon 154,” Preached in 419²⁰

Again, in “Sermon 154,” preached in 419, Augustine commented on Romans 7:15, “It is not what I want to that I do; what I hate, that is what I carry out.”:

What do you carry out? I lust. Even if I don't consent to lust, even if I don't go after my lusts; all the same, I still lust; and of course I am myself in that part too.

You see, it's not a case of it's being me in the mind, someone else in the flesh. But what is the case? *I myself, therefore*; because it's I myself in the mind, I myself in the flesh. It's not a case, you see, of two opposed natures, but of one human being made from each nature; because it is one God by whom humanity was made. *I myself, therefore, I myself, with the mind serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin* (Rom 7:25). With the mind I do not consent to the law of sin; but for all that, I would much rather there wasn't any law of sin in my members. So because I would much rather not, and yet all the same there is: *it is not what I want to that I do*; because I lust, and don't want to, *it is not what I want to that I do; but what I hate, that is what I carry out*. What do I hate? Lusting. I hate lusting, and yet I do it, with the flesh, not the mind. *What I hate, that is what I carry out.*²¹

¹⁹ Augustine, “On the Proceedings of Pelagius,” 132.

²⁰ Augustine, “Sermon 154,” in *Sermons 148-183*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 68.

²¹ Augustine, “Sermon 154,” 73. Augustine argued something similar in the same sermon a page later: “‘What does the law command?’ ‘*You shall not lust* (Rom 7:7).’ ‘What do I want? Not to lust. By wanting what the law wants, *I give my consent to the law that it is good*. If the law said, You shall not lust, and I wanted to lust, I would not be giving my consent to the law, but would stand out as moving in an entirely different direction owing to that perversity of will. Clearly, if the law says, You shall not lust and I would like to lust, I am not giving my consent to the law of God. But what's the actual case? What do you say, law? You shall not lust. I too don't want to lust; I too don't want to. What you don't want, I don't want; that's why I am giving you my consent, because I don't want what you don't want. My weakness isn't fulfilling the law; but my will is praising the law. So if it's what I don't want to that I do, that is precisely why I am giving my consent to the law, because I don't want what it doesn't want; not because I do what I don't want to.’ The doing here, you see, is the lustng, it isn't the consenting to the lust; in case anyone

Augustine contended that Paul in Romans 7:15 was talking about himself after he became a Christian. Still as a Christian, the apostle Paul lusted. Even if he did not act on his lustful desires, he lusted. Furthermore, Augustine, against the Manichees, emphasized that it is not some alien flesh that is part of the apostle Paul. Rather, Paul spoke of himself acting through both the mind and the flesh. Who lusts? Christians do, through their flesh, even when their minds do not deliberately consent.

“Marriage and Desire,” Written Between 419 and 421²²

Additionally, Augustine wrote “Marriage and Desire” between 419 and 421 in response to the condemned Pelagian Julius, who had accused him of teaching that marriage is a work of the Devil. Augustine’s purpose was to show, contrary to the Pelagians, that original sin and concupiscence spread to all mankind from Adam and Eve. According to Augustine, concupiscence is a necessary evil for men and women to have sex in marriage to produce children, after the fall. The guilt of original sin and concupiscence are cleansed in baptism, but as a judgment from God, concupiscence remains, and is spread through carnal generation (all sexual intercourse):²³

should now look to the apostle to get himself an example of sinning, and should himself set a bad example. It is not what I want to that I do. After all, what does the law say? You shall not lust. I too don't want to lust, and yet I do lust; although I don't yield consent to my lust, although I don't go after it. I stand up to it, you see, I turn my mind away from it, I refuse it any weapons, I restrain my members. And yet what I don't want occurs in me. What the law doesn't want, I join the law in not wanting; what it doesn't want, I don't want either; so I give my consent to the law. ‘I do not acknowledge what I do’ But because it is I that am in the mind, I that am in the flesh—but I am more in the mind than in the flesh. You see, because it is I that am in the mind, I am in the ruler; the mind, after all, rules, the flesh is ruled; and I am more in that by which I rule than in that in which I am ruled. So because I am more in the mind, But now it is no longer I that perform it. But now—what does that mean? But now, now that I am already redeemed, previously having been sold under sin (Rom 7:14), now that I have received the grace of the savior so as to take delight in the law of God with my mind, if it is no longer I that perform it, but sin that is living in me.” Augustine, “Sermon 154,” 73-74.

²² Ronald J. Teske, trans., introduction to “On Marriage and Desire,” by Augustine, in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 2, part 1 – Books, vol. 24 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998), 14.

²³ Teske, introduction to “On Marriage and Desire,” 13-14.

Concupiscence of the flesh has, after all, a certain activity, even when one does not offer it the assent of the heart so that it might reign there or offer one's members as weapons to carry out its commands. What activity does it have but evil and shameful desires? For if they were good and licit, the apostle would not forbid us to obey them.²⁴

Augustine argued that concupiscence has a certain activity even when a Christian does not consent to it with his heart. The person, with his flesh, has “evil and shameful” desires that the apostle Paul forbade Christians to consent to. Concupiscence, even in believers, is some sort of action that involves the will.²⁵

“Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” Completed Between 420 and 421²⁶

Moreover, between 420 and 421, Augustine wrote four books that are included in his “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians” for Pope Boniface in response to two letters drafted by the Pelagian Julian. Commenting on Romans 7:16, “I consent to the law that it is good,” he wrote,

He says, after all, that he consents to the law rather than to the concupiscence of the flesh, for the latter he calls sin. He said, then, that his action and conduct do not

²⁴ Augustine, “On Marriage and Desire,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 2, part 1 – Books, vol. 24 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998), 47.

²⁵ Augustine, “On Marriage and Desire,” 47. Augustine continued, “He says, *Let sin not reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires* (Rom 6:12). He did not say: *so that you have its desires*, but: *so that you obey its desires*. Those desires are greater in some and less in others, as each has made progress in the newness of the interior self, and he wanted us to keep up the struggle for righteousness and chastity so that we do not obey those desires. We ought, nonetheless, to want those desires not to exist, even if we cannot attain that goal in the body of this death. For this reason the same apostle also instructs us in another passage, speaking as if he were bringing his own person onto the stage. He says, *For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate* (Rom 7: 1 9), that is, I have those desires. He would, after all, want not to have them so that he would be perfect in every respect. But if I do, he says, *what I do not want, I agree that the law is good* (Rom 7:16), because the law also does not want what I do not want. The law, that is, does not want me to desire, since it says, *You shall not desire* (Ex 20:17), and I do not want these desires. To this extent, then, the will of the law and my will agree. But since he did not want to have desires and yet had those desires and since he was not enslaved to the same concupiscence by consenting to it, he went on to add, *it is no longer I who do it, but the sin that dwells in me* (Rom 7:20).”

²⁶ Ronald J. Teske, introduction to “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” by Augustine, in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 2, part 1 – Books, vol. 24 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998), 99-100.

stem from the will to consent to evil and to do it, but from the impulse of concupiscence. For this reason, then, he says, *I consent to the law that it is good*; I consent, because I do not will what it does not want.²⁷

For Augustine, the mind consents to the law while the flesh due to concupiscence serves the law of the flesh. The impulse of concupiscence is the action of his flesh. Paul consented to the law that it is good and refused to choose to disobey the law. In this way, Augustine argued that Paul is an unwilling yet willing participant in the lust of his flesh; that is, he is unwilling with his mind while being willing in his flesh, lusting in his flesh.

“Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” Written in 430

Finally, Augustine passed away before he could finish his final work, in 430, the “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian.” He wrote these six books in response to Julian’s first six of eight books *To Florus*.²⁸ Julian argued that concupiscence is a good part of man’s nature that even Adam had before he fell into sin. Augustine wrote of the good of man’s nature and the bad of concupiscence in response: “Sight, then, is a good sense of the flesh, but concupiscence of the flesh is an evil movement.”²⁹ His point was that eyesight is something God created good in mankind. Concupiscence, however, is an evil movement or action of the flesh whose origin is not God but the Devil.³⁰

²⁷ Augustine, “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” 126.

²⁸ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 13.

²⁹ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 411.

³⁰ Roland J. Teske, commenting on Augustine’s response to Julian, argued, “While Julian insists that human beings do the evil they do as something possible, Augustine points to the words of Saint Paul, *I do the evil that I do not will* (Rom 7:19), as evidence that human beings do evil out of a necessity and without willing it. One, of course, does evil out of necessity if one does not will it and yet does it. But if what one does unwillingly is only to have carnal desires without any assent of the mind or action of the members, the concupiscence of the flesh is, nonetheless, an evil, ‘even if one does not consent to it to do evil’ (V, 50).” Roland J. Teske, trans., *Answer to the Pelagians*, 3, part 1 – Books, vol. 25 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 25. In the same work, Augustine argued that Christians suffer with concupiscence unwillingly, but by “unwillingly,” he did not mean without the will; he meant without consent of the mind: “We, however, freely speak of both of these: both what a person did willingly and what he suffered unwillingly, that is, the

Concupiscence Is Morally Culpable Sin

Augustine not only spent most of his ministry arguing that the Bible taught that the will is involved in everything a person does, he also taught that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. He taught that all infants were born with concupiscence and were condemned as a result. Their plight did not originate with them but with Adam. Due to Adam's sin, God has imputed his failure to all his posterity. Adam's sin resulted in the fall of mankind, which caused Adam and Eve to be filled with shame due to the existence of concupiscence. Augustine argued that before the fall, husbands and wives could have sex without any concupiscence or "lust of the flesh." Adam could make his penis erect much as healthy people can raise their hands.³¹ However, once Adam sinned, he was full of shame due to the lust of his flesh for his wife. For this reason, Adam and Eve were naked, ashamed, covered themselves, and attempted to hide from God.³²

As a result of man's fall, all children are conceived through a process that requires concupiscence.³³ According to Augustine, even circumcision, as commanded by the law, symbolized the removal of the guilt of original sin and concupiscence.³⁴ Since all mankind comes from Adam, all mankind sinned in Adam.³⁵ Death passed through Adam to all mankind as a result. Augustine argued, "It passed through; as a result, even the baby is guilty; it hasn't yet committed sin, but it has contracted it. You see, that sin didn't

disobedience of the spirit and the concupiscence of the flesh in opposition to the spirit." Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 413-14.

³¹ Augustine, "Answer to Julian," in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 2, part 1 – Books, vol. 24 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske, in (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1998), 411-12.

³² Augustine, "Answer to Julian," 410.

³³ Augustine, "The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sin and the Baptism of Little Ones," in *Answer to the Pelagians*, part 1 – Books, vol. 23 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation of the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 38-39.

³⁴ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 266.

³⁵ Augustine, *St. Augustine*, 67-68, where Augustine argues that infants are guilty because they were in Adam.

remain in its source, but passed through, not into this person or that, but into all men. The first sinner, the first transgressor, begot sinners liable to death.”³⁶

In the New Testament, according to Augustine, original guilt and concupiscence are no longer remitted through circumcision, but baptism. Baptism was necessary to cleanse the morally culpable guilt of original sin and concupiscence of infants. Otherwise, they would be condemned by God. He wrote that it was more important to baptize infants than to help orphans because the grace of Christ will be denied to those who do not have original guilt and concupiscence remitted through baptism.³⁷ And baptism to Augustine served the purpose of applying the atoning work of Christ. Christ died for infants precisely because infants need his atoning work to cleanse them from the guilt of original sin and concupiscence.³⁸ Even though infants, like Adam, are created by God, the source of mankind’s concupiscence is the Devil, not God.³⁹

There is nothing good about concupiscence, nothing of God in concupiscence, according to Augustine. These beliefs led to his teaching that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. There are many of his works that need to be examined.

“Sermon 210,” Preached Between 391 and 396⁴⁰

First, in “Sermon 210,” preached between 391 and 396, Augustine commented on coveting: “Who, after all, can perfectly fulfill, *You shall not covet* (Ex 20:17; Rom

³⁶ Augustine, “Sermon 153,” in *Sermons 148-183*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 65.

³⁷ Augustine, “The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones,” 135.

³⁸ Augustine, “On marriage and Desire,” 89-90.

³⁹ Augustine, “On marriage and Desire,” 45.

⁴⁰ Augustine, “Sermon 210,” in *Sermons 184-229Z*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 6 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 125n1.

7:7)? That's why we have to fast and pray, without ceasing to do good.”⁴¹ He taught that Christians must fast and pray due to this covetousness, this concupiscence or sinful desire remaining in them. To him, coveting was a form of concupiscence. One does not need to fast and pray over guiltless and forgiven sin. One only needs to pray over morally culpable sin that still lacks forgiveness.

“Sermon 113B,” Preached in 399⁴²

Similarly, in “Sermon 133B,” preached in 399, Augustine commented on the Rich Man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31:

We beat our breasts when our consciences prick us with our consciousness of sin. What we are beating is something inside, some bad, evil intention or desire; let it only burst out in confession, and there will perhaps be nothing left to prick our consciences. Let all our sins burst out into confession. I mean, that rich man too, swelling up in his fine linen, had something inside—and if only it had burst while he was still alive! Then, doubtless, perpetual flames would not have been applied to him. But because he was proud at that time, that fluid produced only a swelling, not a bursting. Meanwhile the poor man Lazarus was *lying at his gate, full of sores* (Lk 16:20). So let none of us, brothers and sisters, be ashamed of confessing sins; to lie down, you see, signifies humility.⁴³

Augustine preached, even back in 399, that Christians must fight back their concupiscence, their “evil desires.” He even said that such desires are sins that need to be confessed and forgiven. If such desires do not burst forth in confession, they only swell with pride. If Christians confess their sinful desires, they will be forgiven and eventually carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom, like Lazarus.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Augustine, “Sermon 210,” 122-23.

⁴² Augustine, “Sermon 113B,” in *Sermons 94A-147A*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 4 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1992), 184.

⁴³ Augustine, “Sermon 113B,” 185-86.

⁴⁴ Augustine, “Sermon 113B,” 186.

“Sermon 159B,” Preached in 404⁴⁵

Again, Augustine, in “Sermon 159B,” in 404, interacted with Paul’s praise of the law from Romans 7:12-13, “So did what is good become death for me? Perish the thought! But sin, to be shown up as sin, through what was good wrought death for me,” and taught,

Notice how he said that the law which was given to the Jews was a good thing. He called it a good thing, because God had given it. And indeed all the things laid down in the ten commandments are good. Or is there, perhaps, something bad about *You may not steal, you may not kill, you may not commit adultery, you may not bear false witness, etc., you may not covet your neighbor's goods* (Ex 20:13-17)? I mean, even if you haven't taken anything, but have just coveted it, the laws in the courtroom can't touch you, but God in his judgment can and does.”⁴⁶

Augustine argued that coveting or desiring a neighbor’s goods was sin that a courtroom could not convict, but God in his righteous judgment can and does. Inward sinful desire or coveting is morally culpable sin before God. Such sin needs to be confessed.

“Sermon 198,” Preached in 404⁴⁷

Furthermore, interacting with Romans 1 in “Sermon 198,” Augustine preached in 404,

The apostle included both sorts when he said, into the likeness of the image of perishable man, and of birds and quadrupeds and reptiles. That is why God handed them over to the desires of their hearts, to uncleanness, so that they would treat their bodies with contumely among themselves (Rom 1:23-24). These evils of theirs stemmed from impiety; their head and source, after all, was pride. But the sins that follow are not only sins, they are also punishments. When he says, you see, God handed them over, it means it is already the penalty of some sin that they should do these things; but these punishments are still also sins. Why? Because they can still pull back from them, should they wish to. When it comes to punishment, however, it is no longer granted to turn back from it; that will be the punishment which will not

⁴⁵ Augustine, “Sermon 159B,” in *Newly Discovered Sermons*, part 3 – *Sermons*, vol. 11 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 146.

⁴⁶ Augustine, “Sermon 159B,” 159.

⁴⁷ Augustine, “Sermon 198,” in *Newly Discovered Sermons*, part 3 – *Sermons*, vol. 11 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 180.

anymore be called sin. In these middle stages, you see, they are both punishments and sins. The first stage, which is pride, is only a sin, not yet a punishment. The things that follow are both sins and punishments. Anyone who declines to pull back from them will come to the punishment which is not a sin anymore, but the penalty for all sins. That pride, though, is the first sin is stated openly somewhere else: *The beginning of every sin is pride* (Sir 10:13). And how then is avarice *the root of all evils* (1 Tm 6:10)? Because to want more than God is avarice, to want more than is enough is avarice. Only God, after all, is enough for the soul, which is why Philip says, *Show us the Father, and it is enough for us* (Jn 14:8). But what could be prouder than to forsake God through overweening self-confidence? What more avaricious than not being satisfied with God? Pride, therefore, is the same thing as avarice at the origin of sins. That is why the fornicating soul, having forsaken the one true God as its lawful husband, prostitutes itself to many false gods, that is, to demons, and finds no satisfaction at all.⁴⁸

Augustine argued that pride and the love of money (avarice) are both morally culpable sins, the root for sins. They are not outside of concupiscence or the result of concupiscence, but forms of concupiscence themselves. Pride is a desire for self above God and avarice is a desire for money above God.

“Sermon 83,” Preached Between 408 and 409⁴⁹

Likewise, in “Sermon 83,” between 408 and 409, Augustine preached something similar when he taught on forgiving one’s neighbors:

And so it is that if we desire to receive pardon, we must be ready to pardon all wrongs committed against us. After all, if we take a look at our own sins, and try counting what we commit by deed, with our eyes, with our ears, in our thoughts, by innumerable impulses, I don’t know whether we wouldn’t go to bed with a cool million to our account. That’s why we ask every day, batter God’s ears every day with prayer, prostrate ourselves every day and say, *Forgive us our debts, just as we too forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). Which debts of yours? All of them, or only a part? You will answer, I am sure, “All of them.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Augustine, “Sermon 198,” 205. Augustine references Sirach 10:13 from the Apocrypha. I, SBTS, and Protestants since the Reformation, reject the Apocrypha as being part of Holy Scripture.

⁴⁹ Augustine, “Sermon 83,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – *Sermons*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 381.

⁵⁰ Augustine, “Sermon 83,” 383.

Augustine contended that even the “innumerable impulses” are sins that need to be confessed. For this reason, he told his hearers to pray, “Forgive us our debts.” Christians are so sinful, even after baptism, that Augustine taught they may go to bed each day having committed a million sins.

“Sermon 57,” Preached Between 410 and 412⁵¹

Additionally, between 410 and 412, in “Sermon 57,” Augustine offered an illustration of wrestling with avarice:

Suppose, for example, there is a temptation to avarice, and someone is overcome by some particular temptation (because even the wrestler or the good warrior is sometimes wounded); avarice overpowers a person, even a good wrestler, and he does something or other mean and avaricious. Or else there has been an impulse of lust; though it hasn't led to dishonorable conduct, it hasn't gone as far as adultery. Even when a man has felt such an impulse, he is still forbidden to commit adultery. But he has seen a woman as desirable, he has thought of pleasures he should not have done, he has been in a fight, he has been smitten, doughty warrior though he is; but he didn't consent, he beat back the wanton impulse, he chastised it with the bitterness of regret, he beat it back and conquered it. All the same, insofar as he did slip up, he has something he can say about it: *Forgive us our debts*. So with all other temptations, it is difficult not to have something about which we should say, *Forgive us our debts*.⁵²

Augustine referred to an “impulse of lust” as sin here. He went back and forth between arguing that sinful desires are morally culpable sin and arguing that sinful desires are never morally culpable sin due to the removal of guilt through baptism. His doubt was not in baptism but in his own discernment ability to recognize his own consent to concupiscence. He did not know if he consented in his heart or not, so he prayed to God and encouraged his hearers to pray as well, “Forgive us our debts.”

⁵¹ Augustine, “Sermon 57,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 109.

⁵² Augustine, “Sermon 57,” 114-15.

“Sermon 30,” Preached in 412⁵³

Moreover, in “Sermon 30,” preached in 412, Augustine commented on Romans 6:12, “Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies to make you obey its desires”:

He didn't say, "Don't have bad desires." How, after all, can I avoid having bad desires in this mortal flesh, in which the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh? So what you must do is this: *Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey its desires.* Even if there are desires, you mustn't obey them, lest iniquity should master you.

Do not offer your members to sin as weapons of iniquity (Rom 6:13). Do not let your members become weapons of iniquity, and no iniquity will master you. But even this, your members not becoming weapons of iniquity, you surely don't accord it to yourself by your own powers, do you? You see, when your members do not become weapons of iniquity, there is still some iniquity in your members, in the form of unlawful desires, but it doesn't reign. How can it reign if it hasn't got any weapons? Part of you, your flesh, the lust of your flesh, is rebelling against you by its sluggishness. This sluggishness is a tyrant. If you want to be the tyrant's conqueror, invoke the aid of Christ your emperor.⁵⁴

Augustine said that Paul does not command Christians to not have bad desires but to never let these bad desires reign. Yet, he referred to these desires as “iniquities.” Also, he argued that Paul was concerned with desire not reigning. Thus, he emphasized Christians’ not consenting to concupiscence, to not giving it one’s members for a weapon; for to give one’s members to concupiscence is to give one’s members to a tyrant that is against God. And tyrants against God are never morally neutral; they are always evil.

“Sermon 90,” Preached in 413⁵⁵

Again, in 413, Augustine encouraged his hearers to examine their own spiritual fruit in “Sermon 90”:

⁵³ Augustine, “Sermon 30,” in *Sermons 20-50*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 2 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 123.

⁵⁴ Augustine, “Sermon 30,” 126-27.

⁵⁵ Scholars disagree on the date; some say 411; others say 420. The translator of this sermon, Edmund Hill, thinks it was preached in 413. Augustine, “Sermon 90,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 456n1.

That is the wedding garment. Examine yourselves; if you have it, you can be confident about the Lord's banquet. There are two things in one person: charity and cupidity, love and greed. Let love be born in you if it hasn't been born yet; and if it has, let it be fed and nourished, let it grow. But as for that greed, even if in this life it cannot be totally extinguished, because if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1 Jn 1:8), but insofar as there is greed in us, to that extent we are not without sin; so let love increase, greed decrease, so that one day that one, that is, love, may be perfected, greed may be wiped out.⁵⁶

Augustine contended that cupidity or greed cannot be totally eliminated in this life. Greed is a form of concupiscence, a desire for money above God. It is a lust of the flesh, a sin that must be confessed. Christians must labor to increase in love and to decrease in greed until Christ perfects their love and wipes out their greed, in the end, according to Augustine.

“Sermon 77A,” Preached Between 414 and 416⁵⁷

Furthermore, in “Sermon 77A,” preached between 414 and 416, Augustine taught on covetousness:

However great the progress you make, you still have that covetousness in you. So, until death is swallowed up in victory, say, *Forgive us our debts*. Say this about past matters, about deeds, about words, about thoughts. What about future matters? Listen, and say what comes next: *Lead us not into temptation* (Mt 6:12-13). *Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation* (Mt 26:41). What's the meaning of entering into temptation. Consenting to a bad desire. You've consented? You've entered; at least be quick to come out. Before you get to sinning, kill your consenting. Rejoice that you haven't done it; repent of having thought of it.⁵⁸

Augustine believed that even thinking about lust of the flesh was sin. He communicated that to even consider acting on concupiscence was itself a form of consenting to concupiscence. This raises the question, “How can one know he has a sinful desire if he does not consider it?” Augustine was aware of this reality, and that is why he told his

⁵⁶ Augustine, “Sermon 90,” 451.

⁵⁷ Augustine, “Sermon 77A,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 327.

⁵⁸ Augustine, “Sermon 77A,” 329.

hearers to say, “Forgive us our debts,” because of covetousness within them. And if covetousness is in them, some form of consent quickly follows, at least in thought, according to Augustine.

“Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” Completed Between 420 and 421⁵⁹

Similarly, in Augustine’s “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” completed between 420 and 421, he commented on the hypocrisy of the Pelagians and on the saints’ constant need for forgiveness due to concupiscence:

Since that is the case, let the Pelagians stop pretending that they want to rescue human beings from the snares, as it were, of the Manichees by the insidious praises of those five things, namely, the praise of the creature, the praise of marriage, the praise of the law, the praise of free choice, and the praise of the saints. In fact, they use these praises to trap people in their own nets, that is, so that they deny original sin and begrudge the help of Christ the physician to little ones. They use these praises to maintain that the grace of God is given in accord with our merits, and thus grace is no longer grace. They use these praises to claim that the saints have no sin in this life, and thus they render meaningless the prayer which he who had no sin gave to the saints and through which every sin is forgiven the saints when they pray.⁶⁰

The Pelagians taught that one could choose to simply be sinless by fiat of the will. Augustine taught that baptism cleanses the saints of all sin, but concupiscence remains. Because concupiscence remains, some form of consent remains as well. This meant that even if the guilt of concupiscence is forever removed in baptism, if some form of consent to concupiscence is necessary in this life, then the logic followed that concupiscence is at least functionally morally culpable sin even in believers. After all, what good is it to say that the guilt of concupiscence is removed in baptism if in the next breath one says, “But, the concupiscence makes one guilty through some form of daily consent”? Thus, Augustine argued that the church needed to daily pray, “Forgive us our debts.”

⁵⁹ Teske, introduction to “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” 99-100.

⁶⁰ Teske, introduction to “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” 99-100.

“Letter 6*” Written Between 416 and 421⁶¹

Additionally, Augustine wrote “Letter 6*” between 416 and 421 to commend Atticus, Bishop of Constantinople, for correcting some who were given to Pelagian errors, and to defend a biblical view of concupiscence.⁶² Writing about concupiscence, Augustine reasoned,

For it intrudes where it is not needed and tempts the hearts of faithful and holy people with its untimely and even wicked desire. Even if we do not give in to these restless impulses of it by any sign of consent but rather fight against them, we would nonetheless, out of a holier desire, want them not to exist in us at all, if that were possible, just as eventually they will not exist. After all, this is the perfect good that the apostle indicated was still lacking to the saints in this life, when he said, *I am able to will the good, but I cannot bring it to perfection* (Rom 7:18). For he does not say "do good" but *bring it to perfection*, because a human being does good by not consenting to such desires, but he brings the good to perfection by not having them. *For*, he said, *I do not do the good that I will, but I do the evil that I do not will* (Rom 7:19). He was, of course, not doing evil by offering his members to the carrying out of evil desires. Rather, he said this about those movements of concupiscence: even though he did not consent to them or commit the sin to which they enticed him, he was still doing something evil in having those desires that he did not want to have. Then he adds, *But if I do what I do not will* (Rom 7:20), that is, though I do not consent to concupiscence—I still do not want to have concupiscence and yet I have concupiscence—I myself no longer do it, but the sin that dwells in me (Rom 7:20). The guilt of this sin is contracted by birth; it is removed by rebirth when all sins are forgiven. Some of its power and a certain harmful influence stemming from its infection remains, nonetheless, in the mortal and corruptible body, even after its guilt is removed, and the person who has been reborn fights against it, if he is making progress.⁶³

Augustine believed that Christians should not only fight against concupiscence, but they should desire to not even have these unholy desires. He even argued that the apostle Paul was “doing something evil in having those desires that he did not want to have.” In Christians, this is still guiltless evil, according to Augustine. Yet, even though the guilt of

⁶¹ Augustine, “Letter 6*,” in *Letters 211-270*, part 2 – Letters, vol. 4 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005), 250.

⁶² Roland Teske, trans., introduction to “Letter 6*,” by Augustine. In *Letters 211 – 270, 1* – 29**, part 2 – Letters, vol. 4 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005), 16.

⁶³ Augustine, “Letter 6*,” 252-53.

concupiscence is remitted in baptism, he argued that “some of its power and a certain harmful influence stemming from its infection remains.”

“The Gift of Perseverance,” Written Between 428 and 429⁶⁴

Moreover, Augustine wrote “The Gift of Perseverance” between 428 and 429 to teach his readers that final perseverance of the saints is a gift of God, and to help them learn to properly teach the doctrine of predestination.⁶⁵ Interacting with Cyprian’s comments on the petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our debts,” Augustine wrote against the Pelagians,

But notice how the most glorious Cyprian does them in. For, when he explained this passage of the Lord's Prayer, he said among other things, "How necessary it is, how providential and salutary, that we are warned that we are sinners who are forced to pray because of our sins. Thus, when we ask pardon of God, our mind recalls its own guilty conscience. Lest anyone be pleased with himself as if he were innocent and lest, by being filled with pride, he may perish even more, we are instructed and taught that we sin daily when we are commanded to pray daily because of our sins. Finally, John too put this in his Letter when he said, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (1 Jn 1:8)," and the rest which it would take too long to include here.⁶⁶

Augustine used Cyprian’s quote to teach that the church is guilty of sin daily and must pray for forgiveness. He believed that anyone who thought they did not need to pray daily for forgiveness was full of pride. Again, one must wonder if Augustine believed that some sort of consent to one’s concupiscence was a necessary reality for Christians in this life.

⁶⁴ William Harmless, ed., *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 446.

⁶⁵ Ronald J. Teske, “General Introduction,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 4, part 1 – Books, vol. 26 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 29-30.

⁶⁶ Augustine, “The Gift of Perseverance,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 4, part 1 – Books, vol. 26 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 195-96.

“Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” Written in 430⁶⁷

Furthermore, in his “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” written in 430, Augustine commented on why concupiscence is called sin:

Why do you fight a battle over concupiscence that itself fights a battle, that is, over the law in the members that resists the law of the mind? It is called the law of sin because it urges and—so to speak—orders us to sin, and if one obeys it with the mind, one sins without excuse. It is called sin because it was produced by sin and it longs to commit sin. Its guilt is removed by rebirth; the conflict with it is left for our testing. It is an evil; that is obvious. Nor do we, as you suppose, resist it by the strength of our will unless we are helped by God. This evil must be defeated, not denied; it must be conquered, not defended. Finally, if you consent to it, recognize its evil in your sinning; if you resist it, recognize its evil in your fighting it.⁶⁸

Augustine called concupiscence “evil” repeatedly. Concupiscence orders Christians to sin and tempts them to sin. It is so pervasive in Christians that apart from God’s grace, they cannot resist it. They must appeal to God to help them fight and resist it; “this evil must be defeated, not denied; it must be conquered, not defended.” Julian was doing both, denying that concupiscence is evil and defending it as morally good. But to Augustine, there was nothing good about concupiscence; it was entirely evil.

Also consider another quote of Augustine’s from the same work. Commenting on a Christian’s spirit still sinning after rebirth, Augustine wrote,

But in baptism all sins are forgiven in the grace of God, and by that grace a human being is drawn to baptism itself when the will is prepared by God. Thereafter, though the spirit has desires opposed to the flesh so that it does not consent to iniquity, the flesh, nonetheless, has desires opposed to the spirit so that even the spirit does not do what it wills. After all, the spirit wills not to have the concupiscence of the flesh, but cannot be free from it at present. For this reason the spirit still groans in itself, awaiting the adoption, the redemption of its body, when it will have its flesh in such a way that it can no longer sin. Now, therefore, the spirit not only can sin after baptism, but is at times drawn to consent by concupiscence of the flesh, even though it struggles valiantly against it, and it commits some sins, even though slight ones. We always have reason to say in this life, *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:12).⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 13.

⁶⁸ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 102-3.

⁶⁹ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 124.

Augustine contended near the end of his life that concupiscence is so pervasive that some consent to it is inevitable. Christians should pray for God to forgive their debts because even on their best days, they have debts, acts of consent to concupiscence, that they must seek God's forgiveness for committing.

Furthermore, another quote from Augustine's final work commented on the pure evilness of concupiscence:

We are all, however, tempted, attracted and enticed by our own concupiscence. For this favorite of yours pleases you so much that, when anyone is not drawn by it to consent, you suppose that she should be praised, as if something that draws one toward evil is not evil if one does not give in to it, but resists when pushed. And yet, you argue with great nonsense that, even if one consents to it, we should blame the one who fell, not the one who pushed, the one who was seduced, not the seducer, the one who was enticed, not the one who enticed, for the former makes a bad use of something good, as you define it. You have such an evil spirit that the concupiscence by which the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit seems good to you.⁷⁰

Augustine argued that concupiscence tempts, attracts, pushes, seduces, and entices Christians to sin. He railed against Julian for seeing concupiscence as a good created by God that is misused by man. Instead, Augustine reasoned that concupiscence should not be praised for tempting one to commit evil from within, any more than the Devil should be praised for tempting, since he is its source and father.

Additionally, consider a brief excerpt from the same work where Augustine strongly argued that concupiscence is always sin:

Why is it, I ask, that you say that concupiscence is not a sin? Do you not see that in that way you argue against the apostle? For he showed quite clearly that concupiscence is a sin when he said, *I did not know sin except through the law. For I would not have known desire if the law had not said: Do not desire* (Rom 7:7). What could be said more clear than this testimony? What could be said more foolish than your statement.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 127.

⁷¹ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 382.

Augustine plainly contended against Julian that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, in and of itself. The difference for the saints is that God no longer counts this sin against them, since he has counted it against Christ, and forgiven his saints.

Moreover, consider this quote from the same work where Augustine disputed against Julian that the desire for sexual misconduct is just as much an evil as willing sexual misconduct:

But what is more insane than to call sexual misconduct an evil and the desire for sexual misconduct a good? What is more insane than to think that by the term "concupiscence of the flesh" the apostle of Christ brought accusations, not against concupiscence of the flesh, but against sexual misconduct, which would not exist at all, if a person were not enticed, pulled, and possessed by concupiscence of the flesh? You say this as if this great teacher had not found a reason to blame concupiscence of the flesh, but to blame under its name a person who sins sexually, though a person who sins sexually ought not to be blamed except for obeying its desires. Stop speaking so much and being wise so little. You will never succeed, no matter how great is the river of your wordiness by which you are carried off into the depths; you certainly will never succeed in making sexual misconduct an evil and the desire for what pertains to sexual misconduct not an evil, even if one does not consent to such concupiscence in order not to commit the sin.⁷²

⁷² Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 407. He says something similar on the very next page: "I say that this concupiscence of the flesh is an evil, the concupiscence of the flesh which John says does not come from the Father and which Ambrose says was turned into our nature as the result of the transgression of the first human being. For this reason, John says that it comes from the world, for he wants us to understand it comes from human beings. Mani too calls this concupiscence of the flesh an evil, but he does not know where it comes from. But you call it something good, because you too do not know where it comes from. And by denying that it comes from the source from which Ambrose says it comes, you make Mani think that he correctly attributes it to the nature of evil, which he foolishly thinks is coeternal with God. Therefore, Bishop Ambrose explains what the apostle John says so that you are refuted along with Mani. For that which is turned into our nature through the transgression of the first human being is certainly not an evil coeternal with God. Let Mani, therefore, be silent. And it is, nonetheless, an evil. And so, let Julian also be silent." Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 408. Another page over he argued, "But, you quarrelsome fellow, the limit of concupiscence, which you say is licit, is not observed when one consents or yields to its impulses and moves to its excess; in order that one may not go to this excess, one resists an evil. Who, after all, would doubt that it is an evil which, if you obey it, you do evil and, if you fight against it, you do good? A person, then, who wants to live temperately, should not consent to the evil which you praise, and one who wants to live as a believer should not agree with you when you praise an evil." Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 409. Augustine also argued something similar on the next page: "You say this, as if we say that concupiscence of the flesh surges up only into the pleasure of the sex organs. This concupiscence is, of course, recognized in whichever sense of the body the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit. And because, if the spirit does not have stronger desires opposed to it, it drags one off to evil actions, it is proved to be an evil. On its account scripture says: Was anything created more wicked than the eye? (Sir 31:15). And God, the creator of all bodies and senses, surely, created the eye, not its wickedness. See how you may understand—if you do not fight against the truth—that an evil is present in our nature, even when it is created, though it is a good created in a good

Augustine said that concupiscence “pulls” and “possesses” Christians. This language describes more than temptation; it describes coercion. He also maintained that concupiscence is an evil. To him, if the act is evil, the desire for the act is evil as well.

Also, consider another brief quote from the same work. Commenting on concupiscence being evil, Augustine reasoned, “He, of course, does evil out of necessity who does not will it and does it. But if what he does unwillingly is only to desire carnally without any assent of the mind or action of the members, such concupiscence of the flesh is also evil, even if one does not consent to it to do evil.”⁷³ Augustine argued that concupiscence, sinful desire, is “doing evil.” And doing evil for Christians in this life due to the lust of the flesh is out of necessity. One must wonder, based on Augustine’s final unfinished work against Julian, if he viewed concupiscence as morally culpable sin even after its guilt is removed. This quote makes me question if Augustine was shifting to view baptism as only cleansing of the past guilt of concupiscence, but new sinful desires perhaps bring new guilt, requiring the daily prayer, “Forgive us our debts” for the Christian to be forgiven.

Finally, from the same work, interacting with Romans 7:15, Augustine argued,

way by the good God. But learn from Ambrose where this evil comes from so that you do not offer support to Mani for introducing another, that is, an evil nature coeternal with God.” Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 410-11. On p. 437, Augustine argued in the same vein as above, “Concupiscence of the flesh is evil, even when one does not consent to it to do evil, for it is that by which the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit, even if, because the spirit has desires opposed to it, it does not carry out what it attempts to carry out, namely, an evil action.” Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 437. Finally, Augustine argued something similar on p. 537, “It is not the depravity of sexual desire alone that is blamed when it runs off to what was not permitted, but yours is a great depravity when you do not blame it when it impels one toward what was not permitted. For when it impels one toward what is not licit, one immediately runs off to do it unless one fights against its evilness. And this is the concupiscence of the flesh by which the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit, against which the spirit also has desires, precisely so that the spirit does not run off to what the desire impels it. Even that which impels one toward evil is, therefore, something evil. But if one does not run off after it because the spirit fights against it, one is not conquered by the evil. One will, however, be free from all evil only when there will be nothing against which to fight.” Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 537.

⁷³ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 574-75.

The blindness of heart, then, because of which one does not know that which justice forbids, and the violence of concupiscence, because of which even one who knows that from which one ought to hold back is overcome, are not merely sins, but also the punishment of sins. And, hence, they are not included in that definition of sin which defines only what is sin, not what is also the punishment of sin. For, when persons do not know what they should do and, for that reason, do what they ought not to do, they are not free to hold back from that from which they know that they should hold back. So too, how is that person who is driven, as you say, not because of his origin, but because of habit, to cry out: *I do not do the good that I will, but I do the evil that I do not will* (Rom 7:15), free to hold back from that evil which he does not will but does, or even hates but does? If it were in the power of human beings to be without these punishments, they would not ask God's help both against blindness where scripture says to him, *Enlighten my eyes* (Ps 13:4), and against evil desire where it says to him, *Let every iniquity not lord it over me* (Ps 119:133). Moreover, if these too were not sins because one is not free to hold back from them, scripture would not say, *Do not remember the sins of my youth and of my ignorance* (Ps 25:7); it would not say, *You have sealed my sins in a sack, and you have noticed if did anything unwillingly* (Jb 14:17 LXX).⁷⁴

Augustine called concupiscence “sins” and the “punishment for sins.” He called concupiscence iniquity. He even quoted King David, praying for God to forget his sins of ignorance (Ps 25:7), as a reference to concupiscence. Again, in this final work of Augustine, he began to argue that concupiscence, though cleansed of past guilt in baptism, brings new guilt for the believer that needs to be confessed as sin in order to be forgiven.

Concupiscence Will Not Exist in Heaven

Since Augustine viewed concupiscence as morally culpable sin counted against sinners, counted against Christ for believers, and later in his ministry, as morally culpable sin for believers, it should come as no surprise that he also taught that there will be no concupiscence in Heaven. Consider Augustine’s argument from his “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” completed between 420 and 421:⁷⁵

If we fail to observe something in those commandments, God grants pardon; for this reason we say in prayer both, *Your will be done* and, *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:10, 12). In this life, then, we have the commandment not to sin; in that life we will have

⁷⁴ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 643-44.

⁷⁵ Teske, introduction to “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” 99-100.

the reward of being unable to sin. In this life we are commanded not to obey sinful desires; in that life we will have the reward of not having sinful desires.⁷⁶

Augustine believed that in this life God's grace is essential for Christians to live in relationship with God, for concupiscence is ever-present within us. And the reward for holy living will be the inability to sin in eternity and the inability to have concupiscence or sinful desire. There will be no concupiscence in Heaven because there will be no evil or sin there.

Christ Did Not Have Concupiscence

Since concupiscence is evil and morally culpable sin in Augustine's theology, it biblically and logically followed that he believed that Christ did not have any concupiscence. First, consider Augustine's "Homily 3" on John 1:15-18, preached between 406 and 407.⁷⁷ He, commenting on Christ the Second Adam, preached, "The first man fell, and all who have been born of him have contracted the lust of the flesh from him. There was a need for another man to be born who had contracted no such lust. One man and another: a man for death and a man for life. That is what the apostle says: *Death through a man, through a man also resurrection of the dead.*"⁷⁸ Augustine taught that since Adam fell and all his posterity inherited his corruption, original sin and concupiscence, it was necessary for an uncorrupt Second Adam to redeem mankind. Mankind needed a new Adam who did not inherit the original sin and concupiscence of the old Adam. Death came through the old Adam and life came through the New Adam. If Christ possessed the concupiscence of the old Adam, he could not redeem anyone.

⁷⁶ Augustine, "Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians," 173-74.

⁷⁷ Alan D. Fitzgerald, introduction to "Homily 3," by Augustine, in *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40*, part 3 – Homilies, vol. 12 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), 29.

⁷⁸ Augustine, "Homily 3," in *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40*, part 3 – Homilies, vol. 12 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2009), 77.

Second, consider an excerpt from Augustine's "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian" written in 430.⁷⁹ Commenting on Christ's true humanity and his lack of concupiscence, Augustine wrote,

We do not say: "By the blessedness of a flesh which was deprived of our senses Christ could not experience the desire for sins." Rather, we say that because of the perfection of virtue and a flesh which was not begotten through the concupiscence of the flesh he did not have a desire for sins. It is one thing not to have had an evil desire; it is something else not to have been able to feel it. He would have felt it, after all, if he had had it. For he did not lack the sense by which he would have felt it, but he had a will by which he did not have it. Do not be surprised that Christ, though a true human being, yet good in every respect, refused to have an evil desire. For who apart from you denies that the desire by which we desire evils is evil? Who, I repeat, apart from you tries to persuade us that the desire which is admittedly a desire for sins is not a sin and is not something evil, though one does an evil action if one consents to its persuasion? Christ could have felt this desire, if he had it, and he could have had it, if he had willed to. But heaven forbid that he should have willed to! If, nonetheless, he had evil desire and, to use your word, "a desire for sins," it would have begun to exist in him from his will, because he was not born with it, as we are. And for this reason, his virtue meant that he did not have it; our virtue means that we do not consent to it and that we imitate him so that, as he did not commit sin because he did not have this desire, so we do not commit sin because we do not consent to it. And as he willed not to have this desire and was able not to have it, so let us too will to be without it because we will be able to be without it. His grace will, of course, set us free from the body of this death, that is, from sinful flesh, the grace of him who came to us in the likeness of sinful flesh, not in sinful flesh.⁸⁰

Augustine contended that Jesus could not have had concupiscence because his Father was not Adam. His Father was God. He was not born with concupiscence like the rest of mankind since Adam. The only way Jesus would have concupiscence was if he willed to have it. There was nothing in his human nature that would prevent him from willing concupiscence. Therefore, Christians should seek to be like Christ, choosing to not have sinful desires. Augustine taught that this was an impossibility for this life, but he emphasized fighting against concupiscence, which included willing its death while pleading to God to forgive one's debts.

⁷⁹ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 13.

⁸⁰ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 427.

Third, consider another quote from Augustine's "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian."⁸¹ Commenting on Christ and concupiscence, he wrote,

Christ, then, refrained from sin in such a way that he also refrained from all desire for sin, not so that he resisted that desire which existed, but so that it never existed at all, not because he could not have had it if he had willed to, but he would not have rightly willed to have what the sinful flesh, which he did not have, would not have forced him to have even against his will.⁸²

Again, Augustine taught that Christ could have had concupiscence, but he would have had to will it. His flesh did not desire sin. There was no conflict within Christ between his flesh and spirit. Of course, this emphasis of Augustine on Christ's not having concupiscence further shows that Augustine viewed concupiscence as morally culpable sin. Concupiscence would have disqualified Christ from being the church's Redeemer.

Baptism Is Necessary to Cleanse Concupiscence of Guilt⁸³

Augustine not only spent most of his ministry arguing that the Bible taught that the will is involved in everything a person does, and that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, he also consistently preached that concupiscence requires God's forgiveness for the guilty person or the person must face God's condemnation. God shows no partiality based on age or volitional ability for this moral culpability of the sin of

⁸¹ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 13.

⁸² Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 436-37.

⁸³ Augustine wrote, "This carnal concupiscence would have been harmful, merely by reason of its presence, if the forgiveness of sins had not produced its benefit. Now, though it is present in those who have only been born and also in those who have been born again, it is both present in and harms those who have only been born, but is present in those who have been born again without being able to do them harm. It is harmful to those who have been born to the extent that, unless they are born again, they can derive no benefit from being born of parents who were born again. For the defect stemming from the origin remains in the offspring to make them guilty, even if the guilt of the same defect is washed away in the parents by the forgiveness of sins. Such is the case until all of the defect, by consent to which we sin, is destroyed in the final rebirth, that is, in the renewal of the flesh which is promised in its resurrection that is to come." Augustine, "The Grace of Christ and Original Sin," in *Answer to the Pelagians*, part 1 – Books, vol. 23 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 457.

concupiscence. In Augustine's theology, baptism was necessary in order to cleanse all men, women, and children of the moral culpability of original sin and concupiscence.⁸⁴ There are many works of his that need to be considered.

“Sermon 353,” Preached in 394⁸⁵

First, Augustine, in “Sermon 353,” preached in 394, argued that baptism cleansed sinners of past sins:

The time past, you see, is quite enough for having, so to say, been slaves under the domination of the Egyptians, in the muddy works of sin. Already the Red Sea, namely the baptism of Christ consecrated by his blood, has overthrown the real Pharaoh, destroyed the Egyptians; you need be in no dread of your past sins, as of enemies pursuing you from the rear.⁸⁶

Augustine used the Exodus story of Israel crossing the Red Sea and fleeing the Egyptians to communicate that a believer who has been baptized has no reason to fear past sins. He believed that the regenerating work of Christ through baptism frees infants and adults from past sins, just as God through the Red Sea freed the Israelites from Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

“The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones,” Written in 412⁸⁷

Similarly, in “The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones,” written in 412, Augustine emphasized the need of infants for cleansing

⁸⁴ Neither this writer nor the institution granting this dissertation, SBTS, agree with Augustine that baptizing babies or adults cleanses people of original sin or the guilt of concupiscence. Baptism does not literally cleanse or impute Christ's righteousness. Cleansing comes by grace through faith in Christ alone.

⁸⁵ Augustine, “Sermon 353,” in *Sermons 341-400*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 10 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1995), 152.

⁸⁶ Augustine, “Sermon 353,” 153-54.

⁸⁷ Augustine, “The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sin and the Baptism of Little Ones,” 19-22.

through baptism. The Pelagians believed that infants were born sinless, and thus, go to heaven based on their own merit or lack of need for merit. Since infants could not will any sins, they never committed any sins, nor could they do so until their volitional capacity matured. Therefore, infants were never under any condemnation from God, according to the Pelagians. But Augustine strongly disagreed. Interacting with the apostle Paul again in Romans 6:12, in “The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones,” he argued,

The apostle, however, also refers to this law of sin as "sin," when he says, *Let sin, then, not reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires* (Rom 6:12). It does not remain in the members of those who have been reborn of water and the Spirit, as though it were not forgiven, once they received the full and complete forgiveness of sins and all the hostilities were destroyed, by which we were separated from God. Rather, it remains in the old condition of the flesh as something overcome and destroyed, provided it does not to some extent revive through our consenting to what is wrong and it is not recalled into its own kingdom and dominion.⁸⁸

Augustine taught that the guilt of concupiscence is removed in baptism and is no longer held against those who have been baptized. Rather, it is held against Christ. Those who have been baptized are no longer in the flesh, although concupiscence remains in their flesh. For the regenerate, there is a battle between the concupiscence of the flesh and the mind and spirit that rages until the regenerate enter eternity.

Also, from the same work, Augustine argued that baptism cleanses of all sin completely. If the regenerate died right after baptism, there would be no sins to charge them with:

So, conversely, this law of concupiscence has not passed away, but still remains, though its guilt is removed and no longer exists, when the full forgiveness of sins takes place in baptism. Moreover, if departure from this life immediately follows, there will be absolutely nothing to hold the one subject to guilt, since everything that held such a one has been removed. Just as, then, it is not surprising that the guilt of past thoughts, words, and deeds remains prior to the forgiveness of sins, so it

⁸⁸ Augustine, “The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sin and the Baptism of Little Ones,” 109-10.

ought, conversely, to come as no surprise that after the forgiveness of sins the guilt ceases, while the concupiscence remains.⁸⁹

Augustine believed that concupiscence is cleansed of guilt through baptism but remains as an opponent for believers. Just as guilt for past sins remains long after the deeds have been committed, concupiscence remains long after the guilt has been cleansed in baptism.

Furthermore, another quote to consider comes from the same work, which is strange in light of Augustine's claim of sinlessness for those who might die immediately after baptism. The above quote indicated that Christians at various points in their lives on earth go through brief periods of sinlessness. Against the Pelagians, Augustine argued that no regenerate person is without sin at any point in this life:

These people claim, however, that some human beings, who already have the use of their own reason, will live, have lived, or are now living without any sin. We should hope that this will be the case; we should strive to make it so; we should pray that it will be so. We should not, however, presume that it is already the case. After all, for those who hope for and strive after and pray for this with suitable prayers, whatever is left of their sins is daily removed by the words we truthfully say in the prayer, *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12). Whoever claims that this prayer is not necessary in this life for anyone, even for a holy person who knows and does God's will, except for the Holy of Holies, is greatly mistaken and is utterly unable to please the very one whom he praises.⁹⁰

Augustine taught that the regenerate are so sinful that they need to pray daily for God to forgive them their debts. If anyone disagreed, he said they were committing the sin of pride. His point was that one does not pray for God to forgive his debts because he remembers every sin he has committed; one prays for God to forgive his debts because the Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples and all future disciples to pray this prayer. This prayer is not hyperbole according to Augustine, but rather a prayer that is essential

⁸⁹ Augustine, "The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sin and the Baptism of Little Ones," 110.

⁹⁰ Augustine, "The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sin and the Baptism of Little Ones," 135. Also, Augustine argued something similar when he wrote, "The apostle says of this evil, I know that the good does not dwell in my flesh (Rom 7:18). He commands us not to obey this evil, when he says, *Let sin, then, not reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires* (Rom 6:12). If, then, we consent to these desires stemming from the concupiscence of the flesh by an illicit turn of the will, we say in order to heal this wound, *Forgive us our debts.*" Augustine, "The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sin and the Baptism of Little Ones," 82-83.

precisely because Christians are consenting to concupiscence more than they realize. Therefore, they need forgiveness. As is shown in seed-form here, Augustine grew to believe that some consent to concupiscence was inevitable for all Christians.

**Book One of “On Marriage and Desire,”
Written Between 418 and 419⁹¹**

Moreover, in book one of “On Marriage and Desire,” written between 418 and 419, Augustine reasoned that Paul was using a figure of speech when he referred to concupiscence as sin in Romans 6:12-13 because the baptized are cleansed:

The law of righteousness absolutely forbids us to obey this concupiscence, this law of sin dwelling in the members, for the apostle says, *Let sin, then, not reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires, and do not hand over your members to sin as weapons of wickedness* (Rom 6:12-13). This concupiscence, I say, which is wiped away only by the sacrament of rebirth, certainly transmits the bond of sin to offspring by birth, at least until they themselves are released from it by rebirth. Concupiscence itself, after all, is not now a sin in those who have been reborn, provided they do not consent to it for acts that are forbidden and the mind, remaining sovereign, does not hand over the members to it to carry out those acts. Thus, even if we do not fulfill the words of scripture, *You shall not desire* (Ex 20:17), we at least fulfill what we read in another passage, *Do not go after your desires* (Sir 18:30). It is called sin by a figure of speech, because it was produced by sin and leads to sin, if it is victorious. Its guilt is present in one who has been born, but by the forgiveness of all sins the grace of Christ does not allow this guilt to be present in one who has been reborn, if we do not obey it when it somehow bids us to do sinful actions. Though in those who have been reborn it is itself no longer sin, it is called sin because sin produced it. In the same way, we call language a tongue because a tongue produces it, and we call writing a hand because a hand produces it. So too, it is also called sin because it produces sin, if it is victorious, just as the cold is called sluggish, not because it is produced by sluggish persons, but because it makes them sluggish.⁹²

Augustine argued that concupiscence is not sin in a person who has been baptized, even though he calls concupiscence the desire commanded against in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:17. Augustine went away from the previous quotes, writing that concupiscence is called sin in Scripture for someone who has been baptized because it is

⁹¹ Teske, introduction to “On Marriage and Desire,” 13-14.

⁹² Augustine, “On Marriage and Desire,” 44.

a figure of speech. Baptism takes away the guilt, the moral culpability of concupiscence.

It is only morally culpable sin when the regenerate consent to its desires.

Also, consider another quote from the same work where Augustine spoke of concupiscence being unable to harm the baptized:

It is, then, present in them, but unable to harm their future life, since its guilt contracted by birth has been forgiven by rebirth. For this reason, it is no longer a sin, though it is called a sin, either because it was produced by sin or because it is aroused by the attractiveness of sin, even if one does not consent to it, because the appeal of righteousness prevails. The baptized do not pray, *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12), on account of it, for its guilt has been removed by the bath of rebirth. Rather, they make this prayer on account of sins which they commit, either in consenting to concupiscence, when their choice loses out to their desires, or when because of ignorance they choose evil as if it were good. But they commit these sins by action or by speech or—what is easiest and fastest of all —by thought.⁹³

Augustine taught that concupiscence is so forgiven in the baptized that they are never held accountable for it again, unless they consent to its desires. The baptized do not even need to pray for forgiveness for concupiscence because its guilt has been forever taken away. The regenerate only need to pray for forgiveness for sins they choose to commit, whether in ignorance or knowingly. Nevertheless, Augustine believed that concupiscence will be with the regenerate until they go to be with Jesus.⁹⁴

“Sermon 152,” Preached in 419⁹⁵

Additionally, in “Sermon 152,” preached in 419, Augustine emphasized the removal of the guilt of concupiscence through baptism in Christ while commenting on Romans 8:1, “So there is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus”:

⁹³ Augustine, “On Marriage and Desire,” 129-30.

⁹⁴ Augustine, “Sermon 255,” in *Sermons 230-272B*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 7 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 162-63.

⁹⁵ Augustine, “Sermon 152,” in *Sermons 148-183*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 48.

Even if they have desires of the flesh which they don't consent to; even if the law in their members is fighting back against the law of their minds, and trying to take their minds prisoner; still, by the grace of baptism and the bath of regeneration not only has the guilt with which you were born been canceled, but also any consent you have previously given to any evil lust, whether by committing any crime or misdeed, or by any evil thought or any evil speech, they have all been blotted out in that font, into which you stepped a slave, and from which you came out a free person; therefore, because this is so, *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

There is none now; there was before. From one man all were brought to condemnation. This evil was the effect of being born; that good was the effect of being born again. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has delivered you from the law of sin and death* (Rom 8:2). It is present in your members, but it doesn't make you guilty. You have been set free from it; fight as a free citizen.⁹⁶

Augustine contended that the guilt of concupiscence is cleansed in baptism and the bath of regeneration. Yet, the concupiscence remains, and it desires contrary to the law and contrary to the mind. Nevertheless, such desire does not make a believer guilty before God, for there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. Augustine preached that Christians have been set free from the guilt of concupiscence in Christ.

“Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” Completed Between 420 and 421⁹⁷

Still, in Augustine's “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” he disputed against Julian concerning the guiltless pervasive evil of concupiscence in the baptized:

I believe that they are mistaken or try to mislead others with regard to this concupiscence. Against it even a baptized person has to struggle with a devout mind—and this is true, even if one is most diligent in making progress and is driven by the Spirit of God. But even if it is called sin, it bears that name, not because it is a sin, but because it was produced by a sin, just as writing is said to be the hand of a certain person, because the hand produced it. Those things, however, which we wrongly do, say, or think in accord with the concupiscence of the flesh or ignorance are sins. Once we have done these acts, they hold us guilty, if they are not forgiven. This concupiscence of the flesh is itself forgiven in baptism so that, though it is contracted by those who are born, it does no harm to those who are reborn. If, however, some of these latter beget children through the flesh, it is contracted again and will again harm those who are born, unless it is forgiven by the same rite in those who are reborn. It is, then, present in them, but unable to harm their future life, since its guilt contracted by birth has been forgiven by rebirth. For this reason,

⁹⁶ Augustine, “Sermon 152,” 49.

⁹⁷ Augustine, “Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians,” 99-100.

it is no longer a sin, though it is called a sin, either because it was produced by sin or because it is aroused by the attractiveness of sin, even if one does not consent to it, because the appeal of righteousness prevails. The baptized do not pray, *Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors* (Mt 6:12), on account of it, for its guilt has been removed by the bath of rebirth. Rather, they make this prayer on account of sins which they commit, either in consenting to concupiscence, when their choice loses out to their desires, or when because of ignorance they choose evil as if it were good. But they commit these sins by action or by speech or—what is easiest and fastest of all—by thought. Who even from among the faithful will boast of having a heart that is pure of all of these? And who will boast of being clean of all sin? We, of course, say the next part of the prayer on account of concupiscence, *Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* (Mt 6:13). After all, as scripture says, *All are tempted by their own concupiscence which draws and entices them; then, once concupiscence has conceived, it brings forth sin* (Jas 1:14-15).⁹⁸

Augustine asserted that Christians battle concupiscence so long as they live on this earth in these bodies of death. Concupiscence, though its guilt is removed in baptism, is still called sin because it came from sin and tempts Christians to sin, not because it is any longer morally culpable sin for the Christian. Yet, no Christian can claim to be without sin because every day they give into the concupiscence of the flesh in one way or another through thought, speech, or action. Augustine even wrote that if a believer claims to be without sin at any moment, he is being boastful. Again, this makes me wonder if this is some form of functional guilt that remains in even the baptized. For, what good is it to say that guilt is removed in baptism if concupiscence still necessarily makes the baptized guilty on a daily basis?

Additionally, consider another quote from the same work. Augustine, commenting on baptism and concupiscence, argued,

All these offspring of concupiscence and the ancient guilt of concupiscence itself are forgiven by the washing of baptism, and all the sins this concupiscence now brings forth, unless they are those offspring which are called not merely sins, but serious offenses, are washed away by the means of that daily prayer in which we say, *Forgive us, as we forgive* (Mt 6:12) and by sincere almsgiving. Surely no one is so foolish as to say that the precept of the Lord, *Forgive, and it will be forgiven you; give, and it will be given you* (Lk 6:37-38), does not apply to the baptized. No one, however, could be legitimately ordained a minister in the Church, if the apostle had said, "If there is anyone without sin," where he said, *If there is anyone without*

⁹⁸ Augustine, "Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians," 129-30.

serious offense (Ti 1:6), or if he had said, "having no sin," where he said, *having no serious offense* (1 Tm 3:10). Many baptized believers are, of course, without serious offense, but I would say that no one in this life is without sin, no matter how great is the disease by which the Pelagians are puffed up against us—even to the point that they are bursting apart—because we say this. It is not that some sin remains which is not forgiven in baptism, but that, while we remain in the infirmity of this life, we do not cease daily to commit those sins which are daily forgiven, if we pray with faith and act with mercy. This is the good health of the Catholic faith which the Holy Spirit sows everywhere, not the vanity of heretical evil and the presumption of the spirit.⁹⁹

Augustine argued that no Christian is ever without sin. The fault is not in baptism but in a Christian's inability in this life to live perfectly opposed to the concupiscence within. Therefore, Christians must daily pray for God's forgiveness and grace. The answer to sin for Christians is God's grace, not the heretical evil of the "sinless" Pelagians, nor the presumption that the Spirit has completed his work in Christians.

Furthermore, Augustine argued here that it is impossible for a Christian to be without sin while on earth. Baptism cleanses of all sin but weakness and frailty remain (concupiscence) which results in one's continued sin. Yet, he also said that the apostle Paul argued that to live is Christ but to die is gain because he knew that when he died, he would go to be with Jesus; and, no longer be trapped in the snares of the world, would no longer be subject to the sins and vices of the flesh. Augustine argued here that sin is inevitable for Christians, which is functionally saying that concupiscence is morally culpable sin after baptism. After all, if concupiscence inevitably leads Christians to commit morally culpable sin, there is no difference in saying concupiscence's guilt is remitted in baptism if it necessarily still produces guilt that is not remitted in baptism.

Similarly, Augustine, commenting on 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we lie and the truth is not in us," wrote,

Let the Pelagians say, if they dare, that this man of God was corrupted by the error of the Manichees, because he praises the saints, while, nonetheless, admitting that none of them have in this life attained to such perfection of righteousness that

⁹⁹ Augustine, "Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians," 130-31.

they have absolutely no sin. And he supports his view by the clear truth and divine authority of canonical testimonies. Does he, after all, deny that "in baptism all sins are forgiven," because he admits that our frailty and weakness remain and that as a result of them we sin after baptism and have a constant conflict with the vices of the flesh to the very end of this life?¹⁰⁰

Augustine, in opposition to the Pelagians, argued that regenerate adults are not without sin, even though baptism totally takes away all past sin and the guilt of concupiscence. His point was that "frailty and weakness remain," "concupiscence," which pervasively causes Christians to sin and battle until their last breath. Again, the fault was not in baptism but in concupiscence and continued weakness in this life.

"Answer to Julian," Written in 421¹⁰¹

Additionally, in his "Answer to Julian," written in 421, Augustine summarized how a person becomes righteous:

In this life righteousness is bestowed in these three ways: first, by the bath of rebirth in which all sins are forgiven; second, by combat with the defects from the guilt of which we have been released; third, when our prayer is heard in which we say, *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:12). For no matter how mightily we fight against our defects, we are only human. But the grace of God helps us as we carry on the fight in this corruptible body so that he has reason to hear us when we ask pardon.¹⁰²

Augustine answered Julian that righteousness is given by God first by baptism or rebirth, second by combat with concupiscence, and third by praying the petition of the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our debts." He believed that man needed the grace of God from the beginning of this life to the end of this life due to the overwhelming persuasion of concupiscence. The battle for holiness is fought by believers through diligence, but this diligence is no substitute for the grace of God; rather, one's diligence is ever dependent upon him.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine, "Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians," 207-9.

¹⁰¹ Augustine, "Answer to Julian," 223.

¹⁰² Augustine, "Answer to Julian," 322-24.

***Retractations*, Written in 427¹⁰³**

Again, consider Augustine's *Retractations* that he wrote in 427 to correct or clarify any concerns or questions his previous works raised. Commenting on Romans 7:18, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, no good dwells. For to will is within my power, but I do not find the strength to accomplish what is good," he wrote,

This is the perfection of good, when this concupiscence of sin is not in man, to which, in truth, when one lives a good life, the will does not consent. But, nevertheless, man does not fully accomplish the good because he still remains in the concupiscence that the will resists. The guilt of this concupiscence is remitted by baptism, but there remains the weakness against which, until he is cured, every faithful man who advances in the right direction struggles against most earnestly. Sin, however, which is "never except in the will" must especially be understood as that which is followed by just condemnation-for this "through one man entered into the world"-although, indeed, that sin whereby consent is given to the concupiscence of sin is not committed except by the will. For this reason also, in another place, I said: "Sin is not committed, therefore, but by the will."¹⁰⁴

By the time Augustine wrote his *Retractations*, he argued that concupiscence is a "weakness" in the baptized or regenerate. Remember when he argued that concupiscence does the regenerate "no harm" in his "Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians," when he wrote, "This concupiscence of the flesh is itself forgiven in baptism so that, though it is contracted by those who are born, it does no harm to those who are reborn,"¹⁰⁵ Yet, here he said that concupiscence makes Christians weak. The Pelagian controversy helped to "harden" Augustine's view on concupiscence.

"Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," Written in 430¹⁰⁶

Finally, consider Augustine's final work, his "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian." He passed away in 430 before he could finish it. Commenting on Romans 7:7,

¹⁰³ Augustine, *St. Augustine*, xiii.

¹⁰⁴ Augustine, *St. Augustine*, 64-65.

¹⁰⁵ Augustine, "Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians," 129-30.

¹⁰⁶ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 13.

"For I would not have known desire unless the law said, 'You shall not desire,'" he argued,

This desire, then, which is surely evil, this desire by which the flesh has desires opposed to the spirit, did not yet exist before that great sin of the first human being. But it then began to exist, and it damaged human nature as if in its root from which it contracted original sin. Every human being is, of course, born with it, and the guilt of this concupiscence is not removed except in those who are reborn. And after this forgiveness no one is defiled by it unless one consents to it to carry out an evil act, when the spirit does not have any desires opposed to it or does not have stronger desires opposed to it. Sins which are committed by the personal will of sinners then add strength to that same desire, and so does the very habit of sinning, which is often not without reason called a second nature.¹⁰⁷

Augustine died arguing that concupiscence is sin and evil, and its guilt is remitted in baptism. Yet, Christians battle consenting to concupiscence so long as they live in this life. The way to defeat one's concupiscence is by refusing to consent to it in any manner; however, if Christians consent, such consent feeds and strengthens concupiscence to where it eventually leads to habitual sin.

**Concupiscence Is Morally Culpable Sin after Baptism
that Needs to Be Mortified, or Concupiscence
after Baptism Is Guiltless Evil Influence
that Needs to Be Resisted**

Not only did Augustine contend that one does whatsoever one's nature does, that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, and that baptism is necessary to cleanse concupiscence of its guilt; he also went back and forth between teaching that concupiscence is sin that needs to be mortified and that concupiscence after baptism is guiltless evil influence that needs to be resisted. Many of Augustine's works show him going back and forth.

¹⁰⁷ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 718-19.

“Sermon 110A,” Preached in 397¹⁰⁸

First, in “Sermon 110A,” preached in 397, Augustine spoke of being saved by or crushed by the cross:

So if you aren't mortified, fixed to his cross with the bad desires of flesh and blood, the Crucified falls upon you. Why do sign yourself with the cross? If you don't act the cross, you don't in fact sign yourself with it. Recognize Christ crucified, recognize him suffering, recognize him praying for his enemies, recognize him loving those at whose hands he endured such things and longing to cure them. If you do recognize him, repent, and if ever you entertained bad wishes, see to it that you have good ones from now on. Blot out the fault, in order not to fear the penalty.¹⁰⁹

Augustine argued that mortification includes the mortification of concupiscence.

Christians must be fixed to Christ's cross with their bad desires. They must also replace these bad desires with good desires. The fault, the bad desires, need to be blotted out so that Christians can live without fear of the penalty.

“Sermon 88,” Preached in 400¹¹⁰

Furthermore, speaking about sanctification in “Sermon 88,” preached in 400, Augustine taught,

Therefore, brothers and sisters, what calls for all our efforts in this life is the healing of the eyes of our hearts, with which God is to be seen. It is for this that the holy mysteries are celebrated, for this that the word of God is preached, to this that the Church's moral exhortations are directed, those, that is, that are concerned with the correction of our carnal desires, the improvement of our habits, the renunciation of this world, not only in words but in a change of life. Whatever points are made by God's holy scriptures, this is their ultimate point, to help us purge that inner faculty of ours from that thing that prevents us beholding God.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, “Sermon 110A,” in *Newly Discovered Sermons*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 11 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 95.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, “Sermon 110A,” 97.

¹¹⁰ Augustine, “Sermon 88,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 419.

¹¹¹ Augustine, “Sermon 88,” 422-23.

Augustine argued that the process of sanctification is for the healing of one's nature. It is for this reason that the sacraments are celebrated, the word of God is preached, and the church's moral exhortations are directed. The goal is to correct the saints' carnal desires. The ultimate point of the Holy Scriptures is to purge the inner faculty from all that prevents Christians from seeing God's glory.

“Second Homily” of 1 John, Preached in 407¹¹²

Additionally, speaking of becoming what one loves in his “Second Homily” of 1 John, preached in 407, Augustine reasoned,

If you hold to these things you won't have the concupiscence of the world. By not having the concupiscence of the world, neither the desire of the flesh nor the desire of the eyes nor the ambition of the world will conquer you, and you will make a place for charity to enter, so that you may love God, because, if the love of the world is there, the love of God won't be there. Hold, rather, to the love of God, so that, just as God is eternal, you also may abide in eternity, because a person's love determines the person's quality. Do you love the earth? You will be earth. Do you love God? What shall I say? That you will be God? I don't dare to say this on my own. Let us listen to the scriptures: *I have said that you are gods and that all of you are sons of the Most High* (Ps 82:6).¹¹³

Augustine argued that Christians must pursue replacing concupiscence of the world with love for God. Mortification takes place by replacing affection for the world with affection for God. He thought that one becomes what he loves. If a Christian loves God, then he becomes a god, in God's likeness; however, if he loves the world, he becomes the world. Becoming what one loves begins with one's inner desires, not willful choices, according to Augustine.

¹¹² Boniface Ramsey, trans., *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, part 3 – Homilies, vol. 14 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Daniel E. Doyle and Thomas Martin (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008), 9.

¹¹³ Ramsey, trans., *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, 51.

“Sermon 33A,” Preached in 410¹¹⁴

Moreover, in “Sermon 33A,” preached in 410, Augustine commented on Psalm 104:33 and desiring eternal life:

Let us turn our minds back to the psalm we sang, and discover that he wouldn't have said *I will play music to my God as long as I live*, unless he had meant that life where "long" really is to be found. After all, if the reason there is no "long" in this life is that there is always something that is "last," it follows that we are not called to desire this life when we become Christians.¹¹⁵

Augustine believed that Christians are called to desire God not desire this life. Again, his point was that desire for the world must be put to death in Christians. Desire for this world must be replaced with desire for the world to come.

“Sermon 56,” Preached Between 410 and 412¹¹⁶

Also, in “Sermon 56,” Augustine taught on this petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “God’s will be done on earth as it is in Heaven,” and Christian responsibility:

What does it mean, though, in heaven and on earth, or as in heaven, so also on earth? The angels do your will, may we do it too. Thy will be done, as in heaven, also on earth. Heaven is the mind, earth is the flesh. When you say, if of course you ever do say, what the apostle said, *With the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin* (Rom 7:25), God's will is being done in heaven, but not yet on earth. But when flesh has given its consent to mind, and death is swallowed up in victory, so that no fleshly desires remain with which the mind can be in conflict, when wrangling on earth has ceased, when the war in the heart has ceased, when the situation has ceased of which it is written, *The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, so that you are unable to do what you would* (Gal 5:17); so when this war has ceased, and all lust has been changed into love, nothing will remain in the body to resist, nothing needing to be tamed, nothing to be curbed, nothing to be kicked, but everything will contribute

¹¹⁴ Augustine, “Sermon 33A,” in *Sermons 20-50*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 2 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 160.

¹¹⁵ Augustine, “Sermon 33A,” 162.

¹¹⁶ Augustine, “Sermon 56,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 95.

harmoniously to justice—then is done thy will in heaven and on earth. We are demanding perfection when we make this prayer.¹¹⁷

Augustine contended that Christians have a responsibility to pursue perfection in their minds and flesh. He used this petition of the Lord's Prayer to say that Heaven corresponds to their minds and Earth to their flesh. They will not reach perfection here but must pursue it. And pursuing it means laboring to replace fleshly concupiscence with mindful love for God and the things of God.

“Sermon 76,” Preached Between 410 and 412¹¹⁸

Furthermore, in “Sermon 76,” preached between 410 and 412, Augustine commented on Jesus and Peter walking on water, and its spiritual significance for fighting one’s concupiscence:

For each one of us the storm is our desires. You love God; you're walking on the sea, the swell of the world is under your feet. You love the world; it will swallow you. It knows how to engulf its lovers, not how to bear them up. But when your thoughts are pitching and rolling with desires, in order to overcome your desires call upon the divinity of Christ.¹¹⁹

Augustine taught that the story of Jesus and Peter walking on water had spiritual meaning built upon the historical reality. Peter sank into the sea, into the world, when he took his eyes off Christ. In order to overcome his desire for the world, he had to look to Christ. In a similar fashion Augustine believed that Christians, when their thoughts are rolling with their desires for the world, in order to overcome, they must call to the divinity of Christ. By his grace, they will overcome, and they are expected to labor to overcome their concupiscence.

¹¹⁷ Augustine, “Sermon 56,” 99.

¹¹⁸ Augustine, “Sermon 76,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 311.

¹¹⁹ Augustine, “Sermon 76,” 316.

“Sermon 30,” Preached in 412¹²⁰

Additionally, speaking of the apostle Paul in 412, from Romans 7 in “Sermon 30,” Augustine taught on the need for God’s grace in fighting concupiscence:

Oh yes, I know what you are going to say to me, or what you are already saying to yourself. Whoever you are of this sort, listening to me here, I know what iniquity is saying to you inside your head. You see, you are still under the yoke of iniquity, as long as you fail to acknowledge the price paid by the redeemer. I know what you are saying to yourself: "Here's my flesh lusting against my spirit. It's lusting for a spot of adultery, but I don't consent. I don't give permission, I don't go along with it. Not only do I not do it, I don't even consent to do it. Not only do I not commit it outwardly in the flesh, in my mind I do not even go along with the flesh's rebellion. Do I consent to its revolt, do I give in to its unrest? I certainly do not! So there you are: no iniquity is mastering me." Is that so? Is that the truth? Give thanks, if that's the case, to the one who has granted you that it should be the case. Don't take the credit for it yourself, or you may lose what you have received, and begin to ask for it back again in vain. Are you not afraid of God notwithstanding the proud but giving grace to the humble?¹²¹

Augustine preached a warning to those who think they are like the apostle Paul, resisting the concupiscence of the flesh completely. He warned of being proud, of being over-confident of one’s self-assessment. If one gives thanks to God for the grace he necessarily provided for one to resist his concupiscence, then victory over concupiscence indeed may occur in this Christian’s life. Augustine showed that victory from God is needed because concupiscence is a coercive enemy, not a friend.

“Sermon 163A,” Preached in 416¹²²

Again, in 416, Augustine explained how to treat one’s concupiscence in “Sermon 163A”:

¹²⁰ Augustine, “Sermon 30,” 123.

¹²¹ Augustine, “Sermon 30,” 127.

¹²² Augustine, “Sermon 163A,” in *Sermons 148-183*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 178.

With the help of God's grace slay in yourselves the lust of the flesh; turn your backs on the works of the flesh, love the fruit of the Spirit. For the fruit of the Spirit is joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control (Gal 5:22-23). Do all this, and continue in it, and the God of peace shall be with you (Phil 4:9).¹²³

Augustine taught that Christians are expected by God, with the help of his grace, to kill in themselves the concupiscence of the flesh. They are to reject its works and to love the fruit of the Spirit. God will be with those who submit to his Spirit and live his fruit.

“Letter 196,” Written in 418¹²⁴

Similarly, in “Letter 196” written in 418 to Asellicus, a bishop in Byzacena, Augustine commented on the relationship between concupiscence and coveting:

Now, then, when the apostle says, *It is now not I who do that, but the sin that dwells in me* (Rom 7:17, 20), he speaks of the concupiscence of the flesh that produces in us its impulses, even when we do not obey them, provided that sin does not reign in our mortal body so that we obey its desires and provided that we do not offer our members to sin as weapons of iniquity. By making progress perseveringly in righteousness that has not yet been brought to perfection, we shall at some time come to its perfection when sinful concupiscence does not have to be held in check and reined in but when it does not exist at all. By saying, *You shall not desire* (Ex 20:17), the law did not set forth something we can achieve in this life but something toward which we should tend by making progress.¹²⁵

Augustine went so far to say that one of the Ten Commandments, do not covet, was a command that could not be met in this life, which means that coveting is a form of concupiscence. Instead, Christians must labor to make progress towards rejecting these sinful desires, realizing that Christ empowers Christians now to overcome and will empower them to completely overcome in eternity.

¹²³ Augustine, “Sermon 163A,” 179.

¹²⁴ Augustine, “Letter 196” in *Letters 156-210*, part 2 – Letters, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 310.

¹²⁵ Augustine, “Letter 196” 312-13.

“Sermon 98,” Preached in 418¹²⁶

Furthermore, in “Sermon 98,” speaking of how sin becomes a habit, Augustine preached in 418,

It also says, *He is four days dead* (Jn 11:39). And indeed, to this state of habit or addiction I am speaking of, the soul comes by four stages. First, you see, there is the tingle of pleasure in the heart; second, consent; third, the deed; and fourth, addiction, habit. There are some people, to be sure, who so firmly push unlawful things away from their thoughts, they don't even find any pleasure in them. There are others who find them pleasant, but don't consent; here death is not finalized, but somehow or other initiated. Add consent to pleasure; that is already a death sentence. From consent they proceed to action, action turns into habitual addiction, and the case looks so desperate that one says, He Is four days' dead, he is already stinking.”¹²⁷

Augustine laid out how one becomes addicted to certain sins. He lists four steps: (1) a tingle of pleasure for concupiscence in the heart. (2) consent to concupiscence with the mind. (3) acting on the concupiscence with one's members. (4) repeating steps one through three. Yet, Augustine also argued that there are those who lack any tingling for specific concupiscence in their hearts. They can reject it before there is any “tingle of pleasure.” If they do not reject it before the point of tingling, death is initiated through any “tingle of pleasure.” For Augustine, even considering a lust of the flesh is a form of consent, a tingle of pleasure. Therefore, he taught that Christians must mortify even a “tingle of pleasure” for concupiscence.

“Sermon 156,” Preached in 419¹²⁸

Similarly, in “Sermon 156,” preached in 419, Augustine taught on how to put concupiscence to death:

¹²⁶ Augustine, “Sermon 98,” in *Sermons 94A-147A*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 4 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1992), 43.

¹²⁷ Augustine, “Sermon 98,” 46-47.

¹²⁸ Augustine, “Sermon 156,” in *Sermons 148-183*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1992), 96.

So when something used to give delight, and was not consented to, it was being put to death. Trample on the one that's dead, go on next to the one that's alive; trample on the one that's fallen, wrestle with the one that is still resisting. You see, one pleasurable habit may be dead, but another is very much alive; this one too, as long as you don't consent to it, you are putting to death; when it begins not to be pleasurable at all, you have put it to death.¹²⁹

Augustine believed that the way to mortify various forms of concupiscence was to reject them, to trample on their desires. Once they fade away from any pleasure, they are dead, but not before then.

“Sermon 155,” Preached in 419¹³⁰

Moreover, in “Sermon 155,” teaching about walking according to the flesh or the Spirit, Augustine preached,

You see, whatever past sins were brought about in us by that lust of the flesh, whether in deed or in word or in thought, they have all been rubbed out by holy baptism; one pardon has canceled all debts. So conflict with the flesh remains, because while iniquity has been rubbed out, infirmity is left. It's built in, the delight of unlawful lust tickles your fancy. Fight, stand up to it, don't consent, and then you fulfill this law, *Do not go after your lusts*; because even if they worm their way in sometimes, and take over an eye, an ear, a tongue, a fleeting thought, not even so should we despair of our salvation. That's why we say every day, *Forgive us our debts* (Mt 6:12). *That the justice of the law, he says, might be fulfilled in us.*¹³¹

Augustine taught that Christians are permitted for their fancies to be tickled by concupiscence so long as they do not consent to it. Yet one must wonder how this reasoning fits with what he said in previous sermons about considering a sinful desire or the tingling of one's heart for concupiscence, a form of consent (cf. “Sermon 98”). Now, he argued that even a fleeting thought is a form of consent. That is why Christians must pray daily for God to forgive their debts, since some form of consent to concupiscence is inevitable, even in Christians.

¹²⁹ Augustine, “Sermon 156,” 102-3.

¹³⁰ Augustine, “Sermon 155,” 84.

¹³¹ Augustine, “Sermon 155,” 90.

“Sermon 53A,” Preached Between 405 and 420¹³²

Additionally, Augustine preached between 405 and 420, in “Sermon 53A,” on how to mortify one’s concupiscence:

Anything there in your heart that gives you pleasure, don’t give it your approval or your praise; and if an evil desire tickles you, don’t consent to it; and if it grows very keen, you must pray to God against it, that something may be done inside about purifying the heart, where God is being prayed to. Clearly, when you want to invite God to answer to prayer, clean out your inner room. Sometimes the tongue is silent and the soul is sighing, that means God is being prayed to inside in the room of your heart; there should be nothing there to offend God’s eyes, nothing to cause him displeasure. But perhaps you may find difficulty in cleaning out your heart; call him in, he won’t refuse to clean out a place for himself, and he will agree to stay with you.¹³³

Augustine reasoned that Christians have a responsibility to put their lust of the flesh to death. If they cannot, they must pray to God to give them the grace to do it. However, they must also clean their hearts so that there is nothing there to offend God. Augustine’s points are not contradictory. He argued that Christians must labor to put the flesh to death, not waiting on God to will it, while realizing that if they put their flesh to death it is precisely because of God’s grace, due to God willing it.

“Sermon 42,” Preached in 425¹³⁴

Again, in “Sermon 42,” teaching on being honest with oneself concerning concupiscence, in 425, Augustine preached,

What can a bad man do to you? Don’t you be bad. Don’t let your greed lord it over you, don’t let your lust trample on you, don’t let your anger thresh you. Who are these inner enemies of yours? They are you. Don’t let them do anything to you, and then let’s see what a bad neighbor can do to you, a bad employer, a bad strong man. Let’s see what he can do to you. Let him find you to be just, let him find you to be

¹³² Augustine, “Sermon 53A,” in *Sermons 51-94*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 3 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1997), 77.

¹³³ Augustine, “Sermon 53A,” 82.

¹³⁴ Augustine, “Sermon 42,” in *Sermons 20-50*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 2 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 234.

faithful and trustworthy, let him find you to be a Christian — what is he going to do to you? What the Jews did to Stephen? By doing to him something very bad, they dispatched him to the Good.

So when you pray to God to deliver you from the bad man, look at yourself. Don't spare yourself. Let him deliver you from yourself. How does he deliver you from you? By forgiving your sins, endowing you with merits, giving you the strength to fight against your desires, breathing virtue into you, endowing your mind with heavenly delight to surpass all earthly delights. When God grants you all this, he delivers you from yourself, and in the midst of the evils of this world which are however going to pass away, you can wait without the slightest anxiety for the coming of your Lord with those good things that cannot pass away. Let them be enough for you.¹³⁵

Augustine taught that greed, lust, and anger are Christians; that is, their flesh. Christians must fight against themselves and plead with God to deliver them from themselves. He will forgive their sins and give them a heavenly delight that surpasses all possible worldly delights. Christians must be content with God in order to overcome their concupiscence, and thus, to endure the barbs of others.

“On Grace and Free Choice,” Written Between 426 and 427¹³⁶

Furthermore, Augustine wrote “On Grace and Free Choice” between 426 and 427 in order to show the importance of both grace and free choice without losing either. Speaking on Matthew 16:41, “Watch and pray in order that you may not enter into temptation,” Augustine reasoned,

Let each one, then, in fighting against his own concupiscence, pray in order that he may not enter into temptation, that is, in order that he may not be pulled and enticed by it. But one does not enter into temptation if he conquers evil desire by good will. And yet the choice of the human will is not enough unless the Lord grants victory to one who prays in order that he may not enter into temptation. But what does one see more clearly than the grace of God when one receives what one prays for? For, if the savior had said, *Watch in order that you may not enter into temptation*, he would seem only to have admonished the will of a human being, but when he added, *and pray*, he showed that God helps in order that one may not enter into temptation. It was said to free choice, *Son, do not give up the discipline of the Lord* (Prv 3:11), and the Lord said, *I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail* (Lk 22:32).

¹³⁵ Augustine, “Sermon 42,” 236.

¹³⁶ Teske, “General Introduction,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 4, 11.

A human being is then helped by grace in such a way that his will does not receive the commandments to no purpose.¹³⁷

Augustine pointed out that Jesus told his disciples to watch and pray so that they would not give into their concupiscence or enter into temptation. Christ did not merely appeal to the human wills of his disciples, he told them to cast their wills upon God so that he might help them resist their concupiscence.¹³⁸ The responsibility is the Christian's to will to pray and to will to fight one's concupiscence. Yet, if God does not will, there will be no victory.

“Sermon 25A,” Preached on an Unknown Date¹³⁹

Moreover, teaching on greed being the root of all evils in “Sermon 25A,” Augustine reasoned, “It is avarice that is the root of all evils (1 Tm 6:8-10). Don't have such a root; it is the root of the grass that withers.”¹⁴⁰ He rebuked greed often, and this sermon is a great example. Augustine told Christians to kill the root, to kill the concupiscence of avarice, the love of money. Avarice is neither neutral, nor a friend, but instead, is a bitter enemy within.

¹³⁷ Augustine, “On Grace and Free Choice,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 4, part 1 – Books, vol. 26 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland J. Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 77.

¹³⁸ Augustine told Boniface something similar in “Letter 220” that he wrote in 427. He contended, “Here let it be seen whether you are a man of courage; conquer the cravings by which this world is loved; do penance for past sins, when you were conquered by these cravings and dragged through desires that were not good. If you accept this advice, if you hold onto it and follow it, you will both come to those certain goods and live among these uncertain goods while saving your soul. But you may perhaps ask me again how you can do this when you are involved in such great troubles from this world. Pray courageously, and say to God what you have in the psalm, *Rescue me from my troubles* (Ps 25:17). For these troubles come to an end when these cravings are conquered.” Augustine, “Letter 220,” in *Letters 156-210*, part 2 – Letters, vol. 4 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 76-77.

¹³⁹ Augustine, “Sermon 25A,” in *Sermons 20-50*, part 3 – Sermons, vol. 2 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 92n1.

¹⁴⁰ Augustine, “Sermon 25A,” 90-91.

**“Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,”
Written in 430¹⁴¹**

Similarly, in 430 in his “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” Augustine commented on man’s need for God’s grace in order to overcome concupiscence:

By this heretical interpretation you say that grace does not set us free from sin except when we receive pardon for the past, but not also so that sin does not lord it over us when we are drawn by our concupiscence to consent. By this interpretation you are opposed to the prayers of even the saints. After all, why does one say to God, *Bring us not into temptation* (Mt 6:13), if it lies in the power of our free choice which was built into our nature that this does not happen? Why does the apostle say, *But we pray to God that you do no evil* (2 Cor 13:7), if God sets us free from sins only by granting pardon to our past sins.¹⁴²

Augustine disputed against Julian that Christ told his disciples to pray that God would not bring them into temptation precisely because they needed God’s grace in order to resist concupiscence. They could not do it on their own by mere choice of will apart from God’s grace. Again, concupiscence is not morally neutral or morally good; it is evil.

Also, in the same work, Augustine, commenting on Romans 6:12, “Let not sin reign in your mortal body,” argued,

And so, since he could have said, *Let not sin reign in your body*, why did he add a word and say, *In your mortal body* (Rom 6:12), if it were not that we should hope that this concupiscence which he calls sin will not exist when we will not have a mortal body? Tell us, then, why he did not say: *Let sin not exist in your mortal body*, but said, *Let sin not reign*, if it was not that this concupiscence, which cannot fail to exist in mortal flesh, reigns in those who consent to its desires to commit sins. And if they are conquered by it, they are dragged off wherever it pulls them by a mightier force than they are held back by the law, if they are not helped by grace. But in those who by God's gift do what he has commanded, that is, who do not obey it when it is aroused and insistent, and do not offer their members to it as weapons, it is indeed present, but it does not reign. Its existence is proved when they desire to commit sins, and it is proved not to reign when they do not commit them because the delight of righteousness wins out.¹⁴³

Augustine reasoned that Christians must not let sin reign in their mortal bodies.

Concupiscence will be present in Christians until they leave these mortal bodies behind;

¹⁴¹ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 13.

¹⁴² Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 129.

¹⁴³ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 270-71.

however, they must appeal to God for his grace in order to overcome the lust of the flesh. Christians must not let concupiscence reign, precisely because it is evil.¹⁴⁴

Finally, consider one final quote from the same work. On the Christian's responsibility to imitate Christ, Augustine wrote,

The flesh of Christ, however, had nothing that was unsubdued, nor did it in any way resist the spirit so that the spirit had to subdue it. With this example of perfection set before us, each imitator ought to aim at this: to strive and to long not to have at all the desires of the flesh which the apostle forbids us to carry out. For in that way we can by daily progress lessen those desires which we will not have at all when salvation is complete.¹⁴⁵

Augustine contended, due to Christ's example, all Christians must have his perfection as their goal. Therefore, Christians must strive and fight not to have concupiscence. And each day, those desires will lessen until Christ completes in eternity the good work he began in them in this life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that for most of his ministry, Augustine taught extensively that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. Five supporting points were used to prove this thesis: (1) He initially taught that sin is grounded in one's volitional choice. (2) He later taught that all that a person does, his will does as well. (3)

¹⁴⁴ Augustine argued something similar a few pages later: "They will not, nonetheless, do this unless they fight against that fair favorite of yours, the concupiscence of the flesh, with the strength of love. Every human being is born with that law of the members that resists the law of the mind, and all are held guilty by its bondage if they are not reborn. Mortals do not conquer it by their own spirit unless they are driven by the Spirit of God: *For whoever are driven by the Spirit of God are the children of God* (Rom 8:14). Go ahead now, and plunge headlong by extolling free choice in opposition to this Christian and apostolic truth, and put your trust in your own virtue, not so that you rise up, but so that you fall down." Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 274.

¹⁴⁵ Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 435. Also, Augustine argued something similar near the end of the same work: "The righteousness, then, of this life does not mean that we have no defect, but that we diminish our defects by not consenting to them and live in temperance, justice, and piety by resisting them. But to have no defect which we should resist belongs to the next life which is the reward of acting well in the present life." Augustine, "Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian," 616. Augustine contended that righteousness for Christians in this life is not in being perfect but in the perfecting of the flesh that will not be complete until they go to be with Jesus in eternity. Christians, therefore, will one day be without sinful desires because they pursued holiness in this life; God will reward them.

He clearly said concupiscence is morally culpable sin. (4) He contended that concupiscence makes one guilty and one is therefore in need of baptism for this guilt to be remitted. (5) He went back and forth between arguing that concupiscence is morally culpable sin after baptism and arguing that concupiscence is healed of guilt in the baptized while remaining evil that must be resisted. Augustine also emphasized that Christ had no concupiscence and the saints will have no concupiscence in eternity—by God's grace alone.

CHAPTER 3

ON CONCUPISCENCE, THE ROMAN CATHOLICS REJECTED AUGUSTINE AND THE REFORMED TRADITION FOLLOWED AUGUSTINE

Introduction

In the previous chapter, a forerunner to the Reformed tradition and the Roman Catholic tradition, Augustine, and his views on concupiscence, were examined. The previous chapter showed how Augustine went from contending that sin is grounded in one's deliberate choices to arguing that the will is involved in everything a person does. Then the chapter showed how Augustine argued that concupiscence is morally culpable sin and its guilt is entirely cleansed in baptism, leaving nothing left that God hates in the believer. Yet, he also demonstrated that something of sin remains in the saints after baptism and must be mortified.

Although both traditions claim to follow Augustine, the Roman Catholic tradition and the Reformed tradition disagree in their understanding of concupiscence. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, late Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, helpfully summarized this disagreement when he wrote,

While allowing that it is sinful in the unregenerate, medieval and Romanist theologians argue that it is only the testing scar and combustible material of sin in the baptized, in whom original sin is supposed to be abolished. But Reformation theology does not accept this distinction or its presupposition. Although not imputed, original sin remains in believers, and therefore concupiscence may and must be said to have "of itself the (true and proper) nature of sin."¹

Roman Catholics taught that concupiscence is not morally culpable sin in the regenerate but is merely the “combustible material” of sin that only becomes morally culpable sin if

¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Concupiscence,” in *Wycliffe Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F. Henry (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 133.

acquiesced to. On the other hand, the Reformed tradition argued that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin, but in Christ Christians have been declared righteous. This chapter contends that the Roman Catholics departed from Augustine's teaching on concupiscence and the Protestant Reformers sought to follow Augustine's teaching on concupiscence, as is evidenced in the two groups' confessions and catechisms, and in the writings of the most influential Protestant Reformers and their theological descendants.

Methodology

The methodology for this chapter starts with the presupposition that in order to understand a theological tradition, one must understand its confessions and catechisms. This chapter examines three time periods for the codifying of Reformation theology—Inauguration (1517-1565), Early Orthodoxy (1565-1640), and High Orthodoxy (1640-1725).² For the 1500s through the 1700s, Protestant confessions, catechisms, and prominent theologians are contrasted with the Roman Catholic Council of Trent and its catechism, to prove that Reformation theology followed Augustine's teaching on concupiscence. The chapter concludes by showing that the Reformed understanding of concupiscence was carried into the 1700s, 1800s, and 1900s by the most influential Reformed theologians. Primary sources are the focus with a few secondary sources too.

Reformation Confessions, Catechisms, and Important Figures and Writings: Inauguration (1517-1565)

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

The Protestant Reformation was fueled in part by a return to the Holy Scriptures as possessing greater authority than the Roman Catholic Church. One such

² These three divisions of time periods for the development of Reformed Orthodoxy come from Richard Muller. See Richard A. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology*, vol. 1 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 30-33.

early Reformer who exalted the Scriptures was Ulrich Zwingli.³ Before Martin Luther wrote his *95 Theses*, Zwingli, a young Catholic priest, in 1516 was preaching through the Holy Scriptures in Glarus, Switzerland. He became the “people’s priest” in Zurich, Switzerland in 1519 and acted as a reformer from the beginning.⁴

Zwingli was received favorably in Zurich. He authored the first official confessional document of the Reformation in 1523. His goal was to write an “Instruction” to the city council of Zurich that would teach them why using images and statues in worship and presenting the Mass as a sacrifice are contrary to Scripture. But the council liked the document so much, they made it official and required all ministers and preachers to teach in line with it.⁵ While explaining the purpose of the law for Christians, Zwingli wrote,

Furthermore, if we now have the law we are not therefore righteous, for they are not recognized as godly who hear the law. Rather they are reckoned godly who do the law. What then is the law good for? The answer according to Romans 3:20 is that one recognizes sin through the law. Therefore understand that with the following example: “You should covet no one’s spouse or possessions” [Ex. 20:17] shows you without doubt that if you covet these things you sin. And you fancy that the desire would not be sin, for you think that if you were on your guard before the act that you would not have sinned. But see our cunning! We are godly only because of the outward deed, and yet inwardly the heart has already become adulterous, a thief, a usurer or a robber. For if he were permitted to do it, then he would do it. Now our God is not blind; he sees the heart of people. If God finds the coveting or plotting therein, then the person has already incurred the penalty before God. On the other hand it is not possible for us to be without temptations and lusts so long as we wear the skin of Adam. For the flesh bears its fruit forever. For the law stands firm and does not let itself fall nor bend: you shall covet the goods of no one. And if we

³ Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450-1650* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 219, 224-26.

⁴ Eire, *Reformations*, 227.

⁵ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “Zwingli’s Short Christian Instruction (1523),” by Ulrich Zwingli, in *1523-1552*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 9. The letter was sent out with a heading that read, “A Short Christian Instruction, Sent by the Honorable Council of the City of Zurich to the Ministers and Preachers Living in the Towns, Villages and Districts, that they Henceforth Unanimously Proclaim and Preach the Evangelical Truth to Their Subjects.” Ulrich Zwingli, “Zwingli’s Short Christian Instruction (1523),” in *1523-1552*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. and trans. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 10.

cannot be on our own power with the desire, so also are we also transgressors and fallen into the wrath and penalty of God.⁶

The first official “confession” of the Reformation contended that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. Zwingli argued that sinners want their desires that are contrary to the law to not be sin; however, they are sin. The person who has a sinful desire is already guilty before God. Zwingli, after interacting with Romans 7:8-9 and 14-25,⁷ continued,

See! In Paul’s view we perceive and experience our own weakness and impotence. If, however, no one can come to God unless he has no blemishes, according to Psalm 15:1–3, and we cannot be without blemish, it then follows that we must despair in ourselves of being able to come to God. Here the grace of God that is shown to us in Christ will reveal itself.⁸

⁶ Zwingli, “Zwingli’s Short Christian Instruction (1523),” 15-16.

⁷ Zwingli wrote, “All this will be clear in the words of Paul in Romans 7:8–9: ‘‘sin was dead without the law,’’ that is, one knows nothing of sin where there is no law. ‘I have also lived once without the law,’’ that is, so long as we have not yet been instructed with the word of God, as children are, then we live without the law. ‘When, however, the command has come,’’ that is, after the commandment is made known to us, ‘sin came alive,’’ that is, I then realized what sin is. ‘And yet I have died,’’ that is, when I recognized the law, I saw well that I was of death. ‘Therefore the commandment that was given to me for good has become death for me,’’ that is, I have seen therein how I am worthy of death since I cannot fulfill it, etc. Soon after that [Romans 7:14–20]: ‘We know that the law is spiritual and yet I am carnal, for I have been given away or sold under the weakness of sin (understand: that which we bring here from Adam). For that which I already do does not please me. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate,’’ that is, since the time I heard the law and the word of God I want to avoid sin but the weak flesh does not let me come to that point. ‘If I only do that which I do not want, then I am in harmony with the law, which to be sure is good. However, if I do the opposite, it is the sin doing it,’’ that is, the weakness which lies or lives in me, etc. Soon after that [Romans 7:21–25]: ‘Therefore I find that if I want to do the good or the righteous thing according to the instruction of the law, that evil lies close to me. For I delight in the law of God according to the inner person. I see in my members,’’ that is, in my body, ‘another law. The same fights against the law of the heart and leads me forth captive under the law of sin,’’ that is, of the weakness which lives in my body. ‘What a wretched person I am! Who will redeem me from the body of death?’ I say, ‘Thanks be to God, that I have been redeemed through Jesus Christ our Lord.’” Zwingli, “Zwingli’s Short Christian Instruction (1523),” 16.

⁸ Zwingli, “Zwingli’s Short Christian Instruction (1523),” 15-17. Interestingly, Zwingli was accused in his day, and is still accused today, of not affirming original sin. Yet Martin Bucer defended Zwingli in his book *Common Places* when he wrote, “Moreover the Articles dealing with the chief doctrines of our faith drawn up and signed at Marburg in Hesse show that Zwingli was among those who confessed therein the orthodox belief in original sin. I therefore beseech souls who are zealous for Christ to be willing to interpret in accordance with this godly and wholesome confession anything in his earlier writings that might give rise to the suspicion of unsound opinion concerning this evil of our nature, lest they falsely blame him or others for an offence which surely every Christian scrupulously avoids with fear and trembling. The article which Zwingli with godly Luther and others confessed runs as follows: ‘We believe that original sin is inherent in us from Adam, and is received by heredity, and is sin of such a kind as to condemn all men. And if our Lord Jesus Christ had not succoured us by his death and life, we were bound to die eternally as a result of this sin, and never attain to God’s kingdom and blessedness’. As this is

Zwingli and the first confession of the Reformation taught that only through Christ can any person be saved from one's flesh. For, even when Christians come to God through Christ, they still cannot be without blemish, without concupiscence. Only through Christ are sinners reconciled to God; and only through Christ are Christians continually accepted by God.

Zwingli then went from discussing the law to discussing the gospel:

As long as we live, that rogue, the body, because of temptation, will never let us live a godly life. However, if we have trusted in God through Christ, then the fruits of the flesh cannot throw us down into damnation. Rather, as Christ said to Peter: "See! The devil has lain in waiting for you so that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith become neither unsteady nor weak" [Luke 22:31f.]. Thus we must remain firm in faith so that all our sins will be forgiven through Christ, although both the devil and the flesh will force us through the sieve and entice us with sin to despair. But, as Peter's external denial did not bring him into damnation, so also may no sin bring us to damnation, save one: unbelief. Here, however, the true non-Christians say: "I firmly believe in Christ." Yet they do nothing Christian. Herein one sees that they are non-Christians, for one recognizes a tree by its fruit. [Cf. Mt. 7:16, 20.] Therefore, note for better understanding: as has often been pointed out before, whoever has securely trusted in the grace of God through Christ, after recognizing his sin, cannot be without the love of God. Who would not love him who has so graciously taken away his sin and has begun first to love him, as 1 John 4:19 says, and to draw him to himself? Where, now, the love of God is, there is God; for God is love himself and whoever is in the love of God is in God and God is in him, as 1 John 4:16 says. Now if God is in the right believer and he nevertheless sins, then it follows that it is as Paul says in Romans 8:10: "If now Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit or soul lives because of justification." This justification is nothing but a person's placing himself in and devoting himself to the grace of God. This is true belief. So the opinion of Paul is that our body is always dead and gives birth to works of death and sin. However, the same sins cannot damn us if we are righteous through the Lord Jesus Christ.⁹

his confession and as each man is to be judged out of his own mouth, he ought righteously to be absolved in the minds of all zealous Christians of this charge of denying or not fully acknowledging original sin, even though in his works published prior to this confession some grounds may be found for suspecting this error. He has himself, however, clearly explained his opinion on this issue also when replying to Urbanus Rhegius, affirming that in calling this evil 'disease' rather than 'sin' and in making it harmless for the children of Christians, he never for one moment intended to propose that it does not of itself condemn man. It was rather that, acknowledging as he does that the children of Christians are partakers in the covenant of grace established through Christ, he held that Christ's merit is so effectual for our children that they do not perish by this original evil—though they would certainly perish from it if it were not abolished through Christ's redemption." Martin Bucer, *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, ed. D. F. Wright (Berkshire, UK: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 124. For more evidence concerning why we know Zwingli affirmed the doctrine of original sin, see chap. 7 of this dissertation.

⁹ Zwingli, "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction (1523)," 21.

Zwingli communicated eternal trust in God's grace through Christ. To him, due to a Christian's inability to fulfill the law in this flesh, one could only trust in Christ. It was primarily his understanding of God's holiness and proper worship that drove Zwingli to these conclusions.¹⁰ After all, this confession was written to inoculate its hearers against using images, statues, and the theology of the Mass in worship. Since God's law is good and Christians cannot measure up, they must continually by faith place themselves into the grace of God. According to Zwingli, God condemns those who commit sins of concupiscence, but concupiscence cannot damn Christians if they are righteous through Christ.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Zwingli's teachings would eventually catch the eye of the Pope and help spur the Council of Trent (1545). However, he was not the main Reformer to catch, or perhaps a better term, "poke" the eye of the Pope. Martin Luther's teachings on concupiscence would be under condemnation as well, especially in "Canon 5, The Decree on Original Sin" at the Council of Trent.¹¹ He argued that anyone who denied that sin remains in a baptized child went against both Paul and Christ, and that concupiscence keeps a soul from entering heaven at death even when there is no actual sin.¹² As a result, Luther was condemned as a heretic by Pope Leo in 1520 in his *Bull Exsurge*.¹³

Luther was primarily driven by his doctrine of man's total depravity. If he was to be saved, only God could save him. He had a guilty conscience that drove him to

¹⁰ Eire, *Reformations*, 224.

¹¹ Hubert Jedin, *The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, vol. 2 of *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Dom Ernest Graf (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1958), 134, 144-45.

¹² Jedin, *The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, 144-45. Also see Robert Kolb and James A Nestingen, eds., *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 34.

¹³ Jedin, *The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, 144-45.

depend on God's grace alone, which lead to his understanding of justification as he preached through the Psalms, Romans, and Galatians.¹⁴ He was converted to the Protestant gospel between 1513 and 1517.¹⁵ He understood he was forsaken by God due to his sin (Ps 22), but through faith in Christ, who was perfectly righteous and forsaken for him, God would forsake him no longer (Rom 1:17).¹⁶ In 1517, due to having a pastor's heart for defending his sheep from the wolves, Luther wrote his *95 Theses* in response to Johann Tetzel's selling of indulgences. Tetzel sold indulgences under the guise that if the laity purchased them, they would free their loved ones from purgatory. Luther's rhetoric in his *95 Theses* was cutting and opposed the Pope publicly. Yet, the laity was largely on his side, and the Reformation spread as a result.

Luther's theology did not start with him, for he owed much of his theology to Augustine. He appealed to Augustine often for his understanding that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. For example, in his work "A Treatise on Baptism" written in 1519, he wrote,

Now if this covenant did not exist, and God were not so merciful as to wink at our sins, there could be no sin so small but it would condemn us. For the judgment of God can endure no sin. Therefore there is on earth no greater comfort than baptism, for through it we come under the judgment of grace and mercy, which does not condemn our sins, but drives them out by many trials. There is a fine sentence of St. Augustine, which says, "Sin is altogether forgiven in baptism; not in such wise that it is no longer present, but in such wise that it is not taken into account." As though he were to say, "Sin remains in our flesh even until death, and works without ceasing; but so long as we do not consent thereto or remain therein, it is so overruled by our baptism that it does not condemn us and is not harmful to us, but is daily more and more destroyed until our death."

For this reason no one should be terrified if he feel evil lust or love, nor should he despair even if he fall, but he should remember his baptism, and comfort himself joyfully with it, since God has there bound Himself to slay his sin for him, and not to count it a cause for condemnation, if only he does not consent to sin or remain in sin. Moreover, these wild thoughts and appetites, and even a fall into sin, should not be regarded as an occasion for despair, but rather as a warning from God that man

¹⁴ Eire, *Reformations*, 224.

¹⁵ Eire, *Reformations*, 143.

¹⁶ Eire, *Reformations*, 144-45.

should remember his baptism and what was there spoken, that he should call upon God's mercy, and exercise himself in striving against sin, that he should even be desirous of death in order that he may be rid of sin.¹⁷

In many of Luther's works, he quoted Augustine to defend his position. He believed he was continuing what Augustine taught about concupiscence. He even reworded Augustine's quote to say that sin remains in a Christian's flesh until death. Yet, it is overruled by baptism so that it does not condemn, is not harmful, and is mortified gradually. Luther believed that God imputed the guilt of sin in Christians to Christ. It is not that sin has changed in a Christian, but that the Christian has received grace and been declared righteous; Christ has taken the guilt of their sin away.

Furthermore, Luther's understanding that concupiscence is morally culpable sin was reflected in the "Large Catechism" he wrote in 1529. Pertaining to concupiscence, he referenced the Ninth and Tenth Commandments and argued that God forbade coveting: "in order that it be esteemed as sin and be forbidden to desire or in any way to aim at getting our neighbor's wife or possessions."¹⁸ God does not merely command pure actions, but a pure heart as well. Luther continued,

Thus these commandments are especially given against envy and miserable avarice, that God may remove all causes and sources whence arises everything by which we do injury to our neighbor, and therefore he expresses it in plain words: *Thou shall not covet*, etc. For he would especially have the heart pure, although we shall never attain to that as long as we live here: so that this commandment, like all the rest, will constantly accuse us and show how ungodly we are in the sight of God.¹⁹

Luther argued that the command not to have concupiscence, or sinful desires of coveting, was given for the purpose of showing sinners their complete sinfulness and their need for God's grace continually. However, the command also served the church to constantly

¹⁷ Martin Luther, "A Treatise on Baptism," in *Works of Martin Luther with Introductions and Notes*, vol. 1, trans. C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), 62.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1916), 432.

¹⁹ Luther, "The Large Catechism," 434.

accuse her to show her how ungodly she is apart from God's grace. Therefore, the church must always be aware that she is saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Luther also opposed the Roman Catholic teaching on concupiscence in the "Smalcald Articles" written in 1537. He gathered these articles in order to distinguish essential Lutheran doctrines from non-essential doctrines if the Pope summoned him to a council.²⁰ Writing about "the false repentance of the papists," he argued,

It was impossible that they should teach correctly concerning repentance, since they did not rightly know what sins are. For, as has been shown above, they do not believe aright concerning original sin, but say that the natural powers of man have remained unimpaired and incorrupt; that reason can teach aright, and the will can accordingly do aright [those things which are taught], that God certainly gives his grace when a man does only as much as is in him, according to his free will.

From this dogma it follows that they must repent only for actual sins, such as wicked thoughts that are acquiesced in (for wicked emotion [concupiscence, vicious feelings and inclinations], lust and improper dispositions [according to them] are not sins), and for wicked words and deeds, which the free will could readily have omitted. And to such repentance they fix three parts, contrition, confession and satisfaction, with this consolation and promise added: If man truly repent, confess, render satisfaction, he thereby merits forgiveness, and settles for his sins with God. Thus in repentance men were instructed to repose confidence in their own works. Hence the expression originated, which was employed in the pulpit when public absolution was announced to the people: "Prolong, O God, my life, until I shall make satisfaction for my sins and amend my life."²¹

Luther opposed the papal teaching that only willful actions are morally culpable sins. Instead, he contended that sinful desires are morally culpable sin that requires the sinner to solely depend upon God's grace for forgiveness rather than depending on one's self-reflection or papal discernment of one's "contrition, confession, or satisfaction." Luther believed that if one's fleshly desires are morally culpable sin, then one cannot find help in the mirror or in the papacy but in Christ alone.

²⁰ Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," in *The Book of Concord: or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1916), 307.

²¹ Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," 324-25.

Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560)

Martin Luther was not alone in his theology against Rome, for his closest friend and most ardent supporter was Philip Melanchthon.²² He was a professor with Luther at the University of Wittenberg. In 1520 when Luther was battling with the Pope, Melanchthon was working on the first Protestant systematic theology (dogmatics), which was published in 1521.²³ After quoting John 3:6, "That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit," he wrote,

We are saints insofar as we are spirit, insofar as we have been renewed. Sin still adheres in the flesh, the old man, the outer man. In this connection the apostle says (Gal. 5:17): "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh." The Paris Sophists deny that the concupiscence in the saints' flesh is sin; they say it is "weakness." Luther refuted them quite adequately in his *Against Latomus*. There is nothing more evident than that sin is everything which resists the law of God.²⁴

Melanchthon contended plainly that the telos, the ultimate goal, God, determines the definition of sin. Man's will does not determine what is sin; man's discernment does not; man's rebirth does not. Concupiscence is sin because it resists God's law, not because of any other reason; no other reason is needed.

A few years later, at the request of Emperor Charles V, a Lutheran document of beliefs was submitted that became known as "The Augsburg Confession."²⁵ When it was read publicly at the Diet of Augsburg, there arose a dispute against it.²⁶ Therefore,

²² Eire, *Reformations*, 155.

²³ Wilhelm Pauck, ed., *Melanchthon and Bucer*, *The Library of Christian Classics* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1969), xix, 3.

²⁴ Philip Melanchthon, "Loci Communes Theologici," in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1969), 131.

²⁵ "The Augsburg Confession," *The Book of Concord: or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1916), 34.

²⁶ Philip Melanchthon, "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession," in *The Book of Concord: or, The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Henry Eyster Jacobs (Philadelphia: General Council Publication Board, 1916), 73.

Melanchthon crafted a defense in 1530 known as, “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession.” Defending Luther’s understanding of sin by quoting Augustine, Melanchthon disputed,

But they contend that concupiscence is a penalty, and not a sin [a burden and imposed penalty, and is not such a sin as is subject to death and condemnation]. Luther maintains that it is a sin. It has been said above that Augustine defines Original Sin as concupiscence. If there be anything disadvantageous in this opinion, let them quarrel with Augustine. Besides Paul says (Rom. 7:7, 23): " I had not known lust" (concupiscence), "except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Likewise: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members!" These testimonies can be overthrown by no sophistry. For they clearly call concupiscence sin, which, nevertheless, is not imputed to those who are in Christ, although by nature it is a matter worthy of death, where it is not forgiven. Thus, beyond all controversy, the Fathers believe. For Augustine, in a long discussion, refutes the opinion of those, who thought that concupiscence in man, is not a fault, but an adiaphoron, as color or ill-health is said to be an adiaphoron of the body [as to have a black or a white body is neither good nor evil].

But if the adversaries will contend that the *fomes* [or evil inclination] is an adiaphoron, not only many passages of Scripture, but the entire Church also [and all the Fathers] will contradict them. For even though perfect consent were not attained [even if not entire consent, but only the inclination and desire be there], who ever dared to say that these were adiaphora, viz. to doubt concerning God's wrath, concerning God's grace, concerning God's Word, to be angry at the judgments of God, to be provoked because God does not at once remove one from afflictions, to murmur because the wicked experience a better fortune than the good, to be urged on by wrath, lust, the desire for glory, wealth, etc.? And yet godly men acknowledge these in themselves, as appears in the Psalms and the prophets. But, in the schools, they transferred hither from philosophy, notions entirely different, that, because of emotions, we are neither good nor evil, we are neither praised nor blamed. Likewise, that nothing is sin, unless it be voluntary [inner desires and thoughts are not sins, if I do not altogether consent thereto]. These notions were expressed among philosophers, with respect to civil righteousness, and not with respect to God's judgment.²⁷

Melanchthon believed that Augustine and all the Church Fathers taught that concupiscence is sin. It is not guiltless sin in Christians, and it is not an adiaphoron, a morally neutral inclination. Rather, concupiscence, like all that is contrary to God's law, is morally culpable sin.²⁸

²⁷ Melanchthon, “The Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” 81-82.

²⁸ While Luther was fighting for the Reformation against the Pope, thanks to the printing press, his writings were spreading and reformation with them! The first Swiss city to release his writings was Basel, and evangelical preaching exploded as a result. Due to the influence of men like Johannes

Martin Bucer (1491-1551)

Luther and Melanchthon were not the only Reformers in Germany. Martin Bucer, leader at Strassburg of the Reformed Churches in South Germany, worked for reformation as well, and served as a bridge between the Lutherans and the Reformed.²⁹ The Reformation was a fight by the Reformers against the Roman Catholics, but it was also a fight between the Lutherans and the Reformed concerning the Eucharist. Bucer became very close to Ulrich Zwingli, and became friends with Michael Sattler, John Calvin, and Thomas Cranmer as well.³⁰ In 1536, he wrote *Common Places*. After speaking of Plato's stealing from Christianity the notion that "the wise man's mind should be free from even the faintest longing for evil," he wrote,

For it is so native to our experience for covetousness to lead us into evil-doing that according to the common verdict covetousness itself should not be reckoned as a fault in a man so long as he does not yield to it and purpose to implement it. Consequently the holy apostle wrote: 'I would not have recognized covetousness (to be sin) if the law had not said, "You shall not covet".' Indeed, so justly does the law treat covetousness too as sin that no one who has reflected on how eagerly we ought to be inclined towards righteousness can be in two minds about it. For we should be wholeheartedly on fire for the good, that is, the will of God; and if a man attains to this, no desire for evil will ever steal upon his heart. Every man earnestly cherishes and loves his own life as something good, and therefore no one in his right senses desires what he is fully assured will destroy or maim his life. But if we worshipped and loved God the creator with the total devotion that is his right, what delight in the things that alienate him from us would ever gain access to our hearts? So evil desire is also sin, and since a person judges the objects of his desire to be of supreme value

Oecolampadius, Oswald Myconius, and Simon Gryaneus, "The First Confession of Basel" was written in 1534. Their article on original sin emphasized man's total depravity and the bondage of man's will. Defending these realities, they confessed, "And besides, our nature has been corrupted, and in addition reaches such a propensity of sinning (Gen. 6:5; 8:21), that unless it is restored by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5, 6), man does nothing good by himself, nor does he wish to (Rom. 3:10–12, 23; Ps. 143:2, 10; Eph. 2:1–3, 5)."²⁸ Therefore, the willful actions of a man were not his only sins, but his "wishes" or desires, his concupiscence, that led to these actions were sin as well. Johannes Oecolampadius, Oswald Myconius, and Simon Gryaneus, "The First Confession of Basel (1534)," in 1523-1552, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. and trans. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 288.

²⁹ D. F. Wright, ed., *Common Places of Martin Bucer* (Berkshire, UK: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), i.

³⁰ Eire, *Reformations*, 236, 260, 298-99.

and is immediately borne undeservedly in their direction, it is even the root of all sins.³¹

Bucer believed that man's natural inclination is to assume his wicked desires are not morally culpable sin; that is why Paul wrote in Romans 7 that he could not have known coveting was a sin if the law had not told him. Therefore, Bucer concluded that if a Christian has thought much about the law's demands and how Christians should be only inclined toward righteousness, they cannot believe unrighteous desires are anything but sin. Wicked desires were both sin and the root of all sins according to Bucer.

Additionally, later in his work *True Reconciliation*, written in 1542, he appealed to Augustine for his reasoning concerning why concupiscence is morally culpable sin. Brian Lugojo, Professor at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California, after discussing Melanchthon's thoughts on the article of original sin written at Regensburg, writes of Bucer,

Bucer echoed these sentiments in regard to the article in *De Vera Reconciliatione*. He stated: "However, the saints, in their own way, also desire things contrary to God, are turned away from God, oppose God's good will, and the evil that with a renewed mind and the spirit of Christ they hated and fled, in the flesh and old man (which still indwells them) they do; and thus remain in them the senses of the flesh, which is hostile toward God. They are also themselves to this extent enemies of God." Then after quoting Romans 8:1, that there is still no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, he states that this still remains true for the saint, even though sin still indwells his flesh. Though this evil and sin still merit condemnation, Christ by his death has removed the deserved condemnation from those who remain in him.

Bucer believed that the severity of the evangelical position was in accord with the quotation from Augustine in paragraph 9, which stated that "this remaining evil in the saints is sin, and not only the penalty or the cause of sin, because disobedience dwells in it against the rule of reason." From Bucer's perspective, the article described concupiscence as sin.³²

Bucer, with Augustine, taught that Christians still desire things that go against God due to their "old man," the flesh. The flesh is hostile to God and the only reason God is not

³¹ Bucer, *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, 120-21.

³² Brian Lugojo, *Martin Bucer's Doctrine of Justification: Reformation Theology in Early Modern Irenicism*, in Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 172-73.

opposed to Christians is due to their condemnation being placed on Christ instead of on them. According to Bucer's understanding of Augustine, "disobedience dwells in" the desires of Christians, yet God has hidden them in Christ.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

John Calvin was only eight years old when Luther nailed his *95 Theses* and only fifteen when Zwingli presented his *Instruction* to the Zurich city council. Yet, this young man would grow to become one of the most important leaders of the Protestant Reformation. He was raised Roman Catholic, and studied to be a priest, but by 1533 he had converted to the Protestant gospel.³³ When severe persecution broke out in France in 1534, he fled to Basel, Switzerland.³⁴ While there he wrote his magnum opus, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It was first published in Basel in 1536 and was well received.³⁵ As a result, Calvin eventually sought to move to Strassburg to live a scholar's life in peace, yet the road was blocked, forcing him to stop in Geneva. When Guillaume Farel, the current leader of the Reformation in Geneva, heard the author of the *Institutes* was there, he barged into his room and demanded that he stay in Geneva and serve as his assistant. Calvin resisted but Farel would not take "no" for an answer. He even threatened Calvin with curses from God if he did not stay.³⁶ Calvin stayed and within a year, 1537, he wrote a catechism for children and the uneducated based on the *Institutes*.³⁷ About the Tenth Commandment forbidding coveting, he confessed,

³³ Eire, *Reformations*, 289-90.

³⁴ Eire, *Reformations*, 290-91.

³⁵ Eire, *Reformations*, 291-92.

³⁶ Eire, *Reformations*, 297-98.

³⁷ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to "Calvin's Catechism (1537)," by John Calvin, in *1523-1552*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 353.

With these words the Lord curbs, as it were, all our cupidities which go beyond the limits set by charity. This commandment indeed forbids conceiving in the heart all that which the other commandments prohibit committing in act against the rule of love. Hence this command condemns hatred, envy, ill will, just as murder was condemned above. Lascivious sentiment and inner impurity of heart are here prohibited just as are acts of fornication. Just as, before, rapacity and cunning were forbidden, so now is avarice. Whereas, before, slander was banned, so now malignity itself is repressed.³⁸

Like Luther's catechism, Calvin confessed the command "you shall not covet," forbade any desire contrary to God's law. The sinful desire is always morally culpable sin. Calvin continued, "This therefore is the sum of this commandment: we must be so affectionate that we are no longer even solicited by any cupidity contrary to the law of love, and ready to render most willingly to each one that which is his. And we must hold toward each as his own that which the duty of our office binds us to render to him."³⁹ The goal for the Christian is not mere outward obedience but inward obedience. The goal is perfection, not anything less, according to Calvin.

Unfortunately for Calvin and Farel, the Geneva city council forced them out in May of 1538. The issue was over their magisterial emphasis. The city had recently been freed from the Pope and they were not eager to replace him with new leaders. Calvin went to Strassburg and enjoyed himself from 1538 to 1541.⁴⁰ Yet, in 1541, the election in Geneva changed the composition of the city council and they invited him back. He returned with more authority than he ever had before.⁴¹ One of his first actions as leader was to expand upon a catechism he had written while in Strassburg. In 1541 he released a

³⁸ John Calvin, "Calvin's Catechism (1537)," in *1523-1552*, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. and trans. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 363-64.

³⁹ Calvin, "Calvin's Catechism (1537)," 363-64.

⁴⁰ Eire, *Reformations*, 298.

⁴¹ Eire, *Reformations*, 299.

new catechism in a question and answer format, particularly useful for children.⁴²

Pertaining to the Tenth Commandment, he wrote,

214. M[inister]. Seeing that the whole law is spiritual, as you have so often said before, and the other commandments are not only to order outward acts, but also the affections of the heart, what more is added here?

C[hild]. The Lord wished by the other commandments to rule our affections and will, but here He imposes a law also on our thoughts which though charged with covetousness and desire, yet stop short of an active intention.

215. M. Do you mean that the least temptation that enters into the thought of a believer is sin, even though he resists it and does not consent to it?

C. It is certain that all evil thoughts proceed from the infirmity of our flesh, even though we do not consent to them. But I say that this commandment speaks of concupiscence which tickles and pierces the heart of man, without bringing him to a deliberate purpose.

216. M. You say then that the evil affections which involve a definite act of will or resolution are already condemned, but now the Lord requires of us such integrity, that no wicked desire may enter our hearts, to solicit and incite them to evil.

C. That is right.”⁴³

Calvin believed that God desired more from man than the civil magistrate required. He desired more than mere outward obedience. God desired purity of heart from his people. Therefore, he commanded his people to not desire anything of their neighbors’. The questions and answers Calvin chose leaves no room to assume a different interpretation; Calvin meticulously yet briefly explained that wicked desire, any desire contrary to God’s law, concupiscence, was sin.

Finally, one must consider Calvin’s most important work, possibly the most important book of the Reformation and the most important systematic theology of all time, his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He published the first edition in 1536 and published the final edition in 1559, after much editing and expansion. The final edition is

⁴² James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “Calvin’s Catechism (1545),” by John Calvin, in 1523-1552, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 467.

⁴³ John Calvin, “Calvin’s Catechism (1545),” in 1523-1552, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 496.

the only one Calvin was satisfied with, and it ended up being about the size of the Old Testament plus the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.⁴⁴ In the *Institutes*, Calvin wrote extensively on the sin of wicked desire:

10. Believers are still sinners

Thus, then, are the children of God freed through regeneration from bondage to sin. Yet they do not obtain full possession of freedom so as to feel no more annoyance from their flesh, but there still remains in them a continuing occasion for struggle whereby they may be exercised; and not only be exercised, but also better learn their own weakness. In this matter all writers of sounder judgment agree that there remains in a regenerate man a smoldering cinder of evil, from which desires continually leap forth to allure and spur him to commit sin. They also admit that the saints are as yet so bound by that disease of concupiscence that they cannot withstand being at times tickled and incited either to lust or to avarice or to ambition, or to other vices. And we do not need to labor much over investigating what ancient writers thought about this; Augustine alone will suffice for this purpose, since he faithfully and diligently collected the opinions of all. Let my readers, therefore, obtain from him whatever certainty they desire concerning the opinion of antiquity.

But between Augustine and us we can see that there is this difference of opinion: while he concedes that believers, as long as they dwell in mortal bodies, are so bound by inordinate desires that they are unable not to desire inordinately, yet he dare not call this disease "sin." Content to designate it with the term "weakness," he teaches that it becomes sin only when either act or consent follows the conceiving or apprehension of it, that is, when the will yields to the first strong inclination. We, on the other hand, deem it sin when man is tickled by any desire at all against the law of God. Indeed, we label "sin" that very depravity which begets in us desires of this sort. We accordingly teach that in the saints, until they are divested of mortal bodies, there is always sin; for in their flesh there resides that depravity of inordinate desiring which contends against righteousness. And Augustine does not always refrain from using the term "sin," as when he says: "Paul calls by the name 'sin,' the source from which all sins rise up into carnal desire. As far as this pertains to the saints, it loses its dominion on earth and perishes in heaven." By these words he admits that in so far as believers are subject to the inordinate desires of the flesh they are guilty of sin.⁴⁵

Calvin appealed to Augustine. He had great respect for Augustine and sought to build on his understanding of concupiscence. However, where Calvin believed Augustine's views were contrary to Scripture, he went with Scripture. As argued in chapter 2 of this dissertation, Augustine was difficult to understand on concupiscence and Calvin agreed. Yet, after Calvin argued that Christians are subject to their desires by simply having these

⁴⁴ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:xxix-xxxiv.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:602-3.

desires, he contended that Augustine taught that a person who is subject to his desires is guilty of sin.

Calvin continued,

11. In believers sin has lost its dominion; but it still dwells in them

God is said to purge his church of all sin, in that through baptism he promises that grace of deliverance, and fulfills it in his elect [Eph. 5:26-27]. This statement we refer to the guilt of sin, rather than to the very substance of sin. God truly carries this out by regenerating his own people, so that the sway of sin is abolished in them. For the Spirit dispenses a power whereby they may gain the upper hand and become victors in the struggle. But sin ceases only to reign; it does not also cease to dwell in them. Accordingly, we say that the old man was so crucified [Rom. 6:6], and the law of sin [cf. Rom. 8:2] so abolished in the children of God, that some vestiges remain; not to rule over them, but to humble them by the consciousness of their own weakness. And we, indeed, admit that these traces are not imputed, as if they did not exist; but at the same time we contend that this comes to pass through the mercy of God, so that the saints—otherwise deservedly sinners and guilty before God—are freed from this guilt. And it will not be difficult for us to confirm this opinion, since there are clear testimonies to the fact in Scripture. What clearer testimony do we wish than what Paul exclaims in the seventh chapter of Romans? First, Paul speaks there as a man reborn [Rom. 7:6]. This we have shown in another place, and Augustine proves it with unassailable reasoning. I have nothing to say about the fact that he uses the words "evil" and "sin," so that they who wish to cry out against us can cavil at those words; yet who will deny that opposition to God's law is evil? Who will deny that hindrance to righteousness is sin? Who, in short, will not grant that guilt is involved wherever there is spiritual misery? But Paul proclaims all these facts concerning this disease.

Then we have a reliable indication from the law by which we can briefly deal with this whole question. For we are bidden to "love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our faculties" [Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37]. Since all the capacities of our soul ought to be so filled with the love of God, it is certain that this precept is not fulfilled by those who can either retain in the heart a slight inclination or admit to the mind any thought at all that would lead them away from the love of God into vanity. What then? To be stirred by sudden emotions, to grasp in sense perception, to conceive in the mind—are not these powers of the soul? Therefore, when these lay themselves open to vain and depraved thoughts, do they not show themselves to be in such degree empty of the love of God? For this reason, he who does not admit that all desires of the flesh are sins, but that that disease of inordinately desiring which they call "tinder" is a wellspring of sin, must of necessity deny that the transgression of the law is sin.⁴⁶

Calvin appealed again to Augustine, who called concupiscence, desire contrary to God's law "evil," which is sin. Any opposition to God's law is sin according to Calvin. He interpreted the apostle Paul in Romans 7 with Augustine, arguing that Paul was a believer

⁴⁶ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, 603-4.

speaking of the battle of all Christians between their flesh and spirit. Furthermore, Calvin argued that God desires perfection from his people. That is why they are commanded to love him with all their hearts, souls, and minds. And any inclination contrary to God's law is a movement of the soul whereby Christians transgress the law, and thus, commit sin.

John à Lasco (1499-1560)

John à Lasco had a similar beginning as some of the other Reformers. He was a Catholic priest who was influenced by Erasmus, and then by Zwingli. Around 1538 he was converted to the Protestant gospel, and by 1543, he was the leader of the Protestant Churches in Emden, Germany. When, due to political alliances, leaders permitted Roman Catholicism in the area to flourish again, à Lasco went to England to seek refuge with Thomas Cranmer. There he influenced the book of *Common Prayer* and became the co-pastor of a Dutch immigrant congregation.⁴⁷ He wrote in 1546 for the Emden churches the "Large Emden Catechism," but carried it to England and used it in his "Strangers' Church, London" to train children in the Reformed faith.⁴⁸ Concerning concupiscence being morally culpable sin, he wrote,

Q. 84. Can man not keep himself from sin and avoid it?

R. If we refer to external sinful acts, such as slander, killing, adultery, stealing, drunkenness, and other things of that kind, the ability has been given us in part through the innate natural powers (we attempt it with all diligence—since surely we also have been under obligation) to keep ourselves from such sins. If we wish to consider sin as it pertains to the inner perversity of our nature, then we can never be without sin. In fact, we are unable to do anything but sin as long as we live here. (Phil. 3; Rom. 7)

⁴⁷ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to "London Confession of John à Lasco (1551)," in 1523-1552, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 551-52.

⁴⁸ "London Confession of John à Lasco (1551)," in 1523-1552, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. James Frantz Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 584.

Q. 85. What! Can we not satisfy the law if we outwardly preserve ourselves from sin?

R. By no means! For God has not been satisfied with the external appearance of duty, but desires the heart, because it has been corrupted with unyielding evil, by which it happens that it cannot completely observe the law, which is spiritual. (Dt. 6, 10, 11, 26; Mt. 22; Jer. 17; Rom. 7; Gal. 5)⁴⁹

À Lasco's church confessed that outward sinful acts can be avoided, but one's inner perversity of nature cannot be avoided. God desires the hearts of his people to be pure, and Christians are always sinful and unable to do what the law requires in this life, due to their sinful concupiscence. He continued,

Q. 103. But how do we walk happily and cheerfully in the law?

R. When we are assured that Christ crowns and rewards our imperfect obedience, just as if it were complete; and that although we may be in our sins, we are known in the judgment of God as holy and elect sons; so thus we may progress in our obedience in all activity through our faith in Christ, as best we can. (Eph. 1; Col. 1; 1 Cor. 1)⁵⁰

Even though Christians are inherently disobedient to the law, sinful, they need not despair since they are in Christ and are known by God as "holy and elect sons." Through faith in Christ, à Lasco taught that Christians can progress in their growth in Christ, even though sin, concupiscence, is ever-present with them in this life.

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)

À Lasco was not alone in his labors for reformation. He had many co-laborers, and one of the most influential was Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer became Archbishop of Canterbury, England in 1533. He battled Roman influence for fifteen plus years under Henry VIII, until Henry died, and his ten year-old son, Edward VI, took the throne. Then much authority fell to Cranmer.⁵¹ He brought in à Lasco, Bucer, and Peter Martyr

⁴⁹ John à Lasco, "Large Emden Catechism (1551)," in 1523-1552, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. James Frantz Smith (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 607-8.

⁵⁰ Lasco, "Large Emden Catechism (1551)," 611.

⁵¹ John Edmund Cox, ed., "Biographical Notice of Archbishop Cranmer," in *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1556*, vol. 2 of *The Works of*

Vermigli to teach at Lambert, Oxford, and Cambridge, which helped to turn the Church of England decidedly Protestant. He also used part of that influence to write and implement “The Forty-two Articles of the Church of England” of 1552-1553.⁵² This confession is the basis for the “39 Articles” that the Church of England still affirms today. In “Article 8, of Original, or Birth Sin,” Cranmer wrote,

Original sin stands not in the following of Adam, as the Pelagians do vainly talk, which also the Anabaptists do now-a-days renew: but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam: whereby man is very far gone from his former righteousness, which he had at his creation, and is of his own nature given to evil; so that the flesh desires always contrary to the spirit: and, therefore, in every person, born into this world, it deserves God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature does remain, yes, in them that are baptized: whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek φρονημα σαρκος (which some do expound, the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh), is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe, and are baptized: yet the apostle does confess that concupiscence and lust have of itself the nature of sin.⁵³

Contrary to the Roman Catholic Church, Cranmer and the Church of England confessed that the apostle Paul taught that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. Unfortunately, Mary Tudor came to power and had Cranmer, after a trial, executed in 1556.⁵⁴ However, once she lost power, the “Forty-two Articles” were used again, and

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Martyr, 1556 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1846), viii-x.

⁵² James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1552/53),” by Thomas Cranmer, in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 1-2. Another confession to consider around this same time period, 1553, comes from the “Geneva of the Netherlands,” the “Emden Examination of Faith.” Their answer in Question 6 for what God requires of Christians in the Tenth Commandment was, “That in no way shall we have an evil inclination or lust against the glory of God and our neighbor (Rom. 7:17; Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).” “Emden Examination of Faith (1553),” in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. Abraham Kuyper (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 46.

⁵³ Thomas Cranmer, “The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1552/53),” in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 3-4.

⁵⁴ Cox, “Biographical Notice of Archbishop Cranmer,” x-xii.

served as the basis of the “Thirty-nine Articles” adopted by the Church of England in 1563.⁵⁵ To this day, the statement on “Original Sin” remains the same; only the number has been changed since a statement on the Holy Spirit was added as number 5.⁵⁶

Theodore Beza (1519-1605)

While Cranmer was working for reformation in England, Theodore Beza was laboring for reformation under John Calvin. Beza was raised a Roman Catholic, but gradually became disenchanted with Roman Catholicism until he was converted to the Protestant gospel, condemned as a heretic, and fled to Geneva in 1548. John Calvin welcomed him. At the request of Pierre Viret, he became a professor of Greek for 10 years at Lausanne before he moved to Geneva in 1559 to become the first professor of Greek at the Academy of Geneva. Beza’s embrace of the Protestant gospel was not well received by his Roman Catholic father. As a result, he wrote a confession for his father in 1546 as a defense of his own Christianity. Originally written in French, it was later

⁵⁵ Another document to consider is the “Anglican Catechism” for children, crafted by John Ponet in 1553. Discussing concupiscence rendering man unable to fulfill the law, this catechism reads, “And that no man is made righteous by the law, it is evident: not only that the righteous lives by faith, but also that no mortal man is able to fulfill all that the law of both the tables commands. For we have hindrances that strive against the law: as the weakness of the flesh, habitual appetite, and lust naturally engendered.” John Ponet, “Anglican Catechism (1553),” in 1552-1566, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 19.

⁵⁶ Dennison, Jr., introduction to “The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1552/53),” 2. Another Reformed confession to consider is “The Waldensian Confession of 1560.” Concerning concupiscence, they confessed, “We also believe that this vice is truly sinful and sufficient to condemn the whole human race, even children in the womb of their mother, for it is so judged before God. And after baptism, it is still sinful as to the guilt; but the condemnation is abolished for the children of God, not being imputed to them out of His free goodness. Moreover, we confess that it is such a perversity which always produces the fruits of malice and rebellion so that even the holiest saints, though they resist it, are nevertheless stained with infirmities and shortcomings while they inhabit this world (Rom. 7).” “The Waldensian Confession (1560),” in 1552-1566, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. Andrea Ferrari (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 221.

published in Latin in 1560, and it became a popular summary of the Reformed faith.⁵⁷

Writing directly against the Roman Catholic Church concerning sin, Beza argued,

It is no marvel though that such people do not understand the office of Christ, our only Savior. For they do not know how deadly their sickness is, nor by what means Jesus Christ our only medicine is applied and united to us. For first, instead of declaring that man is altogether dead by original sin (otherwise called natural corruption), they teach that the understanding and will of man is hurt sorely so that the first grace only eases and comforts us in our infirmity. If this doctrine is true, our regeneration proceeds not only from grace, but there is participation or concurrence between grace and what they call free will (which has been discussed in points 13–15 of the third point). Moreover, to join and heap together error upon error, they have a certain disposition proceeding from the nature of man to receive the first grace so that God may be provoked by our merits to give us the second grace.

Likewise, they say that the concupiscence which continues after baptism is not sin of itself before God. Likewise, that all sins do not deserve eternal death because there are some which they call venial sins. Likewise, if our salvation is grounded upon our good works, in all or in part, to what end does grace serve us then, except as an instrument to help our free will to save ourselves? All of these are execrable errors, wholly abolishing the benefits of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Ghost in us.⁵⁸

As an apologetic written for his Roman Catholic father, it makes sense that Beza would be direct in defending his faith as distinct from Roman Catholic teaching. He contended that the papists were wrong in their understanding of sin and total depravity, and its effect on mankind. They were also wrong in their lack of understanding of concupiscence as truly sin, even in the baptized. Beza argued that man continually needed God's grace and the benefits of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit in order to be in Christ and stay in Christ.

Guido de Brès (1522-1567)

While Calvin and Beza were teaching in Switzerland, Guido de Brès was preaching the doctrines of the Reformation in The Netherlands. De Brès was converted to the Protestant gospel by reading the Bible in 1547. He set to preaching and became

⁵⁷ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “Theodore Beza’s Confession (1560),” by Theodore Beza, in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 236-37.

⁵⁸ Theodore Beza, “Theodore Beza’s Confession (1560),” in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 338-39.

known as “The Reformer of the Netherlands,” but had to flee for his life to England due to the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. There he was influenced by John à Lasco and Martin Bucer. He returned to Belgium in 1552 and continued preaching the Reformed faith. In 1561, de Brès authored “The Belgic Confession” that later became one of the “Three Forms of Unity” at the Synod of Dort in 1619.⁵⁹ In article fifteen, on “Original Sin,” he wrote,

We believe that through the disobedience of Adam original sin is extended to all mankind; which is a corruption of the whole nature and a hereditary disease, wherewith even infants in their mother’s womb are infected, and which produces in man all sorts of sin, being in him as a root thereof, and, therefore, is so vile and abominable in the sight of God that it is sufficient to condemn all mankind. Nor is it altogether abolished or wholly eradicated even by baptism; since sin always issues forth from this woeful source, as water from a fountain; notwithstanding it is not imputed to the children of God unto condemnation, but by His grace and mercy is forgiven them. Not that they should rest securely in sin, but that a sense of this corruption should make believers often to sigh, desiring to be delivered from this body of death.⁶⁰

De Brès, in agreement with Bucer and à Lasco, confessed that concupiscence is not eradicated in baptism, but it is imputed to Christ due to his grace and mercy.

Nevertheless, Christians have a personal responsibility to not “rest securely in sin.”

Instead, Christians must desire to be delivered from their bodies of death.

Wolfgang Musculus (1496-1563)

Another important Reformer to consider is Wolfgang Musculus. He had a similar story as other Reformers. When he was sixteen years of age, he became a monk, and stayed one for fifteen years. In 1518, he read some of Luther’s writings and was won

⁵⁹ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The Belgic Confession (1561),” in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 424-25. Dennison points to the possibility that Adrian Saravia, Herman Modetus, Godfrey van Wingen, and Francis Junius helped de Brès write this confession; however, this is debated.

⁶⁰ “The Belgic Confession (1561),” in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 433.

to the Protestant gospel. Once he was ordained a priest, he began preaching in the monastery and local churches until he left the monastery in 1527.⁶¹ He became a leading Reformer and remained one for over 30 years in Augsburg and Bern.⁶² In one of Musculus' most popular works, *Common Places* published in 1560, he contended for the Protestant understanding of concupiscence:⁶³

Then it remains that the same concupiscence is forbidden, which is neither natural nor spiritual, but of the flesh, which is corrupt and desperate: which the Apostle touches, saying, “The flesh desires against the Spirit.” The natural concupiscence is the minister of nature, the spiritual of the spirit of the regenerate, but the carnal concupiscence serves sin which lurks hidden in our flesh. That same is wicked and damnable, and forbidden by God’s law. The naughtiness of it first consists in that, that of itself it desires foul things, unjust, unright, shameful, hurtful, and ungodly: as be the service of idols, whoredom, adultery, drunkenness, wastefulness, deception, pride, backbiting, murder, and such like. In desiring these things it desires against the spirit. Secondly, the wickedness of it consists in this also, that it desires those things which although they be not of themselves evil, yet they have occasion otherwise whereby they be unlawful for us to desire them: as those things which are forbidden by God, or the Magistrate.⁶⁴

Musculus showed the difference between natural desire, spiritual desire, and carnal desire. He defended the Protestant notion that fleshly desire, “carnal concupiscence,” is wicked and damnable or morally culpable, because it desires against the spirit. To desire evil things is evil. He goes so far to condemn desires that are forbidden by God or the local governing authorities, although they may not be inherently sinful.

⁶¹ Gabor J. Lanyi, “The Origins and Nature of Wolfgang Musculus Dusanus’ Political Theology,” in *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica* 63, no. 2 (2018): 88-89.

⁶² Craig S. Farmer, *The Gospel of John in the Sixteenth Century: The Johannine Exegesis of Wolfgang Musculus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3-4.

⁶³ Farmer, *The Gospel of John in the Sixteenth Century*, 29.

⁶⁴ I have updated this quotation from early Modern English to Modern English. For the original quote, see Wolfgang Musculus, *Common Places of Christian Religion Gathered by Wolfgang Musculus, for the use of such as desire the knowledge of Godly Truth*, trans. John Man (London: Henry Bynneman, 1578), 245.

Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583)

Not long after Musculus became a leading Reformer, Zacharias Ursinus was born into a Lutheran family in 1534. At age 15, he enrolled in the University of Wittenberg University where he became a student of and close friends with Philip Melanchthon. When he completed his studies in 1557, he traveled the Reformed world, meeting John Calvin, Henry Bullinger, and Peter Martyr Vermigli, who influenced him the most theologically. When Melanchthon died, Ursinus returned to Zurich to study with Vermigli for nearly a year before he was appointed a professor in Heidelberg in 1562.⁶⁵ He was the primary author of “The Heidelberg Catechism” written in 1563 with Caspar Olevianus and a supporting team that played a lesser role.⁶⁶ The confession later became one of the “Three Forms of Unity” at the Synod of Dort in 1619.⁶⁷ There are several questions and answers in this confession that could be pointed to that argue concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians, but two are enough: (1) In answering question 109, “Does God forbid nothing more in this Commandment than adultery and such gross sins?,” “The Heidelberg Catechism” read, “Since both our body and soul are temples of the Holy Ghost, it is His will that we keep both pure and holy; therefore, He forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words (Eph. 5:3–4; 1 Cor. 6:18–20), thoughts, desires (Matt. 5:27–30), and whatever may entice thereto (Eph. 5:18–19; 1 Cor. 15:33).”⁶⁸ Not only are adulterous actions sins but adulterous thoughts, desires, or any other thing that may entice a Christian from within or without to sin. (2) In answering question 113, “What does the tenth Commandment require?,” “The Heidelberg

⁶⁵ Lyle D. Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Reformation Synthesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 9-10.

⁶⁶ Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism*, 5, 9, 131.

⁶⁷ Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism*, 2.

⁶⁸ “The Heidelberg Catechism (1563),” in 1552-1566, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 795.

Catechism” read, “That not even the least inclination or thought against any commandment of God ever enter our heart, but that with our whole heart we continually hate all sin and take pleasure in all righteousness (Rom. 7:7–8).”⁶⁹ Ursinus and his team believed that the Tenth Commandment forbade any inclination contrary to any commandment of God to ever enter one’s heart. All sin must be rejected, and all righteousness embraced, according to “The Heidelberg Catechism.”

Furthermore, if there was any question about what Ursinus meant by approving the wording, “the least inclination,” he wrote a commentary on “The Heidelberg Catechism.” Speaking of the makeup of sin, he argued, “Its *general nature* is a want of righteousness, or an inclination, or action not in accordance with the Law of God.”⁷⁰ He continued,

That this want of righteousness and these disordered inclinations are sins, and condemned of God, maybe proven: First, from the law of God, which expressly condemns all these things, when it declares, “Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law, to do them”; and “Thou Shalt not covet.” (Deut. 27:26. Ex. 20:17.) The law also requires of men the opposite gifts and exercises, such as perfect knowledge and love to God and our neighbor, saying: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, &c.” “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, &c.” “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” (Deut. 6:5. John 17:3. Ex. 20:3.) Secondly, the same thing is proven by the many testimonies of Scripture which condemn and speak of these evils as sins, as when it is said: “Every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually.” “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” “I had not known lust, (that is, I had not known it to be sin,) except the law had said, “Thou shalt not covet.” (Gen. 6:8. Jer. 17:9. Rom. 7:7.) See also John 3:5. 1 Cor. 2:14; 15:28. Thirdly, by the punishment and death of infants, who, although they neither do good, nor evil, and sin not after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, nevertheless have sin, on account of which death reigns in them. This is that ignorance of and aversion to God of which we have already spoken.⁷¹

Ursinus taught that concupiscence is morally culpable sin for three reasons: (1) All who do not obey the law are cursed, including the command to not desire anything contrary to

⁶⁹ “The Heidelberg Catechism (1563),” 796.

⁷⁰ Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 37.

⁷¹ Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 38.

God's law. (2) The rest of Scripture condemns evil inclinations and impure hearts as well. (3) Babies who die before they are capable of committing volitional sins prove they are sinners because death reigns in them. Ursinus defined sin based on God's moral requirements of mankind as revealed in the Old and New Testaments, not based on man's volitional ability.

Henry Bullinger (1504-1575)

When Ursinus was crafting "The Heidelberg Catechism," Henry Bullinger was serving as Zwingli's successor in Zurich. Bullinger was converted to the Protestant gospel in the early 1520s through reading the Church Fathers and Martin Luther's early works. He grew to be the successor of Zwingli beginning in 1531 and served until his death in 1575.⁷² One of his most popular works was *The Decades*, which consisted of ten sermons.⁷³ In the Fifth Decade, about baptism cleansing eternally, he preached,

Neither is there any doubt, that Abraham in his whole life had continually in his mind the mystery of circumcision, and rested in God and the seed promised unto him. Yet I think that that ought diligently to be marked, which St Augustine pithily and plainly hath often cited: "That our sins are forgiven, or purged, in baptism, not that they are no more in us, (for as long as we live concupiscence beareth sway, and always breedeth and bringeth forth in us somewhat like itself;) but that they should not be imputed unto us: neither that we may not sin, but that it should not be hurtful for us to have or had sinned, that our sins may be remitted when they are committed, and not suffered to be continued."⁷⁴

Bullinger quoted Augustine from "The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins and the Baptism of Little Ones" to defend his notion that being grafted into Christ cleanses

⁷² Thomas Harding, ed., "Biographical Notice of Henry Bullinger," in *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, Minister of the Church of Zurich*, trans. H. I. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1852), viii-xi.

⁷³ G. W. Bromiley, introduction to "Of the Holy Catholic Church," by Henry Bullinger, in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, of *The Library of Christian Classics*, ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1953), 283.

⁷⁴ Henry Bullinger, "The Eighth Sermon," in *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, Minister of the Church of Zurich*, ed. Thomas Harding, trans. H. I. (Cambridge: The University Press, 1852), 398-99.

Christians of all sin eternally, not one's nature or will. Concupiscence is still morally culpable sin in Christians, but it is counted against Christ and not imputed to them.

Furthermore, the most important confession Bullinger was involved in was "The Second Helvetic Confession" of 1566. It was the most widely received Reformed confession of the 1500s.⁷⁵ Defining sin, Bullinger wrote, "We, therefore, acknowledge that original sin is in all men; we acknowledge that all other sins which spring therefrom, are both called and are indeed sins, by what name so ever they are termed, whether mortal or venial, or also that which is called sin against the Holy Ghost, which is never forgiven (Mark 3:29; 1 John 5:16–17)."⁷⁶ He taught that original sin and everything that springs from it is truly sin. Sin by any name is truly sin, and sin can only produce sin, which is why concupiscence is morally culpable sin. Concupiscence or sinful desire springs forth from original sin, not from the inherent good of God's creating work in making mankind in His image.

Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500-1562)

Another important Reformer to consider is Peter Martyr Vermigli. Vermigli was an Italian Reformer. He began as an Augustinian priest and labored for reform in the Roman Catholic Church until he was converted to the Protestant gospel between 1537 and 1540. He fled for his life in 1542, eventually landing at Strassburg, where he taught with Bucer from 1542 to 1547, with his teaching reputation eventually surpassing Bucer. Thomas Cranmer pursued him to help train Anglican priests in Protestant Theology at

⁷⁵ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to "The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," by Henry Bullinger, in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 809.

⁷⁶ Henry Bullinger, "The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," in *1552-1566*, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 821.

Oxford University, where he served from 1547 to 1553.⁷⁷ His most popular work was a collection of his writings put into a systematic theology posthumously called *Common Places*. The book went through fourteen editions from 1576 to 1656, and even outsold Calvin's *Institutes* for decades.⁷⁸ In *Common Places*, while discussing Augustine's understanding of concupiscence remaining after baptism, Vermigli taught,

But Augustine says, that in any wise they be sin before baptism, yea, the Holy Ghost also by Paul calls them sins: and the nature of sin is agreeable onto them. For we have defined sin in such sort, as it pertains to all things, whatsoever does strive against the law of God; for as John says, "Sin is unrighteousness," and who perceives it not to be a thing unjust, that the flesh should make the spirit subject unto it, and that our soul will not repose itself in the word of God. Seeing therefore all these things do stir us up, to transgress and rebel against the word of God, both they are unrighteous, and must be called sins. Beside this, the words of David are against Pighius; "Behold, I am conceived in iniquity; and in sin my mother has conceived me." If naughty desire, and these vices were the works of nature, surely the man of God would not complain of them. And what did Paul the apostle otherwise mean, when he wrote these words to the Ephesians, "We are by nature children of wrath," but that sin is in every one of us.⁷⁹

Vermigli believed he was continuing the teaching of Augustine on concupiscence. He defined sin as "whatsoever strives against the law of God." Since concupiscence prods Christians to transgress and rebel against God's word, these evil desires must be defined as "unrighteous," "sins," and "vices" that are in all Christians. They are not a result of the creating work of God, not according to nature, but according to the sinful flesh. Vermigli continued a few pages later,

And therefore Augustine calls Julian the Pelagian, A shameless praiser of concupiscence; for he commended it, even as Pighius does, to be notable work of God. Moreover, Pighius is against Augustine, for the same very cause, that he says concupiscence is sin before baptism, and denies it [so to be] after baptism; whereas

⁷⁷ Frank James III, ed., *Peter Martyr Vermigli and the European Reformations: Semper Reformanda*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 115 (Boston: Brill, 2004), xiv-xvii.

⁷⁸ Torrance Kirby, Emidio Campi, and Frank A. James III, eds., *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli*, vol. 16 of *Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 1-2.

⁷⁹ I have updated this quotation from Early Modern English to Modern English. For the original quote, see, Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The Common Places of the Most Famous and Renowned Divine Doctor Peter Martyr, Divided into Four Principle Parts: With a Large Addition of Many Theological and Necessary Discourses, Some Never Extant Before*, ed. and trans. Anthonie Marren (1583), 217-18.

(faith be) concupiscence is all one, God all one, and his laws all one: wherefore he concludes; that either sin must be in both, or else in neither of them. But here Pighius greatly errs in two respects; here, because he thinks that in regeneration, there is become not change: especially seeing he cannot deny, but that Christ's remedy is added, his righteousness applied, and our guiltiness taken away; for God does not impute that concupiscence, which remains after regeneration.

Moreover, the spirit is given, where with the strength of concupiscence may be broken; that although it do stich within us, yet that it shall not reign [over us;] for to this end Paul exhorts us, when he says; "Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies." Again on the other part he is deceived, in that he thinks Augustine to judge, if the sin be considered alone, [as it is] by itself: for in most plain words he declares it in his own nature to be sin; because it is disobedience, against the which we must continually wrestle. And where he denies the same to be sin, it must be understood as concerning guiltiness; for that out of all doubt, is taken away in regeneration. For by that means it comes to pass, that although it be very sin indeed; yet God does not impute it for sin.⁸⁰

For Vermigli, those who denied that concupiscence is sin had to argue that it was a good part of man's nature that God created. But Vermigli defended the teachings of David, Paul, and Augustine that any disobedience to God is sin, even in Christians. The difference between Christians and the pagans is not the nature of concupiscence, but that God no longer imputes the concupiscence, the sin, to Christians; rather he imputes them to Christ.

Council of Trent (1545-1563)

By the 1540s, the Reformation was exploding in growth and influence. As a result, leaders in the Roman Catholic church gathered at the Council of Trent in 1545 to officially answer Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. There were many theological issues discussed; the council took 18 years after all to conclude, but the item from Trent pertinent to this chapter is Canon 5, "The Decree on Original Sin." The discussion that led to the formation of the decree centered around Martin Luther's and the Protestants' understanding of original sin and concupiscence.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Vermigli, *The Common Places of the Most Famous and Renowned Divine Doctor Peter Martyr, Divided into Four Principle Parts*, 222.

⁸¹ Michael C. Thomsett, *Heresy in the Roman Catholic Church: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2011), 167.

In framing “The Decree on Original Sin,” The Roman Catholics pointedly rejected Augustine’s understanding of original sin and concupiscence. There were two forms of the Decree, Form I and Form II. Form I was finished on June 8, 1546. On concupiscence, Form I read,

Baptism takes away not only the guilt of original sin but likewise whatever is sin in the true and proper sense of the word (*totum id auferri quod veram et propriam rationem peccati habet*), so that nothing remains in the baptized that is hateful in God’s sight. However, there remain in the baptized “concupiscence”, or a “tinder”, “and a weakness or sickness of nature” (*manere in baptizatis concupiscentiam vel formitem, naturae infirmitatem ac morbum*). These “relics of sin”, St Paul describes by the term “sin”, but the Catholic Church has at no time regarded them as sin in the proper sense of the word, but only in so far as they stem from sin and incline to sin (*quia ex peccato sunt et ad peccatum inclinant*). For this view of concupiscence the decree appeals to St Augustine and declares the Thomistic formula according to which the *formal* element of sin is removed by baptism while the material element remains, to be not unacceptable (*non improbat*).⁸²

Most at the Council disagreed with the wording in Form I. Particularly, they rejected the phrasing from the Augustinians that concupiscence is a “relic of sin” in the baptized. Those who opposed could not understand how a “relic of sin” could exist in the saints and God not hate it, for it is still somehow a sin.⁸³ In other words, they saw it as self-contradictory to say with Augustine that baptism cleanses concupiscence of guilt but the “relic of sin,” concupiscence, remains without any harm to the baptized. A “relic of sin” implies moral culpability, since relics of sin must be sin for even a part of sin is still sin. Thus, they left out the phrase from Form II of the Decree. And to make their rejection of Augustine on concupiscence even more clear, the clause, “for this view of concupiscence the decree appeals to St. Augustine,” was left out of Form II as well.⁸⁴ The Council of Trent deliberately departed from Augustine’s teachings on concupiscence.

⁸² Jedin, *The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, 150-51.

⁸³ Jedin, *The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, 152.

⁸⁴ Jedin, *The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, 154-55. Not only did they remove affirmation of Augustine’s position on concupiscence from Canon 5, they removed affirmation of Aquinas’ position as well. The statement they removed about Aquinas read, “the Thomistic formula according to which the

Catechism of the Council of Trent (1566)

At their twenty-fifth and final session on December 23, 1563, The Council of Trent decided to instruct the Pope to finish a catechism that went along with the teachings of Trent.⁸⁵ The catechism was finished in July of 1566.⁸⁶ Unlike the Council of Trent that deliberately left Augustine out of Canon 5 in “The Decree on Original Sin,” “The Catechism of the Council of Trent” included Augustine’s understanding of concupiscence from his earlier writings.

Consider how “The Catechism of the Council of Trent” answered, “Whether concupiscence in baptized persons be a sin,”

That concupiscence, however, or an innate predisposition to sin (fomes), remains, as has been decreed by the authority of the Council itself in the same place, we must confess; but it does not really constitute sin; for, as St. Augustine also holds: “In baptized children the guilt of concupiscence is remitted; [concupiscence itself] is left for probation;” and the same testifies in another place: “In baptism the guilt of concupiscence is pardoned, but the infirmity remains,” for concupiscence, which is an effect of sin, is nothing else than an appetite of the soul, in its own nature repugnant to reason; which motion, however, if not accompanied by the consent of the will, or by neglect differs widely from the real nature of sin. And when St. Paul says: “I had not known concupiscence, if the law did not say, ‘thou shalt not covet’” (Rom. Vii, 7), from these words he wished to be understood, not the force itself of concupiscence, but the fault of the will.⁸⁷

The Council of Trent left Augustine out of their “Decree on Original Sin,” but those working on the catechism were more favorable to Augustine.⁸⁸ Therefore, what the Council of Trent removed from their decree was put back into the catechism, while contending that concupiscence is not the real nature of sin. Yet, they still rejected

formal element of sin is removed by baptism while the material element remains, to be not unacceptable (non improbat).” Jedin, *The First Sessions at Trent, 1545-47*, 151.

⁸⁵ Philip Schaff, ed., “The Roman Catechism, 1566,” in *The History of Creeds*, vol. 1 of *The Creeds of Christendom with A History and Critical Notes*, 6th ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 100.

⁸⁶ Schaff, “The Roman Catechism, 1566,” 100-101.

⁸⁷ J. Donovan, trans., *Catechism of the Council of Trent: Translated into English* (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1908), 162-63.

⁸⁸ Schaff, “The Roman Catechism, 1566,” 101.

Augustine, albeit a lesser rejection than the Council of Trent, when they argued that concupiscence and coveting are distinguished in Paul. As shown in the previous chapter of this dissertation, Augustine did not separate coveting and concupiscence; coveting is a form of concupiscence according to Augustine.⁸⁹

Post-Reformation Confessions, Catechisms, and Important Figures and Writings: Early Orthodoxy (1565-1640)

The Sandomierz Consensus (1570)

The Council of Trent assured that there would be no reconciliation between the Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church. Trent essentially declared that all Protestants were heretics. The Protestants continued teaching and confessing that Roman Catholicism was wrong on concupiscence. The Counter-Reformation of the Roman Catholics proved to be a formidable opponent to Protestantism. As a result, Lutherans, Zwinglians/Reformed, and Czech/Bohemian Brethren from Poland to Lithuania sought to unite with a statement they could confess together. It started from the vision of John à Lasco, but took over a decade to come to an agreement resulting in the “Sandomierz Consensus” of 1570.⁹⁰ Concerning concupiscence, the document stated that “original sin

⁸⁹ Augustine wrote in “Letter 196” to Asellicus, a bishop in Byzacena, “Now, then, when the apostle says, *It is now not I who do that, but the sin that dwells in me* (Rom 7:17, 20), he speaks of the concupiscence of the flesh that produces in us its impulses, even when we do not obey them, provided that sin does not reign in our mortal body so that we obey its desires and provided that we do not offer our members to sin as weapons of iniquity. By making progress perseveringly in righteousness that has not yet been brought to perfection, we shall at some time come to its perfection when sinful concupiscence does not have to be held in check and reined in but when it does not exist at all. By saying, *You shall not desire* (Ex 20:17), the law did not set forth something we can achieve in this life but something toward which we should tend by making progress.” Augustine, “Letter 196,” 312-13. There are many more quotes from Augustine that could be shared as well. See chap. 2 of this dissertation.

⁹⁰ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “Sandomierz Consensus (1570),” in 1567-1599, vol. 3 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 168-69.

is present in all people,” and all sins that come from original sin are “true sins.”⁹¹ Since concupiscence is what is left of original sin in Christians, the three groups of Protestants confessed together that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. Disagreement over the Lord’s Supper was the primary issue of contention, not views on original sin or that concupiscence is always true sin.⁹²

John Craig (1512-1600)

Another laborer in the Reformation to consider is John Craig. Craig was a Dominican monk who was converted to the Protestant gospel by reading Calvin’s

⁹¹ “Sandomierz Consensus (1570),” in *1567-1599*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 191.

⁹² Another document to consider is “The Confession of La Rochelle” from 1571, adopted at the Seventh National Synod of the Reformed Churches of France. James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The Confession of La Rochelle (1571)” in *1567-1599*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 305-6. Concerning “11. The Condemnation of Sin,” they confessed, “We believe also that this blemish of original sin is sin, in the proper sense of the word, that it is sufficient for the condemnation of the whole human race, even of little children in their mother’s womb, and that God considers it as such. Likewise, we believe that even after baptism original sin is still sin with respect to the guilt, although the condemnation of it has been abolished in the children of God, God not imputing it to them by His most gratuitous kindness. We believe also that original sin is a perversion that is always producing fruits of corruption and of rebellion, so that the most holy men, although they resist it, do not cease to be tainted with many weaknesses and faults while they live in this world.” “The Confession of La Rochelle (1571),” in *1567-1599*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. and trans. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. Martin Klauber (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 311. Another Confession to consider is “The Bohemian Confession” of 1573. In “Chapter 4. Of the Knowledge of Oneself; also of Sin, the Causes and Fruits thereof; and of the Promises of God,” it stated, “Therefore, the origin and principal author of all evil is that cruel and detestable devil, the tempter, liar, and manslayer, and after that, the free will of man, which nevertheless, having been converted to evil through lust by both carnal desires and perverse concupiscence, chooses evil. From this, sins, according to these degrees and this order, may be considered and judged. The first of all, both the greatest and the most serious sin of all, is the sin of Adam, which the apostle calls disobedience, on account of which death reigns in all, even in those who did not sin in the same way with the transgression of Adam (Rom. 5:14). A second kind is original sin, inborn and hereditary, in which we are all conceived and born into this world. “Behold,” says David, “I was born in iniquity, and in sin has my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). And Paul: “We are by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). Let the force of this hereditary destruction be acknowledged and judged by our guilt and fault, inclination or propensity and also our crooked nature, by which punishment is affected.” “The Bohemian Confession (1573),” in *1567-1599*, vol. 3 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 331.

Institutes. While preaching in Italy, he was arrested and condemned to be burned at the stake in Rome as a heretic in 1559, but he was released by the mobs who rioted after Pope Paul IV died. Craig made his way back to his home country, Scotland, and became John Knox's assistant in 1562. After being appointed as chaplain to King James VI, he wrote the “King’s Confession” and a catechism in 1581. This catechism became a staple in Scotland until the Westminster catechisms were released in 1647.⁹³ On concupiscence, Craig contended,

7. Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery
- Q. What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?
- A. All filthy lusts in our heart, word or deed, or gestures.
- Q. What is the end of this commandment?
- A. That we keep both our bodies and hearts pure and clean.⁹⁴

He continued,

10. Thou Shalt Not Covet, etc.
- Q. What is forbidden in this last commandment?
- A. All light and sudden motions to evil.
- Q. Were not those motions forbidden before?
- A. No, but the consent and deed only were forbidden.
- Q. Then what degrees of sin are forbidden?
- A. The lust, the consent, and the deed.
- Q. What is this lust?
- A. Original infection, the mother of the rest of our sins.
- Q. What thing is commanded here?
- A. The perfect love of our neighbor with its fruits.⁹⁵

Craig, like Calvin before him, viewed the Seventh and Tenth Commandments as forbidding, not only the sinful action, but the desire (concupiscence) that lead to the action. He even succinctly defined sin as “lust, consent, and the deed.” But what did he mean by “lust”? He argued that lust is the “original infection, the mother of the rest of our

⁹³ John Craig, “Craig’s Catechism” (1581), in 1567-1599, vol. 3 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 544.

⁹⁴ Craig, “Craig’s Catechism (1581),” 575.

⁹⁵ Craig, “Craig’s Catechism (1581),” 576.

sins.” With this definition, Craig encouraged repentance and faith, the rejection of concupiscence and the practice of perfect love for our neighbors, through faith.⁹⁶

James Ussher (1581-1656)

The same year Craig’s Catechism was published, James Ussher was born. Ussher was a well-respected scholar who had far-reaching influence over Protestantism in the 1600s.⁹⁷ He heavily influenced “The Irish Articles” confession that later influenced the Reformed confession that would become the most influential in history, “The Westminster Confession.”⁹⁸ Concerning original sin in Christians, “The Irish Articles” stated,

This corruption of nature remains even in those that are regenerated, whereby the flesh always lusts against the Spirit, and cannot be made subject to the law of God. And howsoever, for Christ’s sake, there is no condemnation to such as are regenerate and do believe, yet the apostle acknowledges that in itself this concupiscence has the nature of sin.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Another catechism to consider on concupiscence is the “Hessian Catechism” of 1607. Commenting on the meaning of the tenth commandment, it reads, “What is that? We shall fear and love God, so that we do not stand toward our neighbor with cunning against his heritage or house, nor his wife, children, servants, or cattle, to alienate, to force away, or to entice away; rather [that we] restrain these things, so that they remain and do what they ought; yes, that we guard ourselves against all evil desires, longings, and thoughts against our neighbor and keep the commandments of the Lord.” They argued that the tenth commandment taught that a Christian’s cannot go against the law towards one’s neighbor. “Hessian Catechism (1607),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. Tom and Kirsten DeVries (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 18.

⁹⁷ Ussher is best known for dating the beginning of creation at 4004 B.C. since it was inserted in the marginal notes of the King James Version of the Bible. R. K. Bishop, “Ussher, James (1581-1656),” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 1131.

⁹⁸ Jonathan D. Moore, “James Ussher’s Influence on the Synod of Dordt,” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619)*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg, Brill’s Series in Church History 49 (Boston: Brill, 2011), 163-65.

⁹⁹ James Ussher, “The Irish Articles (1615),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 94.

Like the Reformers who came before him, Ussher confessed that concupiscence remains in the regenerate and continually lusts against the Spirit. Therefore, the nature of sin does not change in Christians, rather their sins are imputed to Christ.

The Canons of Dort (1618-1619)

In 1610, the Remonstrants codified the teachings of Jacob Arminius against the teachings of John Calvin. Arminius was a former student of Calvin who took issue with total depravity, predestination, and the substitutionary atonement. Due to the Remonstrants, Holland became embroiled in controversy. Maurice of Orange called a national synod at Dordrecht (Dort) to settle the matter. Dennison writes, “Fifty-six delegates, five professors, eighteen political advisors, and twenty-six delegates from foreign churches (England, Germany, Switzerland, and others) gathered at Dort in 1618.”¹⁰⁰ Against the Remonstrants’ errors, they wrote “The Canons of Dort.”¹⁰¹ Under the “Fifth Head of Doctrine: The Perseverance of the Saints,” they wrote,

Article 1

Those whom God, according to His purpose, calls to the communion of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, He also delivers from the dominion and slavery of sin, though in this life He does not deliver them altogether from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh.

Article 2

Hence spring forth the daily sins of infirmity, and blemishes cleave even to the best works of the saints. These are to them a perpetual reason to humble themselves before God and to flee for refuge to Christ crucified; to mortify the flesh more and more by the spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of piety; and to press forward to the goal of perfection, until at length, delivered from this body of death, they shall reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Article 3

By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and also because of the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who are converted could not persevere in that grace if

¹⁰⁰ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The Canons of Dort (1618-1619),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 120.

¹⁰¹ Dennison, Jr., introduction to “The Canons of Dort (1618-1619),” 120.

left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.

Article 4

Although the weakness of the flesh cannot prevail against the power of God, who confirms and preserves true believers in a state of grace, yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by and to comply with the lusts of the flesh; they must, therefore, be constant in watching and prayer, that they may not be led into temptation. When these are neglected, they are not only liable to be drawn into great and heinous sins by the flesh, the world, and Satan, but sometimes by the righteous permission of God actually are drawn into these evils. This, the lamentable fall of David, Peter, and other saints described in Holy Scripture, demonstrates.¹⁰²

The language used is precise. In Article 1, the body of the regenerate is the “body of sin.”

In Article 2, Christians battle “daily sins of infirmity” and should press ahead to “perfection” which indicates that indwelling sin keeps Christians imperfect; Christians should trust God to one day deliver them “from this body of death.” Furthermore, in Article 3, there remains “indwelling sin” in Christians, making them constantly dependent upon God’s grace for initial, present, and final salvation. Moreover, in Article 4, the flesh is described as a tempter to “great and heinous sins” that must be resisted through constant “watching and prayer.”

Finally, on April 23, 1619, each member of the synod signed the canons. Some of the most influential Reformed theologians of their day participated--Antonius Walaeus, Johann Polyander, Sibrandus Lubbertus, Franciscus Gomarus, John Davenant, William Ames, and Gisbertus Voetius.¹⁰³ Additionally, to make an even greater statement that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin, the entire synod affirmed “The

¹⁰² “The Canons of Dort (1618-1619),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 144-45.

¹⁰³ Richard Muller construed these men as some of the most influential in their day in the Reformed tradition. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 30-31. Also, for a complete list of the delegates that attended the Synod of Dort, see Peter De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2008), 253-58.

Heidelberg Catechism” and “The Belgic Confession” as well in addition to their own canons.¹⁰⁴

Post Reformation Confessions, Catechisms, and Important Figures and Writings: High Orthodoxy (1640-1725)

The London Baptist Confession (1644)

Furthermore, in 1644, William Kiffin left the church of England and established a Particular Baptist church in London. Their first confession, written in 1643, was published in 1644.¹⁰⁵ Under Article 31, they confessed that Christians in this life “are in a continual warfare, combat, and opposition against sin, self, the world, and the devil.”¹⁰⁶ The language they confessed and the word-order they chose pointed to their understanding that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. Instead of saying, “Christians battle against temptation,” they confessed that Christians battle “against sin” and “self,” and then, “the world, and the devil.” By moving from “sin” and “self” to “the world” and “the devil,” they moved from describing the Christian’s continual warfare with the sin within to the sin without, with no moral distinction between the two.

The Colloquy of Thorn (1645)

Additionally, in 1645, King Vladislaus IV, Vasa of Poland, sought to unite all Christians, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Representatives from the Roman

¹⁰⁴ Donald Sinnema, “The Drafting of the Canons of Dordt: A Preliminary Survey of Early Drafts and Related Documents,” in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619)*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg, Brill’s Series in Church History 49 (Boston: Brill, 2011), 326.

¹⁰⁵ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The London Baptist Confession (1644),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 182-83.

¹⁰⁶ “The London Baptist Confession (1644),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 193.

Catholics, The Bohemian and Reformed, the Lutherans, and Dutch Arminians all gathered. Each group was supposed to read their own concise confession, but only the Roman Catholics and Reformed were permitted to because arguments broke out and the gathering dissolved before a united statement could be reached.¹⁰⁷ In the Reformed confession, under heading 3 on sin, they summarized,

Although in the regenerated, original sin, that which concerns the debt is abolished through the gracious remission, and concerning the depravity is more and more put to death through the grace of Christ, yet there remains in them (as long as they are in the flesh) the remnants of that depravity, particularly the evil inclinations and the stirrings of concupiscence which are therefore called in truth real sins, not only insofar as they are the punishment and origin of sin but also insofar as they strive against the law of God was well as against the Spirit of grace. This doctrine, because it is taught by the apostle himself, cannot be rejected as in error, much less condemned by anathema as heretical.¹⁰⁸

One can see quickly in the wording used that the Reformed took shots at the Roman Catholics in their statement due to their theological error, quoting directly from the Council of Trent, “Canon 5” on original sin. The Reformed of Poland and Lithuania confessed that the regenerate still have the features of concupiscence, which are the remnants of depravity like “evil inclinations” and various “stirrings.” These are “in truth real sins” because they strive against the law of God and the Spirit of grace. They argued that the goal of a desire determined if it is sin, not the will or discernment of man.

The Westminster Confession (1646), Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1647)

Moreover, in 1646 and 1647, maybe the most important and most influential Reformed confessions and catechisms ever were written, “The Westminster Confession of Faith” and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. They were composed to reform the

¹⁰⁷ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The Colloquy of Thorn (1645),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 205-6.

¹⁰⁸ “The Colloquy of Thorn (1645),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. Jacob Baum and Peter VanDer Schaaf (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 211.

Church of England to be more Calvinistic and to unite the church in Scotland, Ireland, and Britain.¹⁰⁹ In “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” concerning original sin remaining in Christians, they stated, “This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated (1 John 1:8, 10; Rom. 7:14, 17–18, 23; James 3:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20); and although it be, through Christ, pardoned and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin (Rom. 7:5, 7–8, 25; Gal. 5:17).”¹¹⁰ The 135 Westminster divines confessed that all motions from original sin in believers are sin.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the “Westminster Shorter Catechism” in Question 72 said the seventh commandment forbade “all unchaste thoughts.”¹¹² Additionally, again in question 81, it taught that all inordinate motions and affections for one’s neighbor’s possessions was forbidden by God.¹¹³

Similarly, the “Larger Catechism” in Question 99, explained which rules to follow in order to properly understand the Ten Commandments:

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth every one to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience for ever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin (Ps. 19:7; James 2:10; Matt. 5:21–22).
2. That it is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures (Rom. 7:14; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37–39; 5:21–22, 27–28, 33–34, 37–39, 43–44).

¹⁰⁹ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” in 1600-1693, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 231-33.

¹¹⁰ “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” in 1600-1693, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 242.

¹¹¹ Dennison, Jr., introduction to “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” 232.

¹¹² “Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647),” in 1600-1693, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 363.

¹¹³ “Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647),” 364.

4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden (Isa. 58:13; Deut. 6:13; Matt. 4:9–10; 15:4–6); and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded (Matt. 5:21–25; Eph. 4:28): so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included (Ex. 20:12; Prov. 30:17); and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included (Jer. 18:7–8; Ex. 20:7; Ps. 15:1, 4–5; 24:4–5).

6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto (Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28; 15:4–6; Heb. 10:24–25; 1 Thess. 5:22; Jude 23; Gal. 5:26; Col. 3:21).¹¹⁴

The Westminster theologians confessed that the entire human person is commanded by God's law to conform perfectly. God's requirement is not mere outward obedience, but inward obedience as well. Moreover, they contended that the Ten Commandments not only forbid certain sinful actions but also the "causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto." Those words are all-encompassing. There is no possibility left for nuance. Everything under the sun that leads to sin is sin because the smallest opposition to the law of God is sin. Again, as those great Reformers before them, the Westminster theologians taught that the law, not man's will, determined what is sin. Also, concupiscence is said to be sin in answers to questions 138, 139, 147, 148, and 149 in the "Larger Catechism"¹¹⁵ and question 71 in the "Shorter Catechism."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ "Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)," in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 320-21.

¹¹⁵ "Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)," 333-34, 337-38. Another confession to consider is "Benjamin Cox's Baptist Appendix (1646)." Benjamin Cox was a minister of the Church of England until 1643 when he embraced believer's baptism as the only biblical form of baptism. When there were questions raised against the London Baptist Confession of 1644, Cox wrote an Appendix to clarify any concerns. James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to "Benjamin Cox's Baptist Appendix (1646)," by Benjamin Cox, in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 290. He was clear that concupiscence is sin in point 11: "Though no sin be imputed to those that believe in Christ, nor does any sin totally or fully reign over them, or in them, yet in them 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit' (Gal. 5:17); and 'in many things they all offend' (James 3:2), where the apostle speaks of offenses that one believer may take notice of in another. Thus 'there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not' (Eccl. 7:20); and 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John 1:8)." Benjamin Cox, "Benjamin Cox's Baptist Appendix (1646)," in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 294.

¹¹⁶ "Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647)," 363.

The Savoy Declaration (1658)

Furthermore, in 1658, several Puritans gathered to draft a confession that affirmed their independent view of church government. British Parliament had not approved “The Westminster Confession” in its entirety, and the group as a result opted to write a new confession that Parliament would find favorable. They only met for 12 days, probably because their document gleaned heavily from “The Westminster Confession.” John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Joseph Caryl, and William Greenhill were present to craft the document.¹¹⁷ They declared, concerning original sin,

V. This corruption of nature during this life doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself and all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin.

VI. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth in its own nature bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the Law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal.¹¹⁸

The Puritans were concerned primarily with the authority of the Church of England being greater than Scripture’s authority. However, the Reformed understanding of concupiscence was not in question. As seen above, the Puritans confessed that concupiscence remains in the regenerate and is morally culpable since it is “truly and properly sin.” God’s law is presented as the standard, and everything else that does not measure up to this standard is considered sin. To the Puritans, God’s law and not man’s will determined the definition of sin.

¹¹⁷ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to “The Savoy Declaration (1658),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 457-58.

¹¹⁸ “The Savoy Declaration (1658),” in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 465.

The London Baptist Confession (1677)

Moreover, in 1677, Particular Baptists sought to join the various Calvinist dissenters who were opposed to the Anglican state church's pressure on their congregations. In response, they slightly critiqued "The Westminster Confession of Faith" to reflect their Baptist distinctives. William Collins and Nehemiah Cox were the editors.¹¹⁹ Concerning concupiscence, the Baptists confessed that concupiscence is "truly and properly sin."¹²⁰ There were doctrinal differences between the groups, of course, and the confession was changed; however, the truth that concupiscence is always truly sin was not in question.

The Baptist Catechism (1693)

Additionally, in 1693, William Collins and Benjamin Keach sought to show their agreement with and difference from other Calvinist Christians by producing a catechism.¹²¹ At the end of the catechism, they mentioned their dependence upon the "Declaration of Savoy" and the "Westminster Shorter Catechism."¹²² They quoted the "Westminster Shorter Catechism" verbatim in "Q. 86" as forbidding in the Tenth Commandment "all inordinate motions and affections" to anything that belongs to one's

¹¹⁹ James T. Dennison, Jr., ed., introduction to "The London Baptist Confession (1677)," by William Collins and Nehemiah Cox, in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 531.

¹²⁰ William Collins and Nehemiah Cox, eds., "The London Baptist Confession (1677)," in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 541. In a similar manner, to show their unity with the Protestant Reformed, the English General Baptists altered "The Westminster Confession" some and produced the "The Orthodox Creed" in 1678. They confessed, "And this concupiscence, or indwelling lust, remaineth even in the regenerate, that they cannot love; nor obey God perfectly in this Life, according to the tenour of the first covenant." W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 123, 134.

¹²¹ William Collins and Benjamin Keach, "The Baptist Catechism (1693)," in *1600-1693*, vol. 4 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 572-73.

¹²² Collins and Keach, "The Baptist Catechism (1693)," 589.

neighbor.¹²³ Also, they summarized the distinct motions of man in “Q. 87,” when they argued that men daily break God’s law in “thought, word, and deed.”¹²⁴ Not merely do words and deeds break the law, but sinful thoughts (concupiscence) break God’s law as well.

1700s to the 1900s

Not only did the Reformed tradition argue that concupiscence is morally culpable sin even in Christians in the 1500s and 1600s, many of the most influential Reformed professors and pastors carried this doctrine forward through the 1700s, 1800s, and 1900s. The most influential in the 1700s was Jonathan Edwards. For the 1800s, some of the most influential were Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, James P. Boyce, and Charles Spurgeon. For the 1900s, Herman Bavinck’s teachings were some of the most influential, as they were made popular in the United States by Louis Berkhof.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

In the history of America, Jonathan Edwards may be her greatest theologian. Mark Noll, retired Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, Indiana, calls Jonathan Edwards, “the greatest evangelical mind in American history and one of the truly seminal thinkers in Christian history of the past few centuries.”¹²⁵ God used Edwards, along with George Whitefield, to spur the First

¹²³ Collins and Keach, “The Baptist Catechism (1693),” 584.

¹²⁴ Collins and Keach, “The Baptist Catechism (1693),” 584.

¹²⁵ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 24.

Great Awakening. He was also the third President of Princeton University.¹²⁶ Edwards affirmed “The Westminster Confession,”¹²⁷ as his teaching on concupiscence showed:

Not only are our best duties defiled, in being attended with the exercises of sin and corruption, that precede them and follow them, and are intermingled with holy acts; but even the holy acts themselves, and the gracious exercises of the godly, though the act most simply considered is good, yet take the acts in their measure, and dimensions, and the manner in which they are exerted, and they are corrupt acts; that is, they are defectively corrupt, or sinfully defective; there is that defect in them, that may well be called the corruption of them; that defect is properly sin, an expression of a vile sinfulness of heart, and what tends to provoke the just anger of God; not because the exercise of love and other grace, is not equal to God's loveliness; for 'tis impossible the love of creatures (men or angels) should be so; but because the act is so very disproportionate to the occasion given for love or other grace, considering God's loveliness, and the manifestation that is made of it, and the exercises of kindness, and the capacity of human nature, and our advantages (and the like) together. A negative expression of corruption may be as truly sin, and as just cause of provocation, as a positive.¹²⁸

Christians in this life, in and of themselves, have no being, desire, thought or act that is not tainted by sin. They must find help outside of themselves in God, if he is to accept them. Concupiscence has tainted them and all that flows from them. Yet, Edwards continued, “Hence, though it be true that the saints are rewarded for their good works, yet it is for Christ's sake only, and not for the excellency of their works in themselves considered, or beheld separately from Christ; for so they have no excellency in God's sight, or acceptableness to him, as has now been shown.”¹²⁹ Even though the saints are tainted by indwelling sin, God rewards them based on their good works. This reward,

¹²⁶ Robert Benedetto and Donald K. McKim, *Historical Dictionary of the Reformed Churches*, 2nd ed., Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements 99 (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 161-62.

¹²⁷ In a letter to John Erskine, Edwards said he would have no difficulty submitting to the Westminster Confession. Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, vol. 16 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 355.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Edwards, “Five Discourses on the Soul’s Eternal Salvation,” *The Works of President Edwards*, vol. 6 (Market Place, PA: Edward Baines, 1811), 308.

¹²⁹ Edwards, “Five Discourses on the Soul’s Eternal Salvation,” 309.

however, is not due to them, but due to the work of Christ alone. Apart from Christ, there would be no saints and no reward for the saints, according to Edwards.

Archibald Alexander (1772-1851)

In the 1800s, one of the most influential Reformed theologians was Archibald Alexander. He was the first Professor of Princeton Theological Seminary beginning in 1812. Alexander's influence at the seminary lasted over one hundred years.¹³⁰ Concerning concupiscence, he taught,

It is again disputed, whether concupiscence, or that disease of our nature which renders us prone to sin, is itself of the nature of sin. This the papists deny; we affirm.

They allege, that whatever exists in us necessarily, and is not from ourselves, but from another, cannot be of the nature of sin; but this is the fact in regard to concupiscence, ergo, &c.

Answer. In a merely political judgment this may be correct, but not in that which is divine. And if the principle here asserted was sound, it would prove too much: it would prove that even the acts of concupiscence are not sinful: for there is a sort of necessity for these, supposing the principle of concupiscence to exist in the soul.¹³¹

In the 1830s, like today, people questioned whether concupiscence is morally culpable sin. Alexander clearly articulated the Reformed position over against the Roman Catholic position. He argued that moral culpability in human terms is based on one's capability, but in divine terms, sin is based on God's standard not sinful man's capability to fulfill God's standard.

Furthermore, he argued that if it is true that morally culpable sin is based on one's capability, since both Roman Catholics and the Reformed argue that man cannot be sinless in this life, it necessarily follows that even sinful actions are not morally culpable sin since they are necessary due to the existence of concupiscence in one's soul. If

¹³⁰ M. A. Noll, "Alexander, Archibald," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 30.

¹³¹ Archibald Alexander, "The Doctrine of Original Sin as Held by the Church, Both Before and After the Reformation," *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 2, no. 4 (October 1830): 500-1.

capability defines moral culpability, and no human is capable of being sinless in this life, then no human is morally culpable for one's lack of sinlessness, even in their actions.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

Furthermore, in the 1800s, the most influential American Presbyterian Theologian was Charles Hodge. He taught at Princeton Theological Seminary for over 55 years, from 1822 to 1878.¹³² Concerning the truth that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians, he wrote, "All true Christians are convinced of sin; they are convinced not only of individual transgressions, but also of the depravity of their heart and nature. They recognize this depravity as innate and controlling. They groan under it as a grievous burden. They know that they are by nature children of wrath."¹³³ All true Christians, according to Hodge, understood that they are children of wrath, not merely due to their actual transgressions but also due to their wicked hearts and very nature.

James P. Boyce (1827-1888)

Another influential Reformed theologian in the 1800s was James Pettigrew Boyce. He was the first President of SBTS. Greg Wills, Research Professor of Church History and Baptist Heritage at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort

¹³² M. A. Noll, "Hodge, Charles," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 513-14. Interestingly, in a letter to the editor of the *Witness* on February 29, 1860, William Cunningham, Principal of New College, Edinburgh (today, the University of Edinburgh), wrote against an article by J. A. Wylie. Without the knowledge of the editor, Wylie included an article in the *Witness* that was critical of Hodge. This prompted the letter from Cunningham that read, "Most people, I presume, are aware that he is one of the ablest and most influential expounders and defenders of Calvinism in the present day, and admirably accomplished in almost every department of theological literature. There is no living man entitled to treat him in the very peculiar style in which the author of the article referred to has thought proper to indulge. When he alleges that Dr. Hodge 'wanders in darkness, and never for five minutes on end keeps clear of contradiction,' that 'in his pamphlet the contradictions are more numerous than the pages,' &c., &c., he is propounding what is simply absurd—so absurd, indeed, as to be incredible." A. A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge D. D. LL.D.: Professor in the Theological Seminary Princeton N.J.* (Philadelphia: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), 424.

¹³³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, ed. Anthony Uyl (Woodstock, ON: Devoted Publishing, 2016), 119.

Worth, Texas, writes, “Boyce’s leadership so characterized the seminary that one critic objected that the school belonged to Boyce more than to the denomination. The critic was in an important sense correct. Boyce’s imprint made the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Boyce’s seminary.”¹³⁴ In his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, Boyce wrote, “That the justified are not declared in Scripture to be free from sin or possessed of holy natures, but are represented as still struggling against sin, and not only sin which arises from outward temptations, but that proceeding from the motions of sin within.”¹³⁵ This statement agreed with the “Philadelphia Confession,” which Boyce affirmed, that mirrored the “Second London Confession.”¹³⁶ In his *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, he argued the Reformed position that Christians struggle against the “motions of sin within” in addition to outward temptations.

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Boyce was not the only influential Reformed Baptist that taught that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin, Charles Spurgeon did as well. Spurgeon was one of the most influential Baptists in church history. He was referred to by many as “the last of the puritans” and the “prince of preachers.”¹³⁷ Spurgeon affirmed the “Second London Confession,” as was evident in his preaching and writing.¹³⁸ In a sermon expositing Micah 7:19, “He will subdue our iniquities,” Spurgeon preached,

¹³⁴ Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-5.

¹³⁵ James Petigru Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology*, ed. Anthony Uyl (Woodstock, ON: Devoted Publishing, 2016), 196.

¹³⁶ Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009*, 19.

¹³⁷ Timothy George and David S. Dockery, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990), 286.

¹³⁸ *The Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon: Compiled from his Diary, Letters, and Records by his Wife and his Private Secretary*, vol. 2: 1854-1860 (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899), 160.

Sin poisons the wellhead! Sin is in our brain—we think wrongly. Sin is in our heart—we love that which is evil. Sin bribes the judgment, intoxicates the will and perverts the memory! We recollect a bad word when we forget a holy sentence. Like a sea which comes up and floods a continent, penetrating every valley, deluging every plain and invading every mountain, so has sin penetrated our entire nature! How shall this flood be stopped? This enemy so universally dominant, so strongly entrenched—how shall it be dislodged? It has to be driven out somehow, every particle of it, and we shall never rest until it is. But by whom shall iniquity be subdued? How satisfactory the assurance of our text, “He will subdue our iniquities”!¹³⁹

Christians are so poisoned by sin that Spurgeon argued there is no way to escape unless God subdues their iniquities. Yet, he also argued that Christians must not rest until sin in its entirety is driven out from them. Following the Reformed believers before him, he taught that rejecting one’s sinfulness is the responsibility of Christians while also teaching that God is the only One who can and will deliver them.

Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)

Finally, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, one of the most influential Reformed theologians was Herman Bavinck. He was a theology professor at Kampen Theological School (1883-1902) and the Free University of Amsterdam (1902-1921) in The Netherlands. John Bolt, former Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, called him “the real theologian of the nineteenth-century Dutch Calvinist revival.”¹⁴⁰ In agreement with the great Reformers who came before him, Bavinck argued,

There is not only an antecedent but also a concomitant, a consequent, and an approving will. Later, to a greater or lesser degree, the will approves of the sinfulness of our nature and takes delight in it. And also when later the will,

¹³⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “Sin Subdued,” in *The Metropolitan Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised by C. H. Spurgeon, During the Year 1881*, vol. 27 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, Paternoster Buildings, 1882), 25-27. Spurgeon argued throughout this sermon that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin.

¹⁴⁰ John Bolt, “Bavinck, Herman,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians*, ed. Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Lienhard (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), 59.

illumined by reason, fights against it, or the born-again person can testify with Paul that he does not will the evil that he does [cf. Rom. 7:7–25], then this certainly decreases the degree of sin but does not define the nature of the sin. For sin has its standard only in God's law. Paul definitely denominates as sin the evil he does not will but nevertheless commits and so agrees that the law is good. But even then the sin that is done without having been willed does not occur totally apart from the will. For, certainly, Paul can say: "It is no longer I that do it but sin that dwells within me" [Rom. 7:17], thus drawing a contrast between his regenerate "I" and unregenerate flesh, but Augustine already rightly explained these words as follows: "Even though I do not consent to lust (concupiscence) and even if I do not pursue my desires, nevertheless, I still feel desire and am personally present in that very part of me. For I am not one person in my mind and another in my flesh. But then what am I? For I exist both in my mind and in my flesh. For the two natures are not contrary but the one human being is composed of both inasmuch as God, the God by whom the person was made, is one." Certainly, it is not one person who does this sin in the flesh and another who does not want this sin. In both instances it is the same person who, on the one hand, impurely pursues what is forbidden (concupiscence) and who nevertheless in the deepest part of his will turns away from it and fights it. And since a human being, also the born-again person for as long as he or she is in the flesh, always to some degree desires what is forbidden, even though he or she fights it in the restricted sense, it can be said that at the most fundamental level all sin is voluntary. There is nobody or nothing that compels the sinner to serve sin. Sin is enthroned not outside the sinner but in the sinner and guides the sinner's thinking and desiring in its own direction. It is the sinner's sin insofar as the sinner has made it his or her own by means of his or her various faculties and powers.¹⁴¹

Agreeing with Augustine and the Reformed theologians before him, Bavinck taught that the law defines sin, and the will is involved in everything a person does; all sin is voluntary. The same Christians desire both what is forbidden and what is holy. Christians may choose to repent of and fight their sinful desires as simultaneously their wills are connected to their concupiscence. Even though Paul does not will his concupiscence per se, he still commits it, which indicates that his will is complicit in some form even as he, through his will, fights against his flesh.

Bavinck's development of Reformed theology was made popular in the United States through the influence of Louis Berkhof (1873-1957). Berkhof was a Professor at Calvin Theological Seminary for 38 years and was its first President. His most influential

¹⁴¹ Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 143-44.

work was his *Systematic Theology* that became a popular textbook for Bible college and seminary students across the United States and Canada.¹⁴²

Conclusion

In conclusion, a helpful summary of the thesis argued in this chapter comes from Wolfhart Pannenberg. After saying that the apostle Paul taught in Romans 7:7 that sinful desires are “latent sin,” Pannenberg writes,

In the 16th century this theme became the subject of mutual condemnation on the part of the Reformers and the Roman Catholics. The Reformation view, oriented to Augustine, was that selfish concupiscence is already sin as such. This meant that original sin remains even in those who are baptized, though it is no longer imputed. On this ground the bull of 1520 condemned the relevant statements in Luther (DS § 1452f. = ND § 1923/2f.). The Council of Trent dealt with the relation between concupiscence and sin from the standpoint of the efficacy of baptismal grace and thus arrived at the conclusion that, notwithstanding Paul's description of concupiscence as sin, it is not sin in the strict sense but the "tinder" (fomes) of sin, deriving from sin and inclining to it (DS § 1515 = ND § 512). The Lutheran Reformers, however, insisted on the Augustinian and Pauline usage, to which the apology of the Confession of Augsburg had appealed (2.40 [BSLK, 155, llff.]). The Formula of Concord thus condemned the opposing doctrine that evil desires are not sin (Epitome 1.1 If. [Schaff, Creeds, III, 104f.]).¹⁴³

Pannenberg is correct, but as this chapter has demonstrated, he needs to add to the Lutherans the Reformed, the Church of England, and the Particular Baptists. Against the Roman Catholic Church, who rejected Augustine’s teaching on concupiscence at the Council of Trent and to a lesser degree in their catechism, the Reformers and their theological descendants built upon Augustine’s interpretation of Paul to defend the biblical reality that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate.

¹⁴² F. H. Klooster, “Berkhof, Louis,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 134-35.

¹⁴³ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 240-41.

CHAPTER 4

WESLEY HILL, ROBERT GAGNON, AND THE REFORMED TRUTH THAT CONCUPISCENCE IS MORALLY CULPABLE SIN, EVEN IN CHRISTIANS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the theology of the Protestant Reformers and their theological descendants among the Lutherans, Reformed, Church of England, and Baptists, were shown to be in unison on their understanding of concupiscence. Each, against the Roman Catholic Church, confessed that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate. The Reformers and their theological descendants taught that salvation is by grace alone precisely because man is totally depraved. This chapter argues that some within the Reformed tradition today are departing from their theological forebearers to contend that concupiscence is not morally culpable sin because some distinguish same-sex sexual attraction from same-sex attraction, and some define sinful desire as “a desire to sin” rather than as morally culpable sin. Specifically, they argue that same-sex attraction is not morally culpable sin unless a person “feeds” the desire in thought or deed.

Methodology

This chapter examines two prominent Reformed theologians who believe same-sex attraction is not morally culpable sin—Wesley Hill and Robert Gagnon. Their arguments are presented, then evaluated and rebutted with the Reformed tradition, systematic theology, and logic. The rebuttal appeals in part to the writings of Denny Burk and Wayne Grudem.

Wesley Hill¹

First, consider Wesley Hill. Hill is an Anglican priest and teaches at Trinity College of Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. The school's confession is the "39 Articles" of the Evangelical Church of England. At the 66th Annual Meeting (2014) of the Evangelical Theological Society, Hill presented a paper titled, "Is Being Gay Sanctifiable: Scripture and the Great Tradition on Same-sex Love and Christian Friendship." Hill takes an interesting position in his paper. He breaks same-sex attraction into two distinct realities: same-sex sexual attraction and same-sex attraction:

It seems to be important to make some kind of distinction between an inclination to have sex with persons of the same-sex and a broader sensitivity or sensibility that is part of what modern Psychology refers to when it uses the language of homosexual orientation. Furthermore, it seems important to me to stress that much of what falls under that latter rubric, so not the homosexual inclination but the homosexual orientation, may be not actively sinful but rather the fruit of a Christian ascetic effort to reorder one's homosexual inclinations.²

Same-sex sexual attraction refers to the homosexual inclination to have sex with persons of the same-sex, and same-sex attraction refers to "homosexual orientation" or broader same-sex desire. To Hill, same-sex sexual attraction is sinful and must be mortified. However, the non-sexual aspects of homosexual orientation are not sinful and can be sanctified. In this paper, he argues that Paul condemned same-sex sexual desire and actions in Romans 1:24, 27, but not "homosexual orientation" or same-sex attraction.³ He does not believe that same-sex attraction can be reduced to "lust" or "sin" because it

¹ A more detailed rebuttal to those who argue that same-sex attraction is not always morally culpable sin takes place in chap. 5, where I exegete several biblical passages dealing with the truth that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians.

² Wesley Hill, "Is Being Gay Sanctifiable: Scripture and the Great Tradition On Same-Sex Love and Christian Friendship" (Mp3 of lecture, 66th Annual Meeting (2014) of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Diego, November 19, 2014), <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=17313>, (21:00) - (21:38).

³ Hill, "Is Being Gay Sanctifiable," (00:00) - (26:30).

cannot be reduced to sexual desire.⁴

One of Hill's main premises in the paper is that all sexual desire, heterosexual and homosexual, is "irreparably fallen and thoroughly corrupted."⁵ He fleshes this out by conflating heterosexual desire and same-sex desire as both outworkings of fallenness. After he presented his paper, during the question and answer time, he said, "Marriage, Christian marriage, needs to be understood as an aesthetic practice. It's about the reordering of desire. So, we ought not to think of the task of gay Christians as a task of renouncing something."⁶ For Hill, if heterosexual attraction is fallen and can be sanctified in marriage, then same-sex attraction, though fallen, can be sanctified as well.

How can same-sex attraction be sanctified? He says, "that insofar as a homosexual orientation can represent a broader, deeper drive for non-genital same-sex closeness, it is not objectively disordered, and may instead be a sign of God's gracious reordering of one's erotic life in Christ."⁷ The non-genital desire for same-sex intimacy is not objectively disordered, according to Hill, and can therefore be reordered to holiness. He believes that such a desire for reordering one's homosexual orientation to holy things may be a sign of God's gracious work in a "gay Christian's" life. Specifically, Hill believes "gay Christians" can reorder their same-sex desires to same-sex friendships, acts of mercy, careers that require engaging more with the same-sex, etc.⁸ In his book *Spiritual Friendship*, he writes,

⁴ Wesley Hill, "On Disagreeing About 'Homosexuality': A Thought Experiment," *Spiritual Friendship*, December 17, 2014, <https://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/12/17/on-disagreeing-about-homosexuality-a-thought-experiment>.

⁵ Hill, "Is Being Gay Sanctifiable," (04:41) - (05:09).

⁶ Hill, "Is Being Gay Sanctifiable," (28:25) - (28:35).

⁷ Hill, "Is Being Gay Sanctifiable," (22:14) - (22:35).

⁸ Hill, "Is Being Gay Sanctifiable," (15:30) - (26:30).

Perhaps celibate gay and lesbian Christians, precisely in and out of their celibacy, are called to express, rather than simply renounce and deny, same-sex love. And perhaps this is where, for all the potential trials and temptations that come with this way of thinking, same-sex friendship represents one way for gay Christians who wish to be celibate to say: ‘I am embracing a positive calling. I am, along with every other Christian, called to love and be loved.’⁹

Hill is advocating for same-sex non-genital celibate love. He believes “gay Christians,” even though they will struggle with temptations as a result, can embrace the positive calling of loving and receiving the love of their same-sex friends. Instead of viewing this non-genital homosexual orientation as a curse to be rejected, Hill sees his same-sex attraction as a “doorway to blessing and grace.”¹⁰ He continues,

Being gay is, for me, as much a sensibility as anything else: a heightened sensitivity to and passion for same-sex beauty that helps determine the kind of conversations I have, which people I’m drawn to spend time with, what novels and poems and films I enjoy, the particular visual art I appreciate, and also, I think, the kind of friendships I pursue and try to strengthen. I don’t imagine I would have invested half as much effort in loving my male friends, and making sacrifices of time, energy, and even money on their behalf, if I weren’t gay. My sexuality, my basic erotic orientation to the world, is inescapably intertwined with how I go about finding and keeping friends.¹¹

Hill defines his “homosexual orientation” as a sensibility that colors everything about him—his passion for same-sex beauty, his conversations, his pop culture choices, and the friendships he pursues. He chooses his friends, in part, based on his homosexual orientation. Hill desires same-sex intimacy, and such desire drives him to pour himself into these friendships with a fervency that he would not have if he was not a “gay Christian.” To him, being gay serves his same-sex friends well; he loves them more not less because of it. Same-sex attraction, when steered in the right direction, is not sin but holiness, according to Hill.

⁹ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 76.

¹⁰ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 79.

¹¹ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 80-81.

Robert Gagnon

Another theologian within the Reformed tradition to consider is Robert Gagnon. Gagnon is an ordained ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA). In the past few years, he has become a Baptist. He has left Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PCUSA) and is now teaching at Houston Baptist University in Houston, Texas. One assumes that Gagnon still affirms most of the “Westminster Confession of Faith,” minus the statements on baptism and ecclesiology, something like the “Second London Baptist Confession” published in 1689. At the very least, he still considers himself within the Reformed tradition.

Gagnon has written much on the sinfulness of homosexual acts; however, he has argued that the Bible is not concerned with homosexual inclinations or desires.¹² They are sinful, desires for things God has forbidden, but the person who has them is not morally culpable for them. Gagnon writes, “Like any desire for what God has forbidden, the desire for same-sex intercourse can also be a sin but only if consciously nurtured and ‘fed.’ The mere inclination or the experience of temptation is not sin. The issue is whether one is mastered by the desire.”¹³ To Gagnon, a sinful desire is only morally culpable if it is “consciously nurtured or fed.” Like Roman Catholicism, he separates “experiencing” sinful inclinations from lust. Even his use of the word “experiences” to describe same-sex sexual desires implies that same-sex desires “happen to people,” as if they are victims of same-sex desires, rather than complicit participants in same-sex desires, in their flesh. Gagnon writes,

No one is at fault merely for experiencing urges that one does not ask to experience and does not seek to cultivate. For example, the fact that someone experiences same-sex attractions at all is not something for which one is morally culpable and does not in any way justify a designation of the person as morally depraved. Same-sex erotic desires, like any desires to do what God expressly forbids, are sinful desires (i.e., they are desires to sin), which is why the one experiencing the desires

¹² Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 37-38.

¹³ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 462.

should not yield to them either in one's conscious thought-life or in one's behavior.¹⁴

Gagnon goes so far to contend that moral depravity is not due to inclinations but actions alone. He argues that no one is at fault for merely experiencing same-sex attractions.

Again, this position is more in line with the Roman Catholic tradition than the Reformed tradition. He correctly defines "sinful desires" as "desires to sin" but stops short of correctly designating them "morally culpable." He argues that persons must choose sin in order to be held accountable by God. This wrongly defines sin as based on man's will not God's will.

Gagnon continues, "Feelings of jealousy, covetousness, greed, pride, or sexual arousal for an illicit union are all sinful desires; but one isn't culpable for them unless one willingly entertains them in one's mind or acts on them in one's behavior."¹⁵ Similar to the Roman Catholic catechism, Gagnon distinguishes coveting or lust from inclination or concupiscence. His position is interesting in that he also distinguishes feelings of jealousy, greed, and pride from choosing to have these feelings as well. If one feels jealous, greedy, or prideful, one does not sin according to Gagnon, but if one "feeds" these desires to sin by choosing to continue to have these feelings in one's heart, then one is morally culpable for them.

In a lecture Gagnon gave at the Evangelical Theological Society in 2015, titled, "Why Christians Should Not Throw Reparative Therapy under the Bus," he explains that sinful desire is not morally culpable sin, in part, because one cannot repent from it:

I don't agree that persons are culpable from the very moment that same-sex attractions arise. Alright? So, let's say for example, in one particular case, maybe

¹⁴ Robert A. J. Gagnon, "Is Homosexual Practice No Worse Than Any Other Sin?" Rob Gagnon, January 7, 2015, http://robgagnon.net/articles/is_homosexual_practice_no_worse.htm.

¹⁵ Robert Gagnon, "Comment on Alan Chambers' Interview on the Janet Mefferd Radio Show," *Rob Gagnon*, Accessed July 15, 2019, <http://www.robgagnon.net/homosexAlanChambersJanetMefferd.htm>.

the same-sex attraction might be due to early childhood sexual abuse of an adult male with a male child. Am I going to blame that person? Is that person at fault for the mere experience of same-sex attractions arising from such a horrific episode? I'm not going to do that.¹⁶

Gagnon argues that an abused child is not responsible for same-sex desires that occur as a result of same-sex abuse. I empathize with his reasoning; however, the problem with his assumption is that if one cannot be blamed for one's own inner sinful desires due to one's abuse, one cannot be blamed for lustful fantasies or sinful actions that come as a result of abuse either. If what happens to a person eliminates that person's moral responsibility for how he responds inwardly, then he is not responsible for how he responds outwardly either. If one follows Gagnon's logic to its consistent end, in order to define morally culpable sin, one must answer, "What has happened to man?" rather than, "What has God said?"

In the same lecture, Gagnon continues,

The initial experience of sinful desire, of course, must be rejected. So, if I experience a desire that I regard as a desire to do something God doesn't want me to do, I don't immediately repent of it, because I haven't done anything. The desire just grew up in me, arose in me. What am I going to repent of? I'm going to repent of an involuntary, unconscious urge that arose without being solicited on my part. I'm repenting, how am I going to change my behavior subsequently to prevent that from happening? I can't. But, what I can do is the moment I experience it, say, "You know that's a desire to do something God doesn't want me to do. I reject it." Now, that's the point where culpability or not kicks in. Okay. But, prior to that point, if I'm repenting, I'm turning from something that I'm doing previously. I didn't do anything; it just happened.¹⁷

Gagnon believes that sinful desires must be rejected; however, they cannot be repented from because they are "involuntary, unconscious urges." How can one voluntarily repent of something that is involuntary? Gagnon reasons that when a man desires sin, he has not done anything volitionally; rather, sinful desire has "happened to him." He has a point if

¹⁶ Robert Gagnon, "Why Christians Should Not Throw Reparative Therapy under the Bus" (Mp3 of lecture, 67th Annual Meeting (2015) of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, November 17, 2015), <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=20619>, (19:15) - (19:42).

¹⁷ Gagnon, "Why Christians Should Not Throw Reparative Therapy under the Bus," <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=20619>, (21:11) - (22:05).

man's sin is based on man's capability. Yet again, Gagnon shows that he is defining sin based on man's will, what he reasons man is volitionally capable of doing, rather than defining sin as the Reformed tradition has, based on God's perfect moral law and any opposition to it.

Gagnon then makes a confusing statement: "I'm not saying that that means only conscious impulses sin because eventually we can be trapped in sin, enslaved by sin. And then our whole thinking process itself becomes effected. In fact, it's already infected to some extent from the beginning. But that's a somewhat different thing from what I'm talking about here."¹⁸ Gagnon recognizes that some people have sinful impulses because of previous choices they have made, rather than due to the abuse of others. Thus, his position is that some sinful desires are a result of one's previous choices, while others are a result of the previous choices of others; one is morally culpable for the former but not for the latter. Again, his definition of morally culpable sin depends primarily on man's previous choices and volitional capability, not on one's submission to or lack thereof to God's perfect moral law.

Evaluation of Wesley Hill

Consider Denny Burk

Now, this chapter moves to evaluate and rebut Hill's arguments. Hill argues that a desire for friendship is an essential part of being gay, yet he also argues that Romans 1:24 and 27 do not forbid a desire for homosexual same-sex friendship. He argues on one hand that his "homosexual orientation" cannot be reduced to a desire for same-sex sex, and then on the other hand he argues that Romans 1:24 and 27 only forbid same-sex sex, which is a reduction of the "dishonorable passions" to only passion for same-sex sex. If one adopts his position, that same-sex attraction is a necessary part of

¹⁸ Gagnon, "Why Christians Should Not Throw Reparative Therapy under the Bus," <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=20619>, (22:06) - (22:26).

same-sex sexual attraction, then same-sex attraction must be part of the same-sex sexual attraction forbidden in Romans 1:24 and 27. One cannot tie homosexual orientation to same-sex sexual attraction today, and not tie homosexual orientation to the same-sex sexual attraction forbidden in Romans 1:24 and 27. One cannot parse homosexual orientation out of Romans 1:24 and 27. If homosexual orientation cannot be reduced to “lust” or “sin,” it cannot be reduced to holiness either; but heterosexual attraction can be reduced to holiness because God designed it. Homosexuality, in its purest form, is sin; heterosexuality, in its purest form, is sinless.

Furthermore, consider Denny Burk’s response to Hill. Burk is a Professor of Theology at Boyce College in Louisville, Kentucky and is President of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. He has been one of the most vocal theologians against Hill’s position and the “gay Christianity” movement. In his article, “Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?,” written for *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* in 2015, Burk wrote,

Wesley Hill, for example, argues that same-sex attraction cannot be reduced to a desire for same-sex genital contact. He argues that same-sex attraction also includes a desire for same-sex friendship and even a “preference” for same-sex companionship. I do not deny that same-sex attracted persons report heightened emotional connections with persons of the same sex and that they perceive those connections as part of their attractions. Nevertheless, the defining element of same-sex attraction is desire for a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex. When same-sex sexual desire is removed from the equation, then we are no longer talking about same-sex attraction—at least not in the sense that modern people mean the term. When modern people talk about same-sex attraction, they intend a kind of attraction that includes sexual possibility between persons of the same sex. They do not mean to label as *gay* every person capable of emotional bonds with a person of the same sex. No, it is the same-sex sexual desire that is the constitutive element.¹⁹

Burk is right. The defining element of “being gay” in modern terms, and in biblical terms for that matter, is being sexually attracted to the same sex. All that Hill entails in his

¹⁹ Denny Burk, “Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?,” *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 1 (2015): 112.

“homosexual orientation” is derived from his sexual attraction to men. His “homosexual orientation” would not exist without his sexual desire for men; however, his desire for same-sex friendships would exist without his sexual desire for men. Burk continues,

What then are we to make of the emotional bonds gay people experience for persons of the same sex? Can those attractions be sanctified? Yes, they can. They can be sanctified when they are shorn of the elements that otherwise make them sinful. When sexual possibility and intention are removed through repentance and faith toward God, there can exist the real bonds of holy, God-honoring same-sex friendship. But those bonds can only be cultivated when we recognize that the desire for sinful sex can never be the foundation for holy friendships. Holy friendships are the fruit of chastity in both thought and deed.²⁰

As Hill argues, his desire for same-sex friendships is derivative of a desire for same-sex sex. The two cannot be separated from each other. Hill says he desires same-sex friendships because of his “homosexual orientation.”²¹ If the pursuit of same-sex friendships is due to same-sex attraction, then it cannot exist without same-sex sexual attraction. Therefore, it is sinful since its source is the fall, not God’s good design or even the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s heart. In other words, “homosexual orientation” is entirely concupiscence, and concupiscence must be mortified; it cannot be sanctified.

Consider the 39 Articles

Additionally, the confession for the school Wesley Hill teaches at, Trinity College of Ministry, is “The 39 Articles.” “Article IX. Of Original or Birth-Sin” reads,

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam, (as the Pelagians do vainly talk;) but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek, φροντία σαρκος, (which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire, of the flesh), is not subject to the Law of God. And although there

²⁰ Burk, “Is Homosexual Orientation Sinful?,” 112.

²¹ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 80-81.

is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized; yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.²²

Concerning concupiscence, this statement is identical to the original statement penned by Thomas Cranmer in the “Forty-two Articles of the Church of England” of 1552-1553.²³ Hill argues that same-sex sexual attraction is concupiscence, morally culpable sin. Yet, then he argues that this concupiscence includes a “homosexual orientation” that is not concupiscence, although it is fallen?²⁴ Next, he tells Christians to act on this same-sex attraction in celibate ways because this same-sex desire is being reoriented by the Holy Spirit to holy things.²⁵ The reader should recognize that Hill does not have the same understanding of concupiscence that Cranmer had as communicated in the confession of Trinity College of Ministry. According to “The 39 Articles,” concupiscence and lust are sin and anything that comes from them is sin. This includes both same-sex sexual attraction and same-sex attraction. The only way out of this truth, confessionally and biblically, is to argue that Adam, before the fall, had same-sex attraction, or that Jesus could have had same-sex attraction and remained sinless.

²² “The 39 Articles,” *Trinity School for Ministry*, accessed July 16, 2019, http://www.tsm.edu/the_39_articles/.

²³ Dennison, Jr., ed., “The Forty-Two Articles of the Church of England (1552/53),” 3-4. Cranmer wrote in his original “Forty-two Articles of the Church of England,” “Original sin stands not in the following of Adam, as the Pelagians do vainly talk, which also the Anabaptists do now-a-days renew: but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam: whereby man is very far gone from his former righteousness, which he had at his creation, and is of his own nature given to evil; so that the flesh desires always contrary to the spirit: and, therefore, in every person, born into this world, it deserves God’s wrath and damnation. And this infection of nature does remain, yes, in them that are baptized: whereby the lust of the flesh, called in Greek φρονημα σαρκος (which some do expound, the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh), is not subject to the law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe, and are baptized: yet the apostle does confess that concupiscence and lust have of itself the nature of sin.”

²⁴ Hill, “Is Being Gay Sanctifiable,” (00:00) - (26:30).

²⁵ Hill, “Is Being Gay Sanctifiable,” (15:30) - (26:30).

Heterosexual Desire Versus Same-sex Desire

Moreover, Hill argues that heterosexual desire and same-sex desire are both equally fallen. But the question is, “What has same-sex attraction ‘fallen’ from?” Heterosexual attraction fell from God’s good design in the Garden of Eden into sin. Same-sex attraction, on the other hand, did not exist in the Garden of Eden. Heterosexual attraction was distorted by the fall, but same-sex attraction was created by the fall. Heterosexual attraction can be disordered; same-sex attraction is unnatural (contrary to God’s design, Rom 1:24-27). A disordered desire is a desire that was originally created good by God but has been disordered away from God’s design due to the fall. However, an unnatural desire is a desire that is not designed by God but is entirely a result of the fall. Heterosexual desire can be reordered to holiness because heterosexual desire was created by God. Adam and Eve had heterosexual desire toward one another before the fall in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:20-25). However, same-sex desire cannot be reordered to holiness, because its source is the Devil and the fall of mankind into sin. Same-sex desire is not something good God created that has been distorted by the fall; rather, it is something evil that would not exist if the fall never happened. If sin did not exist, same-sex attraction would not exist; however, heterosexual attraction would still exist if sin never happened.

Hill wants to return to the fall of man to argue that all of mankind’s sexual desires are equally morally blameworthy. However, he needs to go back further than the fall. Sexual desire did not start at the fall; it started before the fall in the Garden of Eden. He needs to return to the Garden before Adam and Eve fell into sin. Adam desired his wife sexually, and his desire was not morally blame-worthy. God’s design is not morally blame-worthy (Gen 2:20-24). Therefore, a desire for God’s design for marriage is not morally blameworthy either. What is God’s design for “homosexual orientation”? There is none. Thus, since there is no original design of God for “homosexual orientation” or an ultimate God-glorifying goal for its end, same-sex attraction is always sinful.

Heterosexual attraction is sinful as well, but only because it falls short of God's design, not because it is contrary to God's design. Same-sex attraction, on the other hand, is always contrary to God's design. Hill makes a biblical category error when he conflates heterosexual attraction with same-sex attraction into the same "fallen" category.

Heterosexual attraction is "fallen," meaning "fallen from the Garden," while same-sex attraction is "fallen," meaning "created by the fall." That is why Jesus quoted the pre-fall marriage of Adam and Eve in Mark 10:2-9 as the ongoing definition of marriage as designed by God.

Homosexuals Who Desire Same-Sex Friendship Desire Same-sex Marriage

Furthermore, in the Garden of Eden, God brought Eve to Adam for marriage. The only sexual desire that is obedient to the law is sexual desire within marriage. The only biblical definition for marriage in the Bible is one man married to one woman for life (Mark 10:2-9). Every other sexual desire is a perversion of this original God-designed desire. The first sexual desire in the Garden was designed by God to be between husband and wife, and every subsequent sexual desire, according to being created in God's image, is for marriage as well. That is the God-designed purpose of sexual desire (Gen 2:20-24). After all, why is Wesley Hill advocating for same-sex friendships and not opposite-sex friendships? He says he desires same-sex intimacy because of his homosexual orientation.²⁶ But, why did God originally create sexual desire and all that comes with it? For heterosexual marriage alone. Biblically, desire for intimacy due to sexual attraction, whether genital or not, is intended solely for heterosexual marriage. Yet, Hill advocates for turning a perversion of this desire, same-sex attraction, to same-sex friendships. His desire is a perversion of God's original intention for sexual attraction. Since God is the designer of male and female sexual desire, God's intention cannot be divorced from

²⁶ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 80-81.

sexual attraction. Therefore, when Hill describes desiring non-genital “male intimacy” based on his same-sex attraction, he is describing in part, how Adam desired intimacy with Eve in the Garden, which was a desire for marriage; that is what God’s design in Hill is telling him, and his sin has turned the natural desire for heterosexual marriage into an unnatural desire for same-sex friendships.

To make the case even further, Hill not only argues for Christians with “homosexual orientation” to pursue same-sex friendships, he argues for Christians to pursue certain friends to be their “significant others.” He describes these friendships as “close, committed, promise-sealed friendships.”²⁷ He even describes one of these promise-sealed friendships he participated in for years where he “fell in love” with his best friend.²⁸ The reason Hill fell in love with his best friend is because God’s purpose for creating Hill’s body with the capability of sexual desire, and all that it entails, was intended for heterosexual marriage; but sin has turned this desire upside down to something unnatural, and Hill’s denial of God’s design for all sexual attraction resulted in his actual sin. If Hill wanted to honor God’s design, as opposed to his experience, he would be primarily advocating for opposite-sex friendships, instead of trying to separate God’s intention for all sexual attraction from his “homosexual orientation.” God’s design always wins, for humans cannot separate who they “tell themselves they are” from who God made them to be. All humans belong to God; they are his image-bearers, created for his purposes (Gen 1-2; Col 1:15-17).

For the sake of clarity, I am not saying same-sex marriage will satisfy Hill or anyone else. It will not, for it cannot. Sin can never satisfy God’s image-bearers since God designed them to reflect him. Rather, I am suggesting that Hill cannot have what he

²⁷ Jonathan Merritt, “Celibate gay Christian leader urges faithful to ‘normalize committed friendships,’ *Religion News Service*, April 7, 2015, <https://religionnews.com/2015/04/07/celibate-gay-christian-leader-urges-faithful-reimagine-friendship/>.

²⁸ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 87-92.

truly desires, same-sex marriage. Therefore, same-sex friendships will not satisfy his sinful desires either. The primary way to repent of same-sex desires is to pursue opposite-sex friendships. And who knows, one may then fall in love with his or her best opposite-sex friend? One may balk by saying, “I could never fall in love with my opposite-sex friend because I am not sexually attracted to the opposite sex.” But, the only prerequisite for sex in the Bible is marriage, not sexual attraction. If one burns with passion and cannot exercise self-control, the Bible’s only answer is heterosexual marriage according to 1 Corinthians 7:5 and 9. Just a chapter earlier, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, the ESV refers to “men who practice homosexuality,” a translation of two Greek words indicating the recipient (*μαλακοί*) and the giver (*ἀρσενοκοῖται*) of homosexual sex, as not inheriting the kingdom of God, if unrepentant.²⁹ The Bible does not say for those who burn with passion to pursue same-sex friendships; it says for them to enter the covenant of marriage with a Christian of the opposite-sex. Why should Christians exclude those who struggle with same-sex attraction from this biblical remedy? A desire for marriage cannot be satisfied with friendship, and an unnatural desire for same-sex marriage cannot be satisfied with same-sex friendships. Hill is only trading one unnatural sin for a less unnatural sin by advocating for acting on one’s same-sex attraction through forming same-sex friendships.

Evaluation of Robert Gagnon

Consider Wayne Grudem

Since Hill’s arguments have been evaluated, it is now time to evaluate Gagnon’s arguments. First, consider a scholar who disagrees with Gagnon’s position, Wayne Grudem. Grudem is Professor of Theology at Phoenix Seminary in Phoenix, Arizona. In one of his latest books, *Christian Ethics*, he writes,

²⁹ Barbara Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 527.

...God ultimately requires moral perfection, not only in human actions, but also in attitudes of the heart, in all areas of our lives. Therefore, the Bible prohibits not only adultery but also the desire for adultery (Ex. 20:17, 17; cf. Matt. 5:28); not only theft but also coveting (Ex. 20:15, 17). This is because “the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

Therefore, Scripture teaches that any desire to break God’s commandments is also wrong in God’s sight. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). While an impulse to do what God expressly forbids is (by definition) an impulse contrary to God’s will, the Bible also recognizes that Christians will be “tempted” by their “own desire” (James 1:14), so it encourages Christians in such circumstances to “remain steadfast” (v. 11) and to “be doers of the word” (v. 22). This implies not actively entertaining the wrongful impulse (cf. Matt. 5:28) and not dwelling on it so that it “gives birth to sin” (James 1:15).³⁰

Grudem, with the Reformed tradition, argues that God requires moral perfection.

Whether or not a person sins is based on God’s will not that person’s will. Anything that is contrary to God’s will is sin. Furthermore, with the Reformed tradition, Grudem distinguishes between concupiscence and actual sin. Sinful desires are both sin and temptation to sin. Christians have a responsibility to fight their sinful desires so that they do not give birth to actual sin (sinful actions).

Consider the Reformed tradition

In addition to Grudem, consider the Reformed tradition’s rebuttal to Gagnon. Gagnon has spent most of his teaching years in the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America. Interestingly, Gagnon responded to the PCUSA controversy in 2013 over the song “In Christ Alone” by The Gettys. The PCUSA hymnal committee rejected the song over the lyric, “The wrath of God was satisfied.” Gagnon took exception and responded to their decision in an article titled, “Presbyterian hymnal committee rejects a song for promoting a Reformed view of salvation.” After quoting pertinent statements from “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” “The Shorter Catechism,” and “The Larger Catechism,” Gagnon wrote,

³⁰ Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 858.

I understand that the confessions are a witness *in time* to the views of the Reformed/Presbyterian churches. I understand too that this or that theological theme that occurs in a document or two might be subject to revision. However, **when a given theological theme plays a significant role in Reformed theology across the whole span of the confessions, as well as in the work of the father of Reformed theology (Calvin), it ought to be accorded a measure of respect.** Elimination of a song in a Presbyterian hymnal for the sole reason that it mentioned said theme in a single line is a case of irony bordering on theological lunacy [emphasis original].”³¹

Gagnon stood boldly in a theologically liberal denomination, the PCUSA, for many years. For his faithfulness to Scripture and the Reformed tradition, he should be praised. However, as has been shown in the previous chapter, the proposition that concupiscence is truly sin even in Christians was a Lutheran, Reformed, Church of England, and Particular Baptist confessional distinctive against the Roman Catholic Church. As Gagnon argued above, Reformed distinctives that have played a significant role across the whole span of confessions and in John Calvin should be respected. To claim to be within the Reformed tradition but to deny the central theme that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin, to use Gagnon’s words, is “irony bordering on theological lunacy.” Gagnon’s position that concupiscence is not morally culpable sin goes against every major Reformed Confession and influential Reformed forebearer throughout the 1500s and 1600s. Although he is within the Reformed tradition, his position on concupiscence is outside of the Reformed tradition.

Gagnon and Concupiscence Versus Temptation

One reason why Gagnon believes concupiscence is not morally culpable sin is because he believes concupiscence is mere temptation, a desire to sin.³² He is partially correct, for concupiscence is both sin and temptation to sin. Gagnon also believes that

³¹ Robert A. J. Gagnon, “The Presbyterian (PCUSA) hymnal controversy around the doctrine of the atonement Part 2: Irony and Lunacy,” *The Layman: A Ministry of the Presbyterian Lay Committee*, August 29, 2013, <https://layman.org/the-presbyterian-pcusa-hymnal-controversy-around-the-doctrine-of-the-atonement-part-2-irony-and-lunacy/>.

³² Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 31-32, 37-38.

Jesus had internal temptations. In a panel discussion on reparative therapy with Denny Burk and Heath Lambert at the Evangelical Theological Society in 2015, Gagnon argued,

There's obviously internal temptation for Jesus. When you are being crucified on the cross and nails are being put into your hands. Okay. And you are suffering excruciating death, if your body at that point isn't crying out for some sort of relief, right? "Give me an alternative to this." To me, that's just striking. It's not, we don't have this image of a Docetic Jesus. He actually does experience internal desires to the contrary. Unless you're a masochist, you're gonna want to get off the cross at that point. But the fact is that he experiences that internal temptation and yet rejects it. So, of course there's no sin in him in that sense. He's also fully human in addition to him being fully God. We don't want to leave out that dimension either.³³

He is correct that Jesus was tempted and did not sin; however, Jesus' temptation remains distinct from the temptations of sinners after the fall of Adam in at least 2 ways: (1) Jesus was only tempted from without not from within. (2) Jesus was tempted by an objective desire for a good thing that the Devil then claimed was his to give.

Jesus was only tempted from without. The author of Hebrews argues that Jesus is sinless in Hebrews 4:14-16,

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God, not Adam, is Jesus' Father (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Adam is not Jesus' federal head; God is Jesus' Federal Head. Jesus was tempted yet without any sin. Therefore, he is worthy to be the eternal High Priest between his church and God. In light of Christ's sinlessness, the story of Christ's temptation is found in Luke 4:1-13:

And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" And the devil

³³ Robert Gagnon, "Panel Discussion, Robert Gagnon, Heath Lambert, Denny Burk, Discussion Q and A, Why Reparative Therapy Is Not an Evangelical Option" (Mp3 of lecture, 67th Annual Meeting (2015) of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, November 17, 2015), <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=21498>, (10:22) - (11:10).

took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” And Jesus answered him, “It is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’” And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

The text begins by emphasizing that Christ was full of the Holy Spirit and was led into the wilderness to fast for forty days and be tempted. Having not ate anything for forty days, Christ was hungry. The Devil, seeking to persuade Christ to sin and fall like Adam, tempted him.

Jesus was tempted by an objective desire for a good thing. The Devil did not use evil things to tempt Jesus, for he could not. He could only tempt Jesus with good things. As Augustine argued, if Jesus was going to desire something objectively evil, something contrary to God’s law, he would have to will this desire since God was his Father, not Adam.³⁴ Christ never had any sinful desires; no original sin and no concupiscence. Consider how Scripture describes his temptation.

First, the Devil tempted Jesus, who was hungry, with bread, encouraging him to do a miracle for his own benefit rather than to fulfill God’s will. Walter Liefeld, Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, notes,

Bread, however, is necessary, not evil, and hardly an object of "the cravings of sinful man" (1 John 2:16). Further, Jesus' temptation is not the same as the self-engendered lust described in James 1:14-15--a fact to keep in mind when we question how Jesus could have been perfect and yet truly tempted. The issue, therefore, is not one of allurement to perverted self-gratification but a challenge to act apart from faithful dependence on God.³⁵

³⁴ Augustine, “Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian,” 436-37.

³⁵ Walter Liefeld, *Luke*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 863.

Jesus desired to live in order to fulfill His Father's will. He desired His Father's food, as he later taught the disciples to pray to God the Father, "give us our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11), which is a good desire that Christ's Father would fulfill in due time. Neither Christ nor the reader would be presumptuous to assume Christ's Father would provide for him food, because he is truly human, in order to keep him alive so that he could fulfill His Father's will. Yet, the Devil tempted him by claiming the food was his, not God's, to give.

Second, the Devil tempted Jesus with the kingdoms of man. Liefeld argues, "Once again, what the devil offered was legitimate in itself. The Messiah would one day rule all the world, possessing all "authority and splendor" (v.6)." ³⁶ Jesus desired His Father's future gift to him of the kingdoms of the world; again, a good desire, yet the Devil tempted him by offering these kingdoms before Christ had earned them, in a truly human way, by fulfilling his Father's will.

Third, the Devil tempted Jesus to prove that God would protect him with his angels. Jesus desired to do His Father's will, to enjoy the protection of his angels; again, a good desire, yet the Devil tempted him by commanding Christ to enjoy the protection of his Father's angels by submitting to the Devil's will for him to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple.

With these 3 objects of temptation, the Devil took good things and distorted them. Similarly, in the temptation of Adam and Eve, the Devil took a bad thing, the forbidden tree, and distorted it to make it look good (Gen. 3:1-7). Therefore, the Devil's strategy was the same in both temptations in at least two ways: (1) He tempted the first Adam and the Second Adam by distorting what God commanded. (2) His goal for the first Adam and the Second Adam was for them to submit to him as father god above the true Father God.

³⁶ Liefeld, "Luke," 864.

Thus, the temptation of Jesus was void of sinful desire. He desired the objects the Devil offered because they belonged to God, because they were intrinsically good, but he did not desire them from the Devil. He was tempted to receive what His Father had already told him would be his, whether through the prophets or through the Holy Spirit, or both. Yet, he did not desire to submit to the Devil's will, only His Father's will. As Jesus said, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

Returning to Gagnon, he argues that James 1:14 teaches that inner temptation is not sin unless one is "dragged away" by it:

The text says, "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own desire." Okay, so you have to be carried away by it. First, to be carried away by the desire, it has to present itself to you. The moment it presents itself to you, you have not sinned. But, if you're carried away by it, and fall into the enticement to it, then it says, "Then, when the desire has conceived," which in the context means you've been carried away by it, and have been brought under its controlling influence, then it gives birth to sin. But, not prior to that point and time.³⁷

Gagnon misunderstands James 1:14 because it is built upon James 1:13, "God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." James spent the prior verses arguing that God gives trials and tests (James 1:2-12), but then clarifies that God is not responsible for our temptations in the midst of these trials and tests. There is a moral difference between tests and trials, and temptations. God can provide tests and trials, but not temptations because they are evil. Contrary to Gagnon, James' point was not to argue that sin only occurs when temptation "drags away and conceives" any more than his point was to argue that death only occurs "when sin is full grown" (James 1:15). Instead, James' point was to place moral responsibility on his hearers, not God, for their temptations and all that they conceive. That is why he personified these immoralities, for each word he used was something only a person can do—"lured," "enticed,"

³⁷ Gagnon, "Panel Discussion, Robert Gagnon, Heath Lambert, Denny Burk," (03:47) - (04:27).

“conceived,” “gives birth,” and “full grown.” By starting with, “God cannot do this,” James indicated that what follows is immorality or sin. And by providing a type of genealogical metaphor of immoral persons, he argued that temptation can only conceive what it is morally, namely evil or sin. Temptation does not come from God and cannot produce holiness, only immorality—inner temptations that lure and entice, conceive sin, and mature into death.³⁸

Only temptation from without is not sinful unless acted upon. That is the type of temptation Jesus experienced and he did not sin because he neither desired to sin, which would be him tempting himself (something God the Son cannot do), nor acted upon such desire. Those, however, who have same-sex attractions or inclinations are tempted from within by their own concupiscence. Such inclinations are morally culpable sin even in Christians, as “The Westminster Confession” states, “This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated (1 John 1:8, 10; Rom. 7:14, 17–18, 23; James 3:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20); and although it be, through Christ, pardoned and mortified; yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin (Rom. 7:5, 7–8, 25; Gal. 5:17).”³⁹

Conclusion

To conclude, the Reformed tradition confessed and taught that concupiscence is morally culpable sin even in Christians. Today, there are many within the Reformed tradition who affirm her confessions that are denying that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. Particularly, they reject the notion that same-sex attraction is morally culpable sin. Wesley Hill argues that same-sex sexual attraction is morally culpable sin but same-sex attraction, the non-genital desires of “homosexual orientation,” are not.

³⁸ A full exposition of James 1:13-15 is provided in chap.5 of this dissertation.

³⁹ “The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646),” 242.

Robert Gagnon argues that God is more concerned with behavior than purity of heart in his people in this life, and that unwanted same-sex attraction is a guiltless desire to sin, that is only morally culpable if acted upon. Both men consider themselves within the Reformed tradition, but their understanding that concupiscence is not morally culpable sin is more in line with Rome than Geneva.

CHAPTER 5

THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT CONCUPISCENCE IS MORALLY CULPABLE SIN, EVEN IN CHRISTIANS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, Wesley Hill and Robert Gagnon were examined and shown to be outside of the Reformed tradition on understanding that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. If one is within the Reformed tradition, then knowing the Reformed position throughout church history is of extreme importance, but the most important truth is that the Bible teaches that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin. This chapter argues that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians, because Genesis 3:6, Matthew 5:27-30, Romans 1:24-27, and James 1:13-15 teach this truth. There are many other passages that could be examined as well, but these four will be the focus of this chapter.¹

Methodology

The methodology for this chapter is one of context, exegesis, objection and rejoinder. First, the context of each passage is explained. Then, each text is exegeted according to a historical-grammatical approach to Scripture. Each passage is then broken up into phrases, and then each phrase is explained. Next, objections to my interpretation are presented and engaged with Scripture, disproving the objections. Finally, the chapter concludes with a pastoral application concerning man's need for the full righteousness of

¹ These four passages were chosen because they are some of the most prominent Scriptures cited by “gay Christians.” There are other passages as well that could have been exegeted to prove that concupiscence is morally culpable sin—Romans 6:11-12; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Mark 10:2-9; 1 Peter 2:11, to name a few.

Christ imputed to him. The sources used are primarily from recent scholars with a few representatives from the Reformed tradition.

Genesis 3:6

Exegesis: Context

The first Scripture to consider is Genesis 3:6 where Eve's inward desires for the forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden are described. The text reads, "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."² In order to properly understand Genesis 3:6, one must first understand its context. God created Eve in his image, for the purpose of being Adam's helpmate, his wife (Gen 2:21-25). God took a rib from the man and created Eve, then brought the two back together to become one flesh. For this reason, a man "shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

In the beginning of chapter 3 of Genesis, the reader is introduced to a new character, the serpent. He is described as "more crafty" than any of the other animals. He deceived Eve to think that the forbidden tree was good. He said, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5). The Devil deceived Eve to believe that the forbidden tree was not what God said it was; rather, God was trying to withhold something good from Eve. She believed the serpent instead of believing God. This means that she willed her unbelief and an inclination or desire for the forbidden tree in her heart, as Genesis 3:6 explains.

² All Scripture references in this dissertation are from the English Standard Version (ESV), unless otherwise stated.

Exegesis: Comments

Genesis 3:6a. Genesis 3:6 begins, “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food.” Moses details the inward thoughts of Eve from her heart. She went from agreeing with God concerning the forbidden tree (Gen 3:2-3), to believing the serpent’s words instead. The result of Eve’s willed unbelief was a change of desire in her heart, the birth of sinful desire, concupiscence. Eve “repented” of God and believed the serpent; she turned from God and placed her faith in the serpent, as John Calvin, the most important father of the Reformed tradition and possibly of the Reformation,³ argued,

This impure look of Eve, infected with the poison of concupiscence, was both the messenger and the witness of an impure heart. She could previously behold the tree with such sincerity, that no desire to eat of it affected her mind; for the faith she had in the word of God was the best guardian of her heart, and of all her senses. But now, after the heart had declined from faith, and from obedience to the word, she corrupted both herself and all her senses, and depravity was diffused through all parts of her soul as well as her body. It is, therefore, a sign of impious defection, that the woman now judges the tree to be good for food, eagerly delights herself in beholding it, and persuades herself that it is desirable for the sake of acquiring wisdom; whereas before she had passed by it a hundred times with an unmoved and tranquil look. For now, having shaken off the bridle, her mind wanders dissolutely and intemperately, drawing the body with it to the same licentiousness.⁴

By choosing to believe the serpent, Eve simultaneously chose to disbelieve God. As Calvin argued, she now saw what the serpent told her to see rather than what God told her to see. The forbidden tree went from being morally repugnant to “good for food,” which should be viewed as a moral admission.⁵ God called his creation “good” in Genesis 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31; that includes the forbidden tree (Gen 2:9). The goodness of creation is derived from its creator. God created a world that displays his fingerprints, his design and purpose for creation to cultivate human flourishing. God’s laws are good because God is good, and his design and purposes for man and the rest of his creation are

³ Eire, *Reformations*, 289-90.

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 151.

⁵ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 238.

good. He forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the tree in the midst of the Garden.

Although the tree was good because God created it good, it was not good for Adam and Eve to eat because God forbade it. The purpose of the forbidden tree was to test Adam and Eve, not to tempt them (James 1:13). Yet, Eve purported in her heart that the forbidden tree was *good* for food, knowledge she derived from the serpent, not God.⁶

Kenneth Mathews, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, notes,

Eve saw what was “good”; the adjective heads the clause accentuating the ironic results of her evaluation. There is a double entendre here: the term for “good” (*tôb*) can mean beautiful and also what is moral. In this case what was beautiful proved to be an allurement to disobedience. The term “good” is reminiscent of the created order God declares as “good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31). But the verbal echo of God’s earlier evaluation suggests that she has usurped God’s role in determining what is “good.”⁷

The forbidden tree may indeed have been “good for food,” objectively, but Eve did not make a statement concerning the tree’s objective goodness. She willed submission to the serpent in her heart, believing him over God. As Mathews points out, the double-meaning from her heart is that the fruit which she previously viewed as forbidden, she now viewed as permissible; the fruit which was previously viewed as immoral she now viewed as morally appealing.

Likewise, C. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in Creve Coeur, Missouri, notes,

In 3:6, as she regards the tree and sees that it is “good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable for giving insight,” the irony of the parallel with 2:9 (there was already “every tree desirable to the sight and good for food” in the garden) should not escape us. She already had everything she could possibly want, and she even had the resources to get everything she thought the tree had to offer. Hence now she is clearly under the sway of the serpent’s deception.⁸

⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 238.

⁷ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 237-38.

⁸ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 172; similarly, 151-52.

Because of God's perfect creation, Collins points out that Eve already had everything she could possibly want in the Garden. And not only that, she also had the resources in the Garden to get everything she thought the forbidden tree had to offer. Therefore, the inner explanation taking place in Genesis 3:6 was Eve trying to justify in her heart what she was about to do with her mouth. The fruit had not changed, Eve had; she had fallen from being "very good" (Gen 1:31) in her heart.

Genesis 3:6b. Then Moses wrote, "And that it was a delight to the eyes." Not only was the tree beautiful and morally appealing to Eve, she also delighted in it. The Hebrew word translated "delight" in the ESV is תָּאַוָּה (taavah), which means "pleasant."⁹ Eve went from not viewing the forbidden tree as pleasant to viewing it as pleasant. She went from not desiring the forbidden tree to desiring it. Such desire did not come from God, his goodness, the objective goodness he endowed in the forbidden tree, or the goodness derived from him within Eve. H. C. Leupold, the late professor of Old Testament Exegesis at Capital University Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, helpfully noted,

A closer contemplation of the tree in the light of the Satanic suggestion leads Eve to notice first something purely physical: "the tree was good for food." This is its appeal to the appetite. Here some commentators rightly sense that aspect of sin which (I John 2:16) is called "lust of the flesh." For, in reality, all aspects of sin lie embodied in this first transgression. Every part of the being of the first mother was drawn into the destructive vortex of the participation in sin. Then follows, introduced by a kind of polysyndeton (*wekhi* = "and that"), to make the separate parts of the temptation as they were felt one by one to stand out more prominently, the statement: "it was attractive to the eye." The aesthetic finds itself appealed to, or better, as again I John 2:16 has it, it was the "lust of the eyes" that here became operative. This was not a clean and holy perceiving but an unholy lusting.¹⁰

Leupold explained that Eve's contemplation of the tree was due to Satan's suggestion. She viewed the tree in a different "light" now than she did prior to their conversation. It

⁹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 136.

¹⁰ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis: Chapters 1-19*, Leupold on the Old Testament 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), 151-52.

was not an objective light or a neutral light, but her willed “lust of the eyes” “became operative.” Eve was created good by God, perfectly and humanly moral. But, this sinful desire, concupiscence, was willed by Eve, created by Eve, as a result of submitting to her new father, the Devil.

Genesis 3:6c. Then, Eve thought, “the tree was to be desired to make one wise.” Not only did Eve now see the tree as good and pleasant in a self-justifying, not an objective way, she also desired it for its potential to make her “wise.” She coveted the forbidden tree for its wisdom. Allen Ross, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama, notes that “the words *ta’āwâ* (“pleasant”) and *nehmād* (“desirable”) are cognates to the Hebrew verbs translated “covet” in the Ten Commandments; both verbs are used in Deuteronomy 5:21, but only the second occurs in Exodus 20:17.”¹¹ Moses wrote in Exodus 20:17, “You shall not covet” (*תָּהַمֹּד*; *tahmōd*),¹² and in Deuteronomy 5:21, “You shall not covet [*תָּהַמֹּד*; *tahmōd*] your neighbor’s wife. And you shall not desire [*תִּתְאַוֵּה*; *tit’awweh*] your neighbor’s house.”¹³ Coveting, many years later forbidden by God in the written law of the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:21), has its origin in the cautionary historical record of Eve’s coveting of the forbidden tree. God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden as a result of their covetous desires and actions, and before God’s people entered the Promised Land, God told them through Moses to not be covetous for what he forbids. Only if they were obedient, would they dwell forever in the Land he had given them (Deut 5:31-33).

¹¹ Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 136. Also see Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 75-76.

¹² H. Bardtke et al., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997), 119.

¹³ H. Bardtke et al., eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 295.

Genesis 3:6d. Finally, Eve acted on her concupiscence, “She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her.” Eve quickly moved from the self-justifying sinful desires of her heart to actions with her flesh. “She took,” she “ate,” she “gave.” As Mathews notes, “the text moves at a rapid pace.”¹⁴ The emphasis of the verbs is that Eve’s sinful desire lead to her sinful actions. The text’s implication is not that concupiscence or sinful desire always leads to sinful actions, but that in Eve, it did. The reason she willed the desire certainly lead to her following through with the desire, for she was already fallen in her heart by the time she ate of the forbidden tree with her mouth. She “ate” the fruit within her heart before she ate with her mouth.

Additionally, Eve went quickly from desiring the tree to becoming like her father the Devil. She went from bearing the image of God alone to corrupting that image by mirroring the serpent. And she even went from being tempted to becoming the tempter. Not only did she eat, but she gave to her husband and tempted him to eat as well.

Genesis 3:6e. Then, Adam followed the serpent and Eve, “And he ate.” Mathews notes,

Adam’s participation is rather understated in the account, given the attention it receives from God (3:17-19) and in later Jewish and Christian tradition. He simply followed the example of the woman without hesitation. There is no sense that Adam is lured by logic or sexual provocation. “For he would have never dared oppose God’s authority unless he had disbelieved God’s Word.” Was Adam privy to the conversation between Eve and the snake? Although “with her” does not in itself demand that he is present since the serpent speaks “to the woman,” nevertheless, the action of the verse implies that Adam is a witness to the dialogue. “You” at each place in 3:1-5 is plural and thus suggests his presence. However, there is no indication that he too is deceived by the serpent.¹⁵

Mathews helpfully points out that the “you” used in Genesis 3:1-5 is plural, and that the action of the verse implies that Adam is present with Eve for her entire conversation with the Devil. Instead of submitting to God, Adam chose to submit to his wife and the Devil.

¹⁴ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 238.

¹⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 238.

Later, the apostle Paul wrote that Eve was deceived but Adam knew full well what he was doing (1 Tim 2:14). He knew the serpent and Eve were wrong, but he willed the desire for the forbidden tree and fell into sin, fell from being “very good” (Gen 1:31).

Engaging Melinda Selmys

One objection to this exegesis of Genesis 3:6 comes from Melinda Selmys. She wrote a guest post at *Spiritual Friendship*, the website co-founded by Wesley Hill, discussing Genesis 3:6. Selmys refers to herself as “a Catholic in exile.”¹⁶ In an article titled “Still Looking to Desire,” she argues,

To understand the difference between concupiscent desire, and ordered desire, let’s follow John Paul II’s lead and return to the Beginning. I’d like to analyze [sic], specifically, Genesis 3:6: “The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was enticing for the wisdom that it could give.” Surely this is a case of disordered desire, right? Eve wants what she’s not supposed to have, and as a result of that desire, she sins.

Sed contra, Eve at this moment is still in a state of Original Innocence. She does not have concupiscence clouding her judgement. What she sees at the moment is objectively true: the fruit really is good to eat, it really is pleasing to the eye, and it really is desirable for the wisdom that it could give. What is false is her conclusion, that because of these properties, it is justifiable for her to take and eat what has been denied to her by God.¹⁷

Selmys misunderstands Genesis 3:6. First, Eve has concupiscence clouding her judgment because the inward desires of her heart are an attempt to justify the sin she is about to commit. She has believed the serpent rather than God. In order to have the desires she had in Genesis 3:6, she had to will the concupiscence or desires; or Selmys must argue that the desires for the forbidden tree are morally good, since they were created by God. Yet, Eve told the serpent God forbade the tree (Gen 3:2-3), the serpent then corrected her

¹⁶ The first line of Selmys’ bio at her website says, “Melinda Selmys is a Catholic-in-exile.” Melinda Selmys, “About,” *Catholic Authenticity {Amor Ipse Notitia Est}*, Accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/catholicauthenticity/about/>.

¹⁷ Melinda Selmys, “Still Looking to Desire,” *Spiritual Friendship*, March 17, 2014, <https://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/03/17/still-looking-to-desire/>.

(Gen 3:4-5), and she then self-justifies in her heart why she is about to eat of the forbidden tree (Gen 3:6).

Second, Eve's desires for the tree were not desires for what is "objectively true." Selmys is correct that God created the forbidden tree as good, but Eve went from saying that God even forbade her and Adam from touching the tree (Gen 3:3) to justifying her sinful desires for the tree as "good," "pleasant," and as the pursuit of "wisdom." In other words, it was the serpent who encouraged Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, not the tree's objective beauty. Eve desired the forbidden tree precisely because she believed the serpent instead of God. Moses even used the same word, "good," for God's description of his creation (Gen 1:31) and Eve's description in her heart of the forbidden tree (Gen 3:6). She made a moral declaration in her heart that went against God's command that the tree was forbidden. The forbidden tree was good because God made it, but it was *not* morally good for Adam and Eve, for God told them it was forbidden. Eve was not God, but she wanted to be God, and she wanted to be like the serpent.

Selmys then takes this hermeneutic and applies it to her same-sex attraction:

When I look at a woman, and see that she is beautiful, that she is desirable, that she is enticing, I'm seeing something that is objectively true: she is objectively a manifestation of the imago dei, she is objectively attractive, and it is objectively legitimate for me to desire to be united with her in the vast communio personarum which is constituted by the Church and by the whole human race.¹⁸

First, the reader should be surprised that Selmys wants to be like Eve as described in Genesis 3:6. Both Eve (Gen 3:13) and the apostle Paul (1 Tim 2:14) said that Eve was deceived by the Devil. Nowhere in Scripture is Eve's desire for the forbidden tree put in a positive light, only negative. Furthermore, God through Moses used two cognates of the same words used to describe Eve's sinful desire in Genesis 3:6, "pleasant" and "desirable," in the Tenth Commandment for "covet" and "desire" (Deut 5:21). At the

¹⁸ Selmys, "Still Looking to Desire," <https://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/03/17/still-looking-to-desire/>.

very least, the reader must admit that Eve's desire for the tree was not morally good. Therefore, Selmys' desire, if it is like Eve's, cannot be morally good either.

Second, Selmys' description is faulty because Eve did not desire something "objectively beautiful." Eve desired sin, and Selmys is not desiring women in an objective way either. Unless Selmys views these "objectively beautiful women" as her sisters or mother (1 Tim 5:2), like Jesus views every woman, she views them sinfully. The fact that she refers to this woman as "beautiful," "desirable," and "enticing," is shocking. She is using the words that Moses used to describe Eve's sinful desire which quickly lead to her sin, Adam's sin, and the death and curse of all creation. All that is wrong with the world can be traced back to Genesis 3:6, and Selmys wants to use Eve as a positive example for sublimating her same-sex attraction for good? God has forbidden same-sex attraction by creating heterosexual attraction in the pre-fall Garden of Eden, when he made Eve for Adam and not another Adam for Adam (Gen 2:20-25).

Third, it is immoral to desire the unity God provides in the Eucharist because one is same-sex attracted to an individual. Sexual attraction should be irrelevant when desiring to be united with one's brothers and sisters in Christ through partaking of the Lord's Supper together. There is not a shred of biblical proof that goes along with what Selmys argues here.

Selmys then contends that she can take these "objective desires" and turn them to good things:

My desire is not disordered in and of itself: it becomes disordered when I direct it, or allow it to [sic] direct itself, towards something which is forbidden. If it leads me to fantasize about homosexual acts, or to think of the woman as a sex object, then it becomes disordered, that is ordered towards an end which is not in conformity with Truth and with the dignity of the person. But what if I make the act of will to redirect that desire, to use it as an opportunity to give glory to God for the beauty which He has made manifest in that particular woman? Or to meditate on my desire for the one-flesh union of the entire humanum in the Eucharist where there is neither Gentile nor Jew, slave nor free, woman nor man? Or as an opportunity to contemplate the relationship between the doctrines of the Communion of Saints and

of the resurrection of the Body? What if, by an act of will, I take that desire and order it towards its proper end: towards the Good, the Beautiful and the True?¹⁹

God forbade Eve from eating of the tree “in the midst of the Garden” (Gen 3:3). She could not redirect her desire for the forbidden tree to something else, for then it would be a desire for something holy. Eve did not desire good food, pretty trees, and wisdom. If she desired these things, she would have enjoyed the trees God had already given her. Eve desired the forbidden tree. She believed the serpent instead of God. If Selmys desired to unite with other Christians in the Eucharist due to viewing them as God’s image-bearers, she would not care about their sex since all males and females are equally God’s image-bearers (Gen 1:26-28). Choosing to unite with a sister in Christ because she looks “beautiful,” “desirable,” and “enticing,” is not holy and can never be a holy desire. Selmys’ desire is not an objectively good desire that needs to be redirected; it is a sinful desire that needs to be repented of.

Matthew 5:27-30

Exegesis: Context

Another popular text to consider concerning the truth that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians, is Matthew 5:27-30. In part of his “Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus preached,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

The context for Matthew 5:27-30 is Jesus’ statements in his “Sermon on the Mount” where he corrected the teachings of the Pharisees. His goal was not to abolish the law, or correct the law, but to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17-20). Donald Hagner, the George Eldon

¹⁹ Selmys, “Still Looking to Desire,” <https://spiritualfriendship.org/2014/03/17/still-looking-to-desire/>.

Ladd Professor Emeritus and Senior Professor of New Testament at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, notes,

Since in 5:21–48 Jesus defines righteousness by expounding the true meaning of the law as opposed to wrong or shallow understandings, it is best to understand $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\sigma\alpha$ here as “fulfill” in the sense of “bring to its intended meaning”—that is, to present a definitive interpretation of the law, something now possible because of the presence of the Messiah and his kingdom. Far from destroying the law, Jesus’ teachings—despite their occasionally strange sound—penetrate to the divinely intended (i.e., the teleological) meaning of the law. Because the law and the prophets pointed to him and he is their goal, he is able now to reveal their true meaning and so to bring them to “fulfillment.”²⁰

Hagner argues that Jesus came to rightly interpret the law, to fulfill the law. Each of Jesus’ statements, “You have heard it said. . . , but I say to you. . . ” (Matt 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34) refers to false interpretations of the law, not the law itself. The law is good (Matt 5:17-20). None of the law will pass away until “all is accomplished” (Matt 5:18).

As Hagner notes, Jesus is the goal of the law. He continues,

Jesus’ words stress that the law is to be preserved not as punctiliously interpreted and observed by the Pharisees (although the language apart from the context could suggest such a perspective) but as definitively interpreted by Jesus the Messiah. That is, to follow the authoritative teaching of Jesus is to be faithful to the whole meaning of the law. Figuratively speaking, it is to uphold every “jot and tittle.”²¹

Hagner reasons that Christ fulfills the law through teaching it correctly. Yet, he also points out that in order for Jesus’ hearers to follow his perfect teaching of the law, they must uphold the law perfectly, every “jot and tittle.” This implies that Christ also lives the whole law’s precepts perfectly in heart and deed, making him the telos of the law, which serves as the basis for his disciples to heed his teaching. David Turner, Emeritus Professor of New Testament at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, argues, “Christology is the foundation of ethics. Jesus, the one to whom the

²⁰ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 106.

²¹ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 106.

law points, emphasizes the higher righteousness that is the true ethical intent of the law and that enables the disciples to enter the kingdom.”²² Jesus’ righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Pharisees, and his disciples’ righteousness must as well, if they are to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:19-20). Christ’s ultimate point is not that his disciples can exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees apart from him, but that he has, is, and will exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees. And if his hearers are his disciples, they must reject the Pharisees’ teachings and embrace him and his teachings instead.

Exegesis: Comments

Matthew 5:27. In Matthew 5:27, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” Jesus began his discussion of the sin of adultery by quoting the Seventh Commandment from Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18 in order to rebuke a Pharisaical teaching that only the outward action of adultery is sin, not the inward intent to lust. The purpose of the law was not only to forbid the act of sin but also the inward desire to sin as is evident from the Tenth Commandment, “You shall not covet” (Ex 20:17). Jesus rebuked the Pharisees’ teaching, not the law as given by God.

Matthew 5:28a. Then Jesus said, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent.” He claimed authority that is greater than the greatest teachers among the Pharisees. Jesus rebuked any form of lustful intent here. William Perkins, a Puritan whom Joel Beeke, President and Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, calls the “principle architect of the Puritan movement,”²³ argued that in this statement Jesus

²² David L. Turner, *Matthew*, of *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 164.

²³ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 473.

forbade the “motion and inward inclination of the heart unto this sin.”²⁴ Sexual attraction for someone other than one’s wife is rebuked here. Sexual attraction’s telos is sexual activity; that is the goal of the attraction, as is evident from God’s original design of heterosexual attraction in Adam and Eve before the fall (Gen 2:20-25). Sexual attraction was designed by God in the Garden to be person-specific, for spouses, and relationship-specific, for marriage. Any sexual attraction outside of attraction for one’s spouse is “lustful intent.” After all, what is the intent of sexual attraction for one’s wife? Sex. What is the intention of sexual attraction to any person? Sex. One cannot be sexually attracted to a person and not have intent for sex with that person; that is what sexual attraction is, “sexual” “attraction.” Calvin noted,

The design of Christ was to condemn generally the lust of the flesh. He says, that not only those who have seduced their neighbors’ wives, but those who have polluted their eyes by an immodest look, are adulterers before God. This is a *synecdoche*: for not only the eyes, but even the concealed flames of the heart, render men guilty of adultery. Accordingly, Paul makes chastity (1 Corinthians 7:34) to consist both in body and in mind. But Christ reckoned it enough to refute the gross mistake which was prevalent: for they thought that it was only necessary to guard against outward adultery. As it is generally by the wantonness of the eyes that temptations are presented to the mind, and as lust enters, as it were, by that door, Christ used this mode of speaking, when he wished to condemn lust: which is evident from the expression, *to lust after her*. This teaches us also, that not only those who form a deliberate purpose of fornication, but those who admit any polluted thoughts, are reckoned adulterers before God. The hypocrisy of the Papists, therefore, is too gross and stupid, when they affirm that lust is not a sin, until it gain the full consent of the heart. But we need not wonder, that they make sin to be so small a matter: for those who ascribe righteousness to the merit of works must be very dull and stupid in judging of their sins.²⁵

Calvin pitted the Papists against the Protestants in his interpretation of Christ’s words in Matthew 5:27-28. Not mere outward lust is condemned, but lust of the heart and all that it entails, including any “polluted thoughts.” Jesus claimed to fulfill the law, and implied

²⁴ William Perkins, *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Ministry of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, M. W. Perkins, the third and last volume* (London: John Haviland, 1631), 54.

²⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 290-91.

that his righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the Pharisees, in both heart and deed. With no sinful inclination, Christ fulfilled the law even in his inclinations.

At this point, some may reply, “Surely Jesus was sexually attracted to women.” Yet, one must understand that in the Garden of Eden, Adam was not attracted to women, only to Eve, and vice versa concerning Eve’s attraction to Adam. And Jesus was created holy and sinless like Adam (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 1:18-19, 2:22; 1 John 3:5). There was only one woman formed from Adam’s side, and that was who he was sexually attracted to (Gen 2:20-25). Concerning Eve, her original human source for life was Adam alone, not men plural. Her sexual attraction followed God’s design of her from Adam, for Adam. God brought Eve to Adam for marriage; God did not bring any other woman to Adam. In a similar manner, there is only one bride of Christ that the Father has brought to the Son. The Son has no sexual desire for this bride since sexual attraction served to point to the greater fulfillment of the Son’s eternal marriage to his bride, the church (Eph 5:22-33). It is not that Jesus is without the capacity for heterosexual attraction, but rather, that the Father did not bring the Son a female bride for marriage, like he did for Adam. Instead, in order to fulfill his original design for marriage, the Father brought the Son a perfect, holy bride who was born out of his Son’s bloody side, and he united her to him eternally. Interestingly, the Greek word used for Adam’s “rib” in the Septuagint, “πλευρόν” (Gen 2:21),²⁶ is the same word used for Christ’s “side” in the Greek New Testament, “πλευρὰν” (John 19:34).²⁷ Christ’s side was pierced with a spear to make sure he was dead on the cross, and blood and water, two of the most essential elements needed

²⁶ Alan England Brooke and Norman McLean, eds., *The Old Testament in Greek: According to the Text of Codex Vaticanus, Supplemented from Other Uncial Manuscripts, with a Critical Apparatus Containing the Variants of the Chief Ancient Authorities for the Text of the Septuagint*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5.

²⁷ Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 370.

to bring life, flowed from the wound. Temporal life came from Adam's side to his bride, and eternal life flowed from Christ's side to his bride.

Returning to the words "with lustful intent," they must be understood on the backdrop of Christ being the goal of the law. His standard is not the false teaching of the Pharisees but perfect obedience to God's law. Christ did not rebuke the Pharisees by saying that only volitional lust is adultery. Rather, he said that any form of lust is adultery. Is a lustful look, whether of inclination or volition, ever obedient to the law? If the answer is "yes," then Jesus over-fulfilled the law, or he experienced lustful inclinations. The first assumption goes against Jesus' own statements that he came, not to add to the law, but to fulfill the law, and the latter is blasphemy. Jesus is the standard of perfection for how one defines "fulfilling the law," not man's discernment of whether he has "chosen" or "unchosen" desires that are contrary to the law. In other words, Jesus gave a standard that only he could fulfill in both teaching and obedient inclination, thought, and deed.

Matthew 5:28b. Then, Jesus contended that a man with lustful intent toward a woman "has already committed adultery with her in his heart." He rebuked his hearers, for what exactly is the intent of sexual attraction to someone other than one's spouse? Is the answer "to fulfill the law," or "to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees"? If that sexual desire was carried to its consistent end, it would lead to sexual immorality or adultery. Its telos is sexual activity with its object of desire. If the object of desire for a sexual thought is God's glory through fulfilling the law, it is not sinful; however, one cannot have a sexual attraction to someone other than one's spouse and argue that the sexual attraction's goal is God's glory.

Obviously, looking at a woman is not sin. But, to look at a woman who is not one's wife with sexual desire in one's heart is morally culpable sin. Turner writes,

By stressing the lustful intention over the act itself, Jesus apparently interprets the seventh commandment by the tenth commandment, which forbids coveting in

general and specifically coveting one's neighbor's wife. But Matt. 5:28 is speaking of women in general, not just married women. Second Temple writings warned men of the dangers of women (e.g., Sir. 25:21; 26:9; Ps. Sol. 16.7–8; Josephus *J.W.* 2.121; *Ant.* 7.130), but Jesus puts the onus on men.²⁸

As shown earlier, the word "covet" is first used to describe Eve's desire for the forbidden tree. Jesus, contrary to Adam and Eve, had no desire for what God forbade; only he fulfilled the law perfectly through teaching and being obedient with his desires and actions. Turner shows that Christ demanded that his male hearers not desire any woman sexually they are not married to.

Also, Jesus quoted the command against adultery, the action, and then argued against adultery in one's heart. Is one to believe that there is a part of the heart, the sinful inclination for adultery, that is not morally culpable for adultery? Moreover, Jesus went from the greater to the lesser, the action to the inward lust. Is one to believe that planning to lust (the greater) to the inclination to lust (the lesser) is not sin? By condemning "lustful intent," Christ condemned the lustful intent of the flesh, including the lustful inclination of the flesh. Richard C. H. Lenski, late professor of theology in the early 1900s at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, argued,

The present participle *βλέπων* characterizes the man by his act of continued looking. The construction *πρὸς τὸ* with the infinitive denotes purpose (not result), it is somewhat like our phrase, "with a view to," etc. (R. 1003, 1075); the aorist infinitive is effective, referring to accomplished lusting; verbs of desire govern the genitive. Jesus does not say that by the accomplished lusting or by and during the act of looking at the woman the man in question commits adultery. The aorist *ἐμοίχευσεν*, with *ἥδη* emphasizing the feature of the time, precedes these acts. The man who casts lustful looks is an adulterer to begin with. The sin is already "in his heart" and only comes out in his lustful look. If the heart were pure, without adultery, no lustful look would be possible. Hence Jesus does not state how the guilty man can free himself of the sin as did the man mentioned in v. 23, 24. The man's very heart and nature must be so changed by divine grace that lustful looks will become impossible for him.²⁹

²⁸ Turner, *Matthew*, 170.

²⁹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), 226. Also see Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Frederick Crombie and William Stewart, trans. Peter Christie (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), 130.

Lenski correctly argued that the man who looks with lustful intent at a woman he is not married to is merely showing the condition of his heart. Christ did not tell his hearers that they can fulfill the law if they will rebuke inclination that is contrary to the law; he told them that they cannot fulfill the law because one's entire heart, including its inclinations, must be morally pure. As Lenski taught, only by divine grace through Jesus Christ can his disciples be made morally pure.

Matthew 5:29-30. Finally, Jesus emphasized his point, by arguing, “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” To make himself even more clear, Christ hyperbolically referred to eliminating the source of lustful intent. He did not refer to cutting off one’s head, where “planning to commit adultery” takes place, or one’s genitals, but one’s right eye and right hand. Which, again, is a move from the action to the cause of the action. He spoke of cutting out one’s right eye, the best eye, the source of the lustful intent, of an evil lustful gaze. Then, he referenced the right hand, the best hand.³⁰ Christ may also reference the right hand because it carries out the lust, possibly a reference to masturbation according to Craig Keener.³¹

Understanding these verses concerning rebuking the inward sinful inclination or temptation is even clearer in a similar passage in Matthew 18:7-9:

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal

³⁰ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 120-21.

³¹ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 188.

fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

Matthew tied the command against temptation directly to tempting oneself. Jesus' disciples should reject the world's temptations. And the world should take heed, fearing God's wrath before they seek to tempt Jesus' disciples. However, it is not merely the world that Christians should fear but their own sinful temptations that stem from their flesh. Turner argues,

Failure to deal radically with sinful proclivities indicates that one is in danger of punishment in hellfire (cf. 3:10–12; 5:22; 25:41). As grotesque as these images of amputation and gouging are, the prospect of eternal punishment is far worse. This language is hypothetical as well as hyperbolic (cf. 5:29–30). Ridding oneself of one's hands, feet, and eyes would not reach the root of sin, the heart (15:18–20). The point is, rather, that one must deal radically with one's sinful tendencies (cf. Prov. 4:23–27; Rom. 13:11–14).³²

Turner is right about Christ's point being that one must deal radically with his sinful tendencies. Christ's hyperbolic response to inward temptation is drastic, but no more radical than his warning to the man that tempts his disciples: "It would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6). Whether temptation comes from within or from without, Christ's followers must reject it in a radical way for the sake of rejecting hell as well. Hagner helpfully argues,

Because of the importance of obeying God's standard of righteousness, radical action should be taken to avoid the cause of the temptation. The discipleship of the kingdom sometimes requires drastic measures. The literal plucking out of an eye or cutting off of a hand, however, will not at all necessarily rid one of the problem. The culprit lies elsewhere, in the heart, the inner person. This is the language of hyperbole (contra Gundry) used to make a significant point.³³

Christ is serious about temptations, whether they come from the world or the flesh of believers. As Hagner notes, Christ demanded an exaggerated drastic response—drown the tempter or cut off the flesh that tempts. His point is not literal since no disciple cut out

³² Turner, *Matthew*, 438.

³³ Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 121.

his eye or cut off his hand in response to Christ's sermon. Rather, as Hagner mentions, he rebuked his hearers' passive justification of the source of temptation to evil. By only declaring the outward act as adulterous, the Pharisees were passively declaring that lustful intent in one's heart fulfills the requirement of God in his law. In a similar manner, those who argue that only chosen lustful thoughts are adulterous, are passively declaring that unchosen lustful thoughts fulfill the law, exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, and imitate Christ, since he is the goal of the law.

Engaging Matthew Lee Anderson

One objection to the above exegesis of Matthew 5:27-30 comes from Matthew Lee Anderson. Anderson recently received his PhD from Oxford University in Christian Ethics and is on the Advisory Council of Revoice. Revoice's mission statement is, "To support and encourage gay, lesbian, bisexual, and other same-sex attracted Christians—as well as those who love them—so that all in the Church might be empowered to live in gospel unity while observing the historic Christian doctrine of marriage and sexuality."³⁴ In an article titled "Sex, Temptation, and the Gay Christian: What Chastity Demands," Anderson responds to Denny Burk's understanding of Matthew 5:27-28, arguing,

On Burk's reading, allowing the purpose clause ("to lust for her") to govern the moral analysis, so that culpability is attached to intentions and not the desire, is a "false conclusion." Instead, Jesus's connects the prohibition on adultery to the prohibition on coveting. Because the "tenth commandment prohibits not merely *intentional* desire for adultery, but *all* desire for adultery," regardless of whether it is voluntary or not, Jesus does too. The "sinfulness of a desire is determined solely by its conformity or lack of conformity to the law of God."

But this is an exegetical parlor trick: Burk doesn't explain the purpose clause of Matthew 5, so much as explain it away. One wonders why Jesus saw fit to include it, since Burk has shown it to be superfluous. As Robert Gagnon noted in their discussion at ETS, though, translating the phrase "with desire" is a "bad translation." One need only keep reading Matthew's gospel to find out why. In Matthew 6:1, a mere 20 verses away, Jesus exhorts us to "beware of practicing your righteousness before other people *in order to* be seen by them." The Greek

³⁴ Revoice, "Our Mission and Vision," *Revoice*, Accessed August 8, 2019, <https://revoice.us/about/our-mission-and-vision/>.

construction is *identical* to 5:28. Yet Burk's reading asks us to believe Matthew uses it in a way that is irrelevant to the meaning in the first instance, while it governs the meaning of the sentence immediately after. (Or are we supposed to read the second verse as suggesting that we are not to practice righteousness while being seen by others?) Burk already grants that Jesus is doing constructive exegesis of the Decalogue in Matthew 5:27-28, creating an amalgam of two verses. But why not also allow that Jesus's exegetical interpretation of the law introduces distinctions in the nature and grounds of moral culpability?³⁵

First, the reason why Jesus included "the purpose clause" of "with lustful intent" was to properly teach the law and to show how he fulfilled the law. Jesus neither had lustful inclination nor lustful thought or action. He looked at all women as his sisters, neither as objects of lust, nor as potential spouses. Jesus did not teach that the law required something less than his own holiness. Rather, he preached full obedience to the law in both heart and action. In summary, Christ distinguished looking at a sister from looking at a woman with lustful intent in Matthew 5:27-30.

Second, Anderson uses a false equivalency fallacy to bolster his point. He is right that the purpose clause has a purpose, but he misconstrues the similarity between Matthew 5:27-28 and Matthew 6:1. In Matthew 5:27-28 lust is condemned, but in Matthew 6:1, practicing one's righteousness before others is condemned. If one takes "before others," away from "practicing one's righteousness," one fulfills the law. Christ's disciples should practice righteousness. However, if one takes "lustful intent" from Matthew 5:28, Anderson argues one is left with sexual attraction to someone other than one's spouse, which he believes is not immoral; but surely he cannot say that sexual attraction for someone other than one's spouse fulfills the law? These two texts do not correspond the way Anderson thinks they do. He removes the sin from Jesus' command

³⁵ Matthew Lee Anderson, "Sex, Temptation, and the Gay Christian: What Chastity Demands," *Mere Orthodoxy*, June 20, 2018, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/sex-temptation-gay-christian-chastity-demands/>. The quote that Anderson references is from when Gagnon argued, "And with regard for the text in Matthew 5, it is, the text doesn't say, 'If you look at a woman with desire.' That's not what the text means. The use here is pros ($\pi\tau\circ\zeta$), the preposition pros with an infinitive, which almost always is purposeful. Okay, with the intent to desire here. Purposeful intentionality is indeed part of that text. The translation 'with desire' is a bad translation. Okay, it does not bring out the purpose connotation of the preposition pros with an infinitive." Robert Gagnon, "Panel Discussion, Robert Gagnon, Heath Lambert, Denny Burk, (18:42) - (19:28).

to not practice one's righteousness before others, asking instead, 'Are we "not to practice righteousness while being seen by others?"' Yet, Jesus did not rebuke practicing righteousness; he rebuked practicing one's righteousness before others. Furthermore, like His command in Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus did not merely rebuke "practicing one's righteousness before others," he rebuked any inclination or desire to as well. It should go without saying that Jesus was not rebuking practicing one's righteousness while being seen by others since Jesus was seen by others as he practiced his righteousness.

Third, by Jesus claiming that he came to fulfill the law and that his hearers must be more righteous than the Pharisees, he presented himself as the standard for the "nature and grounds of moral culpability" to the law. Does Jesus have any inclination of lustful intent or any inclination to practice his righteousness before the Pharisees? Of course not. He fulfilled the law in both his teaching and in his righteousness. He is the telos of the law. Therefore, his hearers, in order to fulfill the law like him, must not have any lustful inclinations either.

Romans 1:24-27

Exegesis: Context

Another popular passage that teaches concupiscence is always morally culpable sin is Romans 1:24-27. The apostle Paul wrote,

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

The apostle Paul in Romans 1:18-23 writes against the pagans who knew God's eternal power and divine nature through observing his creation, but they suppressed this truth and worshipped idols instead of the only true God. As a result, God "gave them up" to their sinful desires.

Exegesis: Comments

Romans 1:24a. Following Romans 1:18-23, Paul argued, “Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.” Due to their rejection of him and their worship of false gods, God gave up men to the lusts of their hearts. Douglas Moo, Kenneth T. Wessner Professor of New Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, writes,

The "therefore" at the beginning of this verse shows that God's "handing over" of human beings is his response to their culpable rejection of the knowledge of himself that he has made generally available (vv. 21-23). Paul's use of the verb "hand over" to describe this retribution has its roots in the OT, where it is regularly used in the stereotyped formula according to which God "hands over" Israel's enemies so that they may be defeated in battle. And, in an ironic role reversal, the same formula is used when God hands his own people over to another nation as punishment for their sins. Somewhat similarly, Paul here alleges that God has "handed over" people to "uncleanness."³⁶

Moo argues that the reason why God gave these pagans over to uncleanness was due to their morally culpable rejection of the knowledge of him that he gave them through his common grace. By “giving them up,” Paul means that God actively handed them over to fulfill their evil desires. He handed them over to what they desired. Moo notes that “the meaning of ‘hand over’ demands that we give God a more active role as the initiator of the process. God does not simply let the boat go — he gives it a push downstream. Like a judge who hands over a prisoner to the punishment his crime has earned, God hands over the sinner to the terrible cycle of ever-increasing sin.”³⁷ The lusts of their hearts, not God’s handing them over, lead to their impurity. And in this way, their impurity is not only sin but God’s judgment upon their sin. John Murray, a late Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, argued,

That to which they were given up is defined as “uncleanness” (cf. vss. 26, 28). But the uncleanness to which they were given up did not take its origin from the judicial act. The giving up to uncleanness presupposes the existence of the uncleanness, and

³⁶ Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, of *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 110.

³⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 111.

the penalty consists in the fact that they were given over to the uncleanness which previously characterized them and is referred to as “the lusts of their hearts”.³⁸

These desires or “the lusts of their hearts” were contrary to God’s design for purity as given in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:20-25—desire that carried out God’s design for husband and wife to become one flesh in marriage. Murray helpfully noted that God was not responsible for giving these men over to evil acts because they alone were responsible for desiring these evil acts. After all, Paul used the term “lusts” ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota\theta\upsilon\mu\iota\alpha\varsigma$) to describe their wicked impulses.³⁹ Gagnon argues,

Paul usually uses *epithymia* in a negative sense to refer to the desires of the sinful impulse operating in the Spirit-less flesh of human existence (Rom 6:12; 13:14; Gal 5:16-24; cf. Eph 2:3; 4:22). Like other Jews, Paul could summarize the Mosaic law with the opening phrase of the tenth commandment "You shall not desire/covet," from which commandment "sin produced in me every kind of desire" for forbidden things (Rom 7:7-8; 13:9; cf. 4 Mace 2:6; L.A.E. 19:3; Philo, Decal. 142-43, 173; Spec. Laws 4.84-94; Jas 1:14-15; 4:2). Thus sinful *epithymia* was by no means restricted for Paul to unbridled or illicit forms of *sexual* desire, though manifestations of such consistently stand first or second in Pauline vice lists and obviously are foremost in Paul's mind here in Rom 1:24-27. It is important to be clear that the negative valence for *epithymia* is mandated by the context, not by the inherent meaning of the word in Paul. Elsewhere, Paul could refer to *epithymia* in a positive sense (e.g., Paul's "intense desire" to be reunited with the Thessalonian converts [1 Thess 2:17; 3:2] or his "desire to depart and to be with Christ" [Phil 1:23]). Desire becomes a problem only when people are "desirers of evil things," such as idolatry and sexual immorality (1 Cor 10:6; cf. Col 3:5). The context for Rom 1:24 rules out any possibility that the term is to be taken in a morally neutral sense (*contra* Countryman).⁴⁰

Gagnon notes that Paul’s understanding of the Tenth Commandment was, “You shall not desire/covet” (Rom 7:7-8, 13:9). Desire and covet are one and the same in the Tenth Commandment according to Paul. When he used *epithymia*s ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\iota\theta\upsilon\mu\iota\alpha\varsigma$) in this negative context, it pointed to his rebuke, not only of the idolatrous actions of the pagans but of their sinful impulses as well. Their sinful impulses cannot be parsed out of Paul’s

³⁸ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, of *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 44.

³⁹ Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 482.

⁴⁰ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 232.

description of their morally culpable sin and God's resulting judgment of handing them over to their evil desires.

Romans 1:24b. Paul continued, that God gave them up “to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.” What were the lusts of their hearts? God permitted them to dishonor their bodies among themselves. They used their bodies for something other than God’s original design as evident in Genesis 2:20-25 when God made woman for man because there was no other created thing fit for him. God took a rib from Adam’s body and made Eve, but then brought Eve back to Adam for the two to become one flesh. To go against God’s design for human sexuality, as detailed in the Garden of Eden, is to dishonor one’s body. God designed sexual activity, including the male and female genitals, for heterosexual marital sex.

Romans 1:25a. Then Paul explained why God gave them up, “because they exchanged the truth about God for a [the] lie.” God gave the men over to dishonor their bodies because they exchanged the truth of God for the lie. Leon Morris, a late Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, argued,

Most versions read “a lie” (NIV, KJV, RSV, etc.), but Paul uses the definite article. He is not thinking of idolatry as no more than one falsehood among many. It is *the* lie. Elsewhere he speaks of “putting away the lie” and “speak[ing] truth” (Eph. 4:25); again he speaks of some who “will believe the lie” (2 Thess. 2:11). In each case, as here, he is contrasting the lie with the truth. He does not see heathen religion as a partial truth. It is the lie that leads people away from the truth of God. The true God stands in contrast with idols (1 Thess. 1:9). To exchange the worship of God for the lie is the final disaster.⁴¹

Morris noted the “black and white” nature of Paul’s emphasis. There is no middle ground between God and paganism. Since the telos of paganism is always aimed away from God towards false gods, it is always devoid of truth. All truth is God’s truth, but for truth to serve God it must be directed toward God away from false gods. As detailed in Romans

⁴¹ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 90.

1:18-23, mankind worshipped false gods, which often included sex acts with temple priests and prostitutes. They exchanged “the truth God had made known” of himself through creation for the lie of false gods and the perverse doctrines that their false religions espoused.⁴²

Romans 1:25b. Paul wrote that they embraced a lie. Then, he continued, “And worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” Instead of worshipping the true God, Yahweh, mankind worshipped fictional gods of their own making. They served the creature, taking that which is given by God—man’s intellect, his flesh, trees, tools, etc.—and used them to create gods to worship. These idols were temporary, brought into existence by man and destroyed or forgotten by the passing of generations and societies. But the true God, the triune God of Scripture, is blessed forever. Paul expected the church at Rome to agree, for he wrote, “Amen,” much like a preacher seeking agreement to a point he has made from the pulpit.

Romans 1:26a. Then, Paul argued, “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions.” Because these pagans bowed to the creature rather than the Creator, God gave them up to dishonorable “passions” ($\pi\acute{a}\theta\eta$). Gagnon argues,

The word *pathos*, "passion," appears elsewhere in the NT only in 1 Thess 4:5 and Col 3:5. In the former, men should select wives primarily with a view to their holy character, not "in the passion of lust" (*en pathei epithymias*), that is, not out of an all-consuming and blind desire for physical beauty. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, defined *pathos* as "an irrational and unnatural (*para phys in*) movement of the soul or an impulse in excess" (Diogenes Laertius 7.110). While not an exclusively negative term (note the qualifier "of dishonor"), it tends to convey something more than mere emotion: an intense, and thus potentially overpowering, impulse to act in a manner contrary to right reason and nature. Plato refers to "erotic passion" as a "madness" of sorts that causes one to be "led away" (Phaedr. 265B; cf. Jewett). Greco-Roman moral philosophy centered around the control of improper passion.⁴³

⁴² Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 45-46.

⁴³ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 235.

As part of the judgment for their false worship, God gave them up to fulfill their hearts' "intense impulses" to dishonor his design of them, as Gagnon notes. With every sexual passion that is contrary to God's design, they dishonored God's telos for them as being made in His image for the purpose of reflecting him and for fulfilling his design of them.

Romans 1:26b. Next, Paul gave evidence that God had given them over to their concupiscence, "For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature." By listing the women's homosexual sin first, Paul may be indicating his surprise.⁴⁴ Schreiner notes the transition from unnatural worship (idol worship) to unnatural sexual relations (sexual relations contrary to God's design):

Why does Paul focus on homosexual relations, especially since it receives little attention elsewhere in his writings (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10)? Probably because it functions as a fitting illustration of that which is unnatural in the sexual sphere. Idolatry is *unnatural* in the sense that it is contrary to God's intention for human beings. Worshiping corruptible animals and human beings instead of the incorruptible God turns the created order upside down. In the sexual sphere the mirror image of this *unnatural* choice of idolatry is homosexuality (cf. Schlatter 1995:43; Hays 1986:191; du Toit 2007:286). Human beings were intended to have sexual relations in marriage with those of the opposite sex. Just as idolatry is a violation and perversion of what God intended, so too same-sex relations are contrary to what God planned when he created man and woman.⁴⁵

Schreiner helpfully argues that the pagans turned God's design upside down, first in worship, then in sexual relations. Just as worshipping the creature rather than the Creator turns God's intention for mankind's worship upside down, homosexuality turns God's intention for mankind's sexuality upside down. Women exchanged the natural, God-designed, sexual relations with men for the unnatural, not designed by God, sexual relations with women. Gagnon helpfully reasons, "Sexuality in Paul's understanding has its "function" or "use" in giving pleasure to a complementary sexual "other"; sex here is first and foremost self-giving rather than self-gratifying (cf. 1 Cor 7:3-5 with the pattern

⁴⁴ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 235-36.

⁴⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., of *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 102.

of self-emptying set forth in the "Christ hymn" in Phil 2:5-11).⁴⁶ Paul pointed to God's design of male and female genitals, how they are to "fit together" in the sex-act, for the sake of displaying God's design (nature) for sexual relations in biblical marriage—the two shall become one flesh (Gen 2:24). There is a self-giving reality in marriage that is displayed in the one-flesh sexual act of intercourse. Likewise, Moo argues,

In keeping with the biblical and Jewish worldview, the heterosexual desires observed normally in nature are traced to God's creative intent. Sexual sins that are "against nature" are also, then, against God, and it is this close association that makes it probable that Paul's appeal to "nature" in this verse includes appeal to God's created order. Confirmation can be found in the context. In labeling the turning from "the natural use" to "that [use] which is against nature" an "exchange," Paul associates homosexuality with the perversion of true knowledge of God already depicted in vv. 23 and 25.⁴⁷

Moo points out that by using "natural" and "against nature," Paul argued that God created heterosexual desires, but he did not create homosexual desires. Therefore, same-sex desires are contrary to nature, contrary to "true knowledge of God." Such unnatural inclinations must be rejected since they have no God-designed source or goal. The source of any same-sex inclinations is sin and their goal is sin.

Romans 1:27a. Then, Paul described the men, "And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women." Aegidius Hunnius, a post-Reformation Lutheran, Professor at the University of Marburg and the University of Wittenberg,⁴⁸ noted,

This is an exposition of those things that he had earlier begun to mention concerning the Gentiles' manner of life, which they horribly defiled in both sexes by the most evil sins, especially by lusts contrary to nature. This abominable uncleanness, he says, was not only the effect of idolatry but also its just punishment and wages; so that in this way, sins were being punished by sins. For, considered in themselves, these shameful acts are sins, in which respect they have Satan for their author. But they are also punishments, with respect to the preceding idolatry. Certainly God

⁴⁶ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 237.

⁴⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 115.

⁴⁸ Gerhard Bode, "Instruction of the Christian Faith by Lutherans after Luther," In *Lutheran Ecclesiastical Culture, 1550-1675*, ed. Robert Kolb (Boston: Brill, 2008), 178.

does not cause these sins in themselves, but by his just judgment he permits the Gentiles to tumble down into them with Satan pushing them.⁴⁹

Like the women exchanging the men, the men exchanged the women as well for unnatural relations. In this way, according to Hunnius, the men embraced both their sinful passions and the judgment of God. Schreiner also notes,

That homosexual relations are contrary to nature, in the sense that they violate what God intended, is communicated in saying that women abandoned “the natural use for that which is contrary to nature” (*τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν, tēn physikēn chrēsin eis tēn para physin*, v. 26; cf Ps.-Phoc. 192), and in saying that men “have left the natural use of women” (*ἀφέντες τὴν φυσικὴν χρῆσιν τῆς θηλείας, aphentes tēn physikēn chrēsin tēs thēleias*, v. 27).⁵⁰

Paul pointed to God’s design for men and women as what is “according to nature,” that is, according to how God has designed male and female bodies to come together in sex in marriage. As Schreiner argues, one cannot disconnect God’s design from the purpose of male and female sexual relations. Murray agreed, “As elsewhere in the apostle’s teaching (cf. 1 Cor. 7:1–7) the honourableness of the heterosexual act is implied and its propriety is grounded in the natural constitution established by God. The offence of homosexuality is the abandonment of the divinely constituted order in reference to sex.”⁵¹ Just as they abandoned the true God for false gods, they also abandoned God’s true design of their bodies and sexual relations for their own deceitful sinful impulses.

Romans 1:27b. The men gave up the women, Paul argued, “And were consumed with passion for one another.” These men left the women and were consumed with passion that was contrary to God’s design for one another. The Greek word

⁴⁹ Aegidius Hunnius, collating *Epistolae Divi Pauli*, 85, and *Thesaurus*, 21, quoted in *Romans 1-8*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 74.

⁵⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 102-3.

⁵¹ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 47-48.

translated “passion” by the ESV here is ὄρεξι (orexei), while earlier in verse 26, the word translated “passions” was πάθη (pathe).⁵² Gagnon notes,

When the *orexis* does not follow reason or nature, it becomes a negative quality. Stobaeus defines *epithyrnia* (bad desire) as “*orexis* disobedient to reason” (Anth. 2.87.21-22; cf. H. Heiclland, “*oregomai*, *orexis*,” TDNT.5:447-8; TLNT, 2.591 n. 2; further Fredrickson, “Romans 1:24-27,” 213-14.) The verb is used three times in the NT, twice in a positive sense (Heb 11:16; 1 Tim 3:1), once in a negative sense (the desire for money, 1 Tim 6:10). The only occurrence of the noun, here in Rom 1:27, clearly has a negative sense since the context speaks of desire for things “contrary to nature,” and specifically of sexual desire for other males. The translation “lust” is not inaccurate for the context (*contra* Countryman), though the word in isolation is not restricted to sexual desire.⁵³

Their passions were contrary to nature, lusts for sex with other men, as Gagnon shows. Because they acted on their passions, their passions consumed them. They thought they were fulfilling their desires by consuming their objects of desire, but the opposite happened, their desires consumed them. They stared into their idols and their idols stared back into them, consuming them. Murray reasoned,

The intensity of the passion is indicated by the word “burned”. It is a mistake to equate this burning with that mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7:9. The latter is the burning of natural sex impulse and there is no indictment of it as immoral—marriage is commended as the outlet for its satisfaction. But here it is the burning of an insatiable lust that has no natural or legitimate desire of which the lust is the perversion or distortion. It is lust directed to something that is essentially and under all circumstances illegitimate.⁵⁴

Since unnatural lust has no God-designed goal, as Murray taught, the correct response was to reject the passion that is contrary to God’s design. If one acts on unnatural passion, the passion becomes the master and the person becomes the slave. Sinful impulses, left unchecked, both push the sinner and pull him into the pit.

Romans 1:27c. Then, Paul offered more detail: “Men committing shameless acts with men.” As a result of their unnatural passions, they pursued and committed

⁵² Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 483.

⁵³ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 238.

⁵⁴ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 48.

shameless acts with men. The natural response, since these men were committing acts contrary to God's design for their bodies, should have been shame and guilt. However, their consciences were seared to the point that even common sense could not deter them from turning God's design for males and females upside down.

Romans 1:27d. Next, Paul explained their judgment: "And receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error." As a result of these men searing their consciences to the point that they rejected both the true God and his design for their bodies, they dove further into idolatry. It is one thing to reject God's law, where God says, "This is how you use your body for my glory." It is an even further step into depravity to reject both God's law and God's design of humanity. God's design demands that men and women come together for sex only in marriage (Gen 2:20-25). Only men and women have the genitals that fit together. Murray reasoned,

The concluding part of the verse harks back to the thought expressed in verses 24, 25, 26, namely, that abandonment to immorality was the judicial consequence of apostasy. Here, however, a new element is interjected—the abandonment is said to be "the recompense which was due". Arbitrariness never characterizes the divine judgment. But here the apostle expressly reflects upon the correspondence between the sin and the retribution inflicted. The "error" recompensed by abandonment to these unnatural vices is the apostasy from the worship of God described in verses 21–23, 25 and the recompense itself consists, to use Shedd's words, in "the gnawing unsatisfied lust itself, together with the dreadful physical and moral consequences of debauchery". In the apostle's delineation of the moral squalor we must discover a conspicuous example of the wrath of God revealed from heaven (vs. 18). And the degeneracy evinces the degradation which follows in the wake of idolatrous worship. The proprieties which our own nature would dictate are shamefully desecrated and we "become blind at noonday."⁵⁵

Murray argued that Paul showed the penalty of man's errors, since they seared their consciences for their pleasures, was a lack of conviction against other sins as well. The warning is that one cannot bow down to false gods (upside-down worship), without also bowing down to unnatural immorality as well (upside-down desires, thoughts, and

⁵⁵ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 48.

actions). William G. T. Shedd, the late Professor of Systematic Theology in the late 1800s at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, argued,

A celebrated actor, on walking through the syphilitic ward of a hospital remarked: ‘God Almighty writes a legible hand.’” *ἔδει*] implies the necessity fixed and made certain by divine appointment. *πλάνης*] the literal meaning of the word must be kept in mind; they had wandered away from the true God, in the manner described in verses 21-23. Compare the Latin and English error. *ἐν ἐαυτοῖς*] the evil consequences are internal: in their own souls and bodies; and mutual: communicated to one another, and received from one another.⁵⁶

Since worshipping false gods is unnatural, it often includes and or leads to other unnatural sins as well. As a result of their dive away from God into their depravity, God gave these pagans up to a “debased mind” (Rom 1:28), and they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness (Rom 1:29-32) that destroyed themselves and one another, as Shedd showed.

Engaging Robert Gagnon

Now consider Robert Gagnon and his hermeneutics. Gagnon is the leading scholar on the Bible’s condemnation of homosexual acts as sin. As shown above, he argues that Romans 1:24-27 teaches that God gave these pagans over to their “sinful impulses” (*ἐπιθυμίαις*, Rom 1:24),⁵⁷ for things “contrary to nature” (*παρὰ φύσιν*, Rom 1:26),⁵⁸ like “sexual desire for other males” or “lust” (*όρεξι*, Rom 1:27).⁵⁹ He also teaches that forbidden desires break the Ten Commandments:

Like other Jews, Paul could summarize the Mosaic law with the opening phrase of the tenth commandment "You shall not desire/covet," from which commandment "sin produced in me every kind of desire" for forbidden things (Rom 7:7-8; 13:9; cf.

⁵⁶ William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 29.

⁵⁷ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 232.

⁵⁸ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 235.

⁵⁹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 238.

4 Mace 2:6; L.A.E. 19:3; Philo, Decal. 142-43, 173; Spec. Laws 4.84-94; Jas 1:14-15; 4:2).⁶⁰

Yet, in this same book, Gagnon also argues,

The focus of this book on same-sex intercourse or homosexual practice, as opposed to homosexual orientation, is a reflection of the Bible's own relative disinterest toward motives or the origination of same-sex impulses. What matters is not what urges individuals feel but what they do with these urges, both in their fantasy life and in their concrete actions.⁶¹

This quote and Gagnon's exegesis of Romans 1:24-27 do not fit together. God through the apostle Paul thought it important enough to include the depraved desires that were contrary to nature in addition to the depraved actions. At the very least, God's "giving them up" to "impurity" in Romans 1:24 and "giving them up" to a "debased mine" in Romans 1:28 must be due to all the sin that comes before—the idol-worship and the homosexuality, but also the "sinful impulses," unnatural "desires," and "lust." This means that God "gave them over" to "impurity" and a "debased mind" in part because these sinful inclinations were morally culpable sin, and he was holding them morally accountable and judging them for having them.

James 1:13-15

Exegesis: Context

The final Scripture, and probably the most popular one referenced in this debate, that teaches concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians, is James 1:13-15. James wrote, "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." In order to understand the context of James 1:13-15, one must understand James 1:2-12. In these

⁶⁰ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 232.

⁶¹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 37-38.

verses, James contends that “trials” and “tests” come from God by ordination, whether directly or indirectly; however, “temptations” are different. Moo notes that James’ transitions from testing to temptation occurs within verse 13, arguing that the first mention of “temptation” in verse 13 should be translated “trial.”⁶² Thus the proper translation of verse 13 should read, “Let no one say when he is tested, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.” One can trust that God brings trials and tests to his people, but he never brings temptations. Man alone is responsible for his inward temptations to sin.

Exegesis: Comments

James 1:13a. James began his transition from discussing tests and trials to discussing temptations with, “Let no one say when he is ~~tempted~~ [tested], ‘I am being tempted by God.’” He argued that no person can blame God for his or her inward temptation to sin. Although God tests his people throughout Scripture, bringing them various trials, he does not create within them the sinful temptations that come from their hearts during his tests and trials. Moo helpfully explains,

⁶² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, of *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 72. Moo writes, “The NIV translation suggests that all of v. 13 is about temptation: When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. Most English versions agree; but note the rendering in the NJB [New Jerusalem Bible, a Roman Catholic translation]: “Never, when you are being put to the test, say, ‘God is tempting me’; God cannot be tempted by evil, and he does not put anybody to the test.” Moo believes this is the best translation of the verse; however, he is referring only to the first peirazomenos (*πειραζόμενος*) being translated “test” and the last peirazei (*πειράζει*) being translated “temptation,” because the NJB in verse 13 and 14 translates James as saying that God does not test. The Roman Catholic translators of the NJB distinguish test from trial and temptation. Yet, Moo argues God does test, saying that trial and testing are the same but tempting to sin is evil. He writes, “The OT often makes clear that God himself brings trials into the lives of his people. “God tested Abraham” when he ordered him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:1). He tested Israel by leaving the people surrounded by pagan nations (Judg. 2:22). And he tested King Hezekiah by leaving him to his own devices in his reception of the Babylonian envoys (2 Chron. 32:31; cf. 2 Kings 20:12-19). But while God may test or prove his servants in order to strengthen their faith, he never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith. Thus, despite the fact that the same Greek root (peira-) is used for both the outer trial and the inner temptation, it is crucial to distinguish them.” Moo, *The Letter of James.*, 72-73.

The OT often makes clear that God himself brings trials into the lives of his people. "God tested Abraham" when he ordered him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22:1). He tested Israel by leaving the people surrounded by pagan nations (Judg. 2:22). And he tested King Hezekiah by leaving him to his own devices in his reception of the Babylonian envoys (2 Chron. 32:31; cf. 2 Kings 20:12-19). But while God may test or prove his servants in order to strengthen their faith, he never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith.⁶³

Moo correctly notes that James explained God's meticulous sovereignty over the trials of his people, but he was also emphatic that God is neither the author of sin, nor the source of temptation to sin. God's purpose for his disciples' trials is always to strengthen their faith; however, the purpose of inward temptation is always to kill the tempted.

James 1:13b. Then, James further explained why God does not tempt: "For God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." Since God is perfectly good and perfectly holy, he cannot desire anything that is contrary to his nature. This also follows that God cannot tempt anyone to sin. God cannot be the tempter because he is holy, but he also cannot desire evil for the same reason. If being tempted by evil would compromise God's holy nature, then being tempted by evil would compromise Christ's nature and all humans' natures as well. James morally distinguished sinful man from God here.

James 1:14. To further clarify the difference between God and sinful man, James wrote, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." Mankind cannot blame God when they are tempted by sin for their temptation comes from within. It is their fault alone. The word translated "desire" by the ESV, ἐπιθυμίας,⁶⁴ refers to lust or "fleshly, illicit desire" based on its context here, according to Moo:

"Desire" (epithynia) [ἐπιθυμίας] can have a neutral meaning in the NT (cf. Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23), but the context here makes it clear that James uses it with its

⁶³ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 72-73.

⁶⁴ Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 686.

more typical NT sense: fleshly, illicit desire. The word often carries for us a sexual connotation (and it has this sense in the NT), but it usually has a broader meaning, including any human longing for what God has prohibited.⁶⁵

James wanted his readers to know that God is not the source of their temptations, but their own lust lures and entices them. Craig Blomberg, Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary in Denver, Colorado, notes, “Though simultaneous actions, the former verb [lures] suggests a more forceful outside pull than the latter [entices]. Temptation can sneak up on us covertly; it can also attack overtly.”⁶⁶ Tests and trials may be welcomed as joyous occasions since they produce “steadfastness” and eventual perfection (James 1:2-4), but inward temptations only come from a sinful heart, and they must be rejected as an enemy, as Blomberg notes. Interestingly, James personifies desire here, for it “lures and entices.”⁶⁷

James 1:15. Finally, James likened human development to the growth of sin from beginning to end: “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” James’ point is not that sin only leads to death when “full grown” or that temptation only leads to sin when it “conceives.” Sin always leads to death.⁶⁸ And sin, or self-tempting, starts in an individual’s heart not in God’s heart.⁶⁹ Blomberg argues, “While v. 15 is made up of two parallel independent clauses, they further the thought of v. 14, together describing the end result of temptation when left unchecked. A sequence of actions emerges as lust ‘begets’ sin and sin produces

⁶⁵ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 74.

⁶⁶ Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 67.

⁶⁷ Ralph P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary 48 (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1988), 36-37. Also see Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on James*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Michael A. Williams (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 92-93.

⁶⁸ Martin, *James*, 36-37.

⁶⁹ Dan McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 106.

death.”⁷⁰ James argued that individuals, not God, are responsible for sinful lust, thoughts and actions that end in death.⁷¹ James 4:1-2 is similar: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.” The word “desire” ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\theta\upsilon\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon$) in James 4:2 is similar to the word “desire” ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\theta\upsilon\mu\alpha\gamma$) in James 1:14.⁷² Moo notes,

We do not know what the disputes that James refers to were about. The fact that James does not comment directly on the issues involved suggests that his concern was more with the selfish spirit that bitterness of the quarrels than with the rights and wrongs of the various viewpoints.

The source of these quarrels, James now goes on to note, is *your desires that battle within you*. *Desires* translates the Greek word *hēdonē*, which means simply “pleasure,” but often with the connotation of a sinful, self-indulgent pleasure (we get our word “hedonism” from it). It consistently has this negative meaning in the NT (Luke 8:14; Tit. 3:3; 2 Pet. 2:13).⁷³

Moo correctly argues that James was not concerned with who was right or wrong in James 4:1-2 but was rather concerned with their selfish desires that lead to their violence towards one another. He rebuked their self-indulgent desire for pleasure that battled within them. There was a “war” raging within his hearers, and their sinful desires were their own enemies and the enemies of the rest of the church as well.

Returning to James 1:15, to argue that James implied that sinful desire is not sin, one must also argue that James implied that sin only leads to death when it is “full

⁷⁰ Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 67-68.

⁷¹ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 75. Moo writes, “The most we can say is that James, like other Jewish and Christian authors, wants to place the responsibility for temptation and sin squarely on the shoulders of each human being.”

⁷² Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 691.

⁷³ Moo, *The Letter of James*, 181.

grown” (*ἀποτελεσθεῖσα*).⁷⁴ John Mayer, an Anglican priest and biblical exegete in the 1600s,⁷⁵ argued,

Having spoken hitherto of external temptations, now he speaks of internal, that is, evil thoughts suggested to the mind, whereby a person is enticed and drawn to evil. These come not from God, but from our spiritual enemies. God indeed is said to tempt Abraham, and likewise to tempt the people of Israel (Gen 22; Deut 12), but it is to be understood that there is a twofold temptation, the one of trial, the other of deceit. By the first God tempts, so that humans may be more purified, as the gold being tried in the fire; but not by the other. The devil tempts thus, so that he may deceive us, the flesh that it may allure us, and the world that it may draw us away. . . . The degrees of temptation are noted: first, there is delight alluring; second, consent conceiving; third, work performing; fourth, custom perfecting. Lust conceives by the devil, who is (as it were) the father, and lust the mother; this conception is by the consent of the will, or by delight. “Brings forth sin,” that is, Psalm 7. It is perfected by custom, and then death comes; that is, it becomes guilty of eternal damnation, “for the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6). But why is death assigned only to custom? Does not sin delighted in, or consented to, and acted, bring forth death also? Answer. Yes, doubtless, but it is most properly said thus of custom in sin, because in such there appear no signs of life, and there is little hope of his return, but in such as sometime fall into sin there are signs of life, through more in the consenter, fewer in the actor of sin.⁷⁶

Mayer contended that God “tempts. By “tempts,” he did not mean that God did something evil, as his above quote shows. Rather, he simply acknowledged that the same Greek word in James 1, *peirazó* (*πειράζω*),⁷⁷ is translated in our English translations as either “tests,” “trials,” or “temptations,” depending on the context. Mayer argued that God “tempts” to purify through trials, but the Devil tempts to deceive and destroy.

Also, Mayer pointed out four degrees of temptation in James 1:14-15: (1) “delight alluring”; (2) “consent conceiving”; (3) “work performing”; and (4) “custom perfecting.” To Mayer, “lures and entices,” “conceives,” “grows” and “dies” all describe

⁷⁴ Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 686.

⁷⁵ Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, eds., *Acts*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 397.

⁷⁶ John Mayer, *A commentarie vopn the New Testament*, 3:9-10, quoted in *Hebrews, James*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 13 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 213-14.

⁷⁷ Aland et. al., eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 686-87.

four degrees of inner temptation. And not only that, Mayer also asked and answered, “Does not sin delighted in, or consented to, and acted, bring forth death also? Answer. Yes, doubtless.” Thus, he likewise said that all degrees of inner temptation are sin as well. Inner temptation, whatever degree, is morally culpable sin.

Furthermore, as Mayer argued, James’ point was that temptation always leads to death if it is not repented from. If one does not repent of sinful desire, he or she is running towards death, for that is where sin always leads; sinful desire (lust) conceives sin, and sin grows into death.⁷⁸ The picture is that of three persons, for temptation “lures and entices,” it “conceives,” “grows and dies.”⁷⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, late Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, noted that there is a story of three generations here—“the grandmother is lust, the mother is sin, and the daughter is death.”⁸⁰ Sin cannot grow into life and temptation cannot conceive anything but sin and death. Inner temptation conceives what it is morally, namely sin and death. The moral makeup of each of these three—inner temptation, sin, and death—is the same because none of them come from God, only from sinful man. Richard Turnbull, a post-Reformation Anglican Priest and exegete in the late 1500s,⁸¹ noted,

When the apostle here says, “Lust when it has conceived brings forth sin,” our adversaries the papists take an occasion to broach this their opinion concerning concupiscence, that it is not sin. This is their argument. Lust brings forth sin, therefore lust is not sin. One thing cannot be both cause and effect, the effect itself, and the cause of itself. Lust therefore cannot be sin, if it brings forth sin, for then it would be the cause of itself, and bring forth itself, which is most improper speech.

⁷⁸ Martin, *James*, 37.

⁷⁹ Dibelius, *A Commentary on James*, 92-93.

⁸⁰ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 108-9.

⁸¹ Anthony A. Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of all the Writers and Bishops who have had their Education in the University of Oxford*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, ed. Philip Bliss (London: St. John’s College, Oxford, 1813), 752.

To this be it answered that one thing may be cause and effect also, but not cause and effect in the same respect. One thing may be cause of sin, and yet sin: for one sin is often cause of another sin. As idleness, riotousness, and drunkenness, are not only themselves sins, but causes of sin also, even of the sin of uncleanness and fornication, incest and adultery, as Moses records of Lot's incests, of the Sodomical uncleanness, and the Scripture of David's adultery, and many similar examples prove the same. Concupiscence and lust therefore is not only cause of sin, but sin itself, yet not the same sin whereof it is cause. Lust conceives and brings forth sin, that is, an actual sin, a sin done in deed, seen of others, manifestly apparent to the view. Such a sin is not lust. . . lust is a conceived evil, an inward consenting to evil, and therefore sin. Thus lust is not only the cause of actual sin, but sin itself, not only before baptism, but even after also. . . Again, whatsoever is repugnant to the law of God and his will is sin. Lust and concupiscence is repugnant to the law and will of God; it is sin therefore.⁸²

Turnbull is right that there are numerous examples where sin is both sin and the cause of sin, as the above exegesis of Romans 1:24-27 proved. Tempters from without are never viewed as the friends of Christ's disciples or as morally neutral. Why should one's own desires be viewed positively or morally neutral because they tempt to sin from within? Again, as Turnbull argued, inner temptations do not come from God; they are "lust and concupiscence" and are "repugnant to the law and will of God." They are sins that wage war, seeking to kill the tempted, making those who succumb allies of death, so that they can die and kill their brothers and sisters in Christ as well.

Therefore, James' point is to encourage his hearers to repent of the source of sin and death in their lives, their sinful desires. He encouraged them to take responsibility for their sinful desires. If his hearers stop the sinful desires before they can conceive, they stop sin from killing them and others. James is essentially saying, "Some of you have died and killed others because of your sinful desires. God is not tempting you. You are tempting yourselves. The result of tempting yourself without repentance is sinful actions and death. Deal with the self-temptation so that you will not have to deal with your own death or your murder of your brethren (James 4:1-2)."

⁸² Richard Turnbull, *An Exposition upon the Canonical Epistle of Saint James*, 50v-51r, 52r, quoted in *Hebrews, James*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 13 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 214.

James concludes this section by arguing in James 1:16-18, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” He reiterates his point that only good and perfect gifts come from God to man, not inward temptations to sin. Lust of the flesh is not God’s gift to man; rather, lust of the flesh, tempting oneself, is solely the work of man. Therefore, it is always evil or sin. Inward temptations do not fulfill the law.

Engaging Matthew Lee Anderson

One objection to the above exegesis comes from Matthew Lee Anderson. He writes about the proper interpretation of James 1:13-15 while responding to Denny Burk,

Burk’s emphasis on the object of the agent’s desire obscures the claim that each is “tempted *when...carried away and enticed*” by their desire. That one is tempted when ‘carried away’ clearly seems to indicate a kind of intensity to the desire, which ‘gives birth’ to sinful actions not by having a sinful *object* but by sweeping the agent into a morally bad action based on their lack of self-control. Even if we grant Burk’s distinction between the internal or external grounds of temptation, James’s concern is actually broader than Burk makes it out to be. Burk’s overwhelming focus on the *object* of desire as the grounds for its wrongness obscures the possibility that one could be sinfully ‘swept away’ by an internal desire for a *morally worthwhile* and *permissible* object. Burk acknowledges that desires might be wrong based on their intensity in a footnote—yet his concern to ensure we depict same-sex sexual desires as pervasively ‘sinful’ leads him to misconstrue a passage that very clearly seems to be about the intensity of a desire.⁸³

First, the telos of every desire is either God or death. That is what James argued (James 1:15). Temptation from within is always aimed at death. God is not its source (James 1:13, 17). God is not its goal (James 1:15). Second, the word James used for desire is “lust” or “illicit desire” ($\epsilon\pi\iota\theta\nu\mu\iota\alpha\varsigma$); $\epsilon\pi\iota\theta\nu\mu\iota\alpha\varsigma$ in the context of James 1:13-15 is a forbidden desire, not a desire for something good. The “intensity” of a desire is irrelevant

⁸³ Anderson, “Sex, Temptation, and the Gay Christian: What Chastity Demands,” <https://mereorthodoxy.com/sex-temptation-gay-christian-chastity-demands/>.

if the desire is forbidden by God. Forbidden desires are sin. James rebuked forbidden desires in James 1:13-15, not good desires that have gone awry.⁸⁴

Third, Anderson argues that James indicated the possibility that one can be drawn away with a good desire that is intense. But that was not James' point. James' point was Christians taking responsibility for their lusts in the midst of tests and trials given by God. God tests his people, but he does not tempt his people; they tempt themselves with their own illicit desires. James did not use words for good desires that are intense in James 1:13-15. Instead, he referred only to lusts that lead to death.

Anderson then moves from discussing James 1:13-15 to considering how Jesus desired something contrary to God's command in the Garden of Gethsemane. He writes,

This misreading governs Burk's understanding of Christ's temptation as well. While he is right that Christ's temptation is not ours, he nowhere in his published writings on this issue has acknowledged that in the Garden Christ specifically asks the Father to remove the burden of the cross from Him, even if He chooses to do the Father's will anyway. The lacuna is striking, given the centrality of the episode to our understanding of how Jesus was 'tempted and tried.' But it is also inevitable given Burk's broader commitments: Burk has no category for a *human* temptation that arises *from within* that is *not* sinful. Burk's contention that Jesus had "no desires that predisposed Him to sin" is founded upon an inability to see how a desire for a *good* object might *on its own* "predispose" one to sin. Hence Burk's insistence that Christ's temptations were all "external," in that they came *to* Him. Yet one wonders what principle or desire was within Jesus that allowed the 'external' appearance of a thing to come to him *as a temptation*? In the Garden, Christ seems to demonstrate a desire, to the point that He is recorded as petitioning the Father on its basis [Luke 22:42]. If such an expression does not come from within Jesus—if it is only an 'external' temptation, or no temptation at all—then Jesus's humanity disappears in favor of a docetic Christology, which would be an exceptionally ironic turn given the pervasive docetism beneath the affirmation of gay marriage.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ There are "good desires" and "bad desires." There are not "good desires that become bad desires." By definition, if a good desire can become a bad desire, it was already a bad desire to begin with. The Bible communicates this reality when it speaks of the desires of the flesh versus the desires of the spirit (Rom 7:13-25; Gal 5:17-21).

⁸⁵ Anderson, "Sex, Temptation, and the Gay Christian: What Chastity Demands," <https://mereorthodoxy.com/sex-temptation-gay-christian-chastity-demands/>.

First, William Hendriksen, a late Professor of New Testament Literature at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, offered a helpful summary of Jesus' possible reasoning when he commented on Luke 22:42:

Though it will never be possible for our minds to penetrate into the mystery of the horror Jesus experienced in Gethsemane, we cannot be far amiss if we state that it probably included at least this, that he was given a preview of the agonies of the fast approaching crucifixion. He had a foretaste of what it meant to be "forsaken" by his heavenly Father. And is it not reasonable to assume that during these dreadful periods of anguish Satan and his demons assaulted him, with the intention of causing him to turn aside from the path of obedience to God? Cf. Ps. 22:12, 13.

The best commentary on what Jesus experienced in Gethsemane is surely the inspired statement of Heb. 5:7, "He offered up prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears. . ."

He prayed that "this cup," this terrible impending experience climaxed by the cross and the sense of complete abandonment, might be spared him. As with his entire human nature he recoiled before this terror, he "knelt down" (so Luke), "fell on his face" (so Matthew). He was, as it were, being torn apart by agony.

To be noted especially, and this in all the reports, hence also here in Luke, is the Sufferer's complete and unqualified submission to the will of his heavenly Father: "Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."⁸⁶

As Hendriksen noted, it is morally appropriate for Jesus in Gethsemane to not desire the unjust treatment that he will experience soon—the betrayal of Judas, his arrest, beating, scourging, mocking, and beard-plucking that resulted in his humiliation, suffering, pain and death. Anderson also writes about Jesus, "But he seems to desire to *not* do something his Father commands."⁸⁷ Yet, the reader must remember how Peter, when he preached at Pentecost, described Jesus' death as both God's will and sinful man's will: "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). Christ's death was both God's definite plan and the work of lawless men. Jesus' agony indicates his understanding of these two realities at work in his coming death—God's holy will and man's sinful will. What happened to Jesus was both just and unjust. God's response to

⁸⁶ William Hendriksen, *Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 982-83.

⁸⁷ Anderson, "Sex, Temptation, and the Gay Christian: What Chastity Demands," <https://mereorthodoxy.com/sex-temptation-gay-christian-chastity-demands/>.

Jesus was just, but man's response was unjust. Jesus desired God's will but did not desire man's evil.

Additionally, should Jesus have desired to become sin (2 Cor 5:21)? Should Jesus have desired to be forsaken by his Father, to drink the cup of his Father's wrath (Matt 27:45-46)? If Jesus is holy, he should not desire to become sin and should not desire to be forsaken by his Father, as Hendriksen pointed out above. Imagine Adam in the Garden before he fell into sin when he was still holy, desiring God to forsake him and desiring to become sin. Would not this be a sinful desire for Adam? If so, then surely it would be for Christ who is God the Son Incarnate. Yet, Christ should desire to do his Father's will, which is exactly what he desired to do since he merely requested that his Father change his will, so that he might not have to endure the sin of man or being forsaken by His Father.

Moreover, God approved of Jesus' prayer since the text says that an angel came from Heaven to strengthen him (Luke 22:43). From Luke emphasizing where the angel came from, one must assume God the Father sent the angel to strengthen his Son, not because his Son was trying to get out of doing His will; but on the contrary, because the Son's obedience to his Father peculiarly required him to want to do his Father's will while not wanting to endure the evils that came along with it.

For these reasons, the perfect holy human response in Jesus' circumstances in Gethsemane is what Jesus did in his heart and actions—agonized obedience to his Father's will. Jesus was, desired, and did exactly what his Father required of him, including his prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. It would be presumptuous of any person to suggest that Jesus could have had a better desire or response to his imminent death. By Jesus starting his prayer with, "If you are willing," and ending his prayer with "not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42), he proved his trust in his Father's sovereignty, even as he did not desire to become sin and experience his Father's wrath.

Additionally, the words Jesus used were pointed. He requested that the “cup of wrath” be removed from him (Luke 22:42). The cup of wrath may refer to God’s wrath while also referring to the suffering Jesus was about to experience. Darrell Bock, Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, argues,

In other words, Jesus is requesting a potential alteration in God’s plan, where the cup of wrath is dispensed with—but only if it is possible and within God’s will. Jesus’ qualifications about God’s will make the request in such a way that the previous certainty expressed about God’s plan is irrelevant. In effect, Jesus says, “If it is necessary, it is necessary. But if there is another way, could it be...?” (To argue that the prayer is only about wrath not abiding on Jesus ignores his prediction of his vindication; he already knew that the wrath he faced would not be permanent.) The arrest provides God’s answer. Jesus is going to suffer. Nonetheless, he will submit to God’s will. In fact, the prayer closes as it began—with Jesus expressing his commitment to God’s will. His attitude is exemplary. He makes known the desire of his heart to God, but his primary concern is to accomplish God’s will. Jesus’ question is like that expressed by the three Jewish men in Dan. 3:17–18.⁸⁸

Bock notes that Jesus’ request is similar to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s response to Nebuchadnezzar when they were about to be thrown into the fiery furnace in Daniel 3:17-18: “If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” In light of Bock’s comparison to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Jesus essentially prayed, “If it be your will, you are able to deliver me, but if not, your will be done.” A desire for God to change his will is not a desire for something other than God’s will.

Second, Jesus did not desire to go against God’s will. He desired God to change his will. It is not morally wrong to desire God to change his will to something that still accomplishes his will, especially since God’s will included Jesus becoming sin and being forsaken by his Father through drinking the cup of his wrath. Plus, there are

⁸⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, of *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1760.

biblical examples where God changed his will in response to prayer. One example is Hezekiah's illness and recovery found in 2 Kings 20:1-6:

In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover.'" Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, "Now, O LORD, please remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him: "Turn back, and say to Hezekiah the leader of my people, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD, and I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake."

God sent Isaiah to Hezekiah to prophesy of his impending death. Yet, Hezekiah prayed for God to change his will, and God gave him fifteen more years of life as a result.

Perhaps Jesus had this example or other examples in mind as he prayed. The point is that there are many more possible options that are biblically faithful than to believe that Jesus desired something forbidden by God, like Adam and Eve did when they desired the forbidden tree (Gen 3:6). If Jesus desired something forbidden by God, then he sinned, and all of his disciples are still in their sins.

Pastoral Application

Finally, consider a pastoral application of the truth that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin. The Bible teaches that sinners need Christ's full imputed righteousness—His sinless nature, faith, inclinations, thoughts, and actions—credited to their accounts; this crediting of Christ's righteousness to the church must be perpetual because concupiscence is morally culpable sin even in Christians. If anyone is to go to Heaven, one does not merely need Christ's holy thoughts and holy actions credited to one's account, one also needs Christ's holy nature, holy faith, and holy inclinations credited to one's account. Whatever is sin must be forgiven and whatever is unrighteous must be reckoned with Christ's righteousness. If Jesus died for sinners and for their sinful

desires, then Christ was held morally accountable for sinners and their sinful desires; which means that all of mankind are morally culpable sinners and their sinful desires are morally culpable sin.

The Reformed Tradition

Because man was totally depraved in his original sin and due to this concupiscence remaining in Christians, Reformed Protestants, against Roman Catholics, argued that man needed his sin imputed to Christ and Christ's full righteousness imputed to him in order to be reckoned righteous before God. Francis Turretin, professor at Geneva Academy in the late 1600s and the author of the systematic theology textbook used at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1812 to 1871,⁸⁹ argued, "God cannot show favor to, nor justify anyone without a perfect righteousness":

For since the judgment of God is according to truth, he cannot pronounce anyone just who is not really just. However, since no mortal after sin has such a righteousness in himself (nay, by sin he has been made a child of wrath and become exposed to death), it must be sought out of us in another, by the intervention of which man (sinful and wicked) may be justified without personal righteousness. Human courts often justify the guilty either through ignorance (when the wickedness is not known and lies concealed) or by injury (when it is not attended to) or by iniquity (when it is approved). But in the divine court (in which we deal with the most just Judge, who neither holds the guilty as innocent, nor the innocent as guilty) this cannot occur. Therefore he who is destitute of personal righteousness ought to have another's, by which to be justified. For although God (as the supreme arbiter of affairs and the sovereign Lord of all) has the power to remit the punishment of sinners, still he cannot (because he is most just) thus favor the sinner, unless a satisfaction is first made by which both his justice may be satisfied and punishment taken of sin. Since this could not come from us who are guilty, it was to be sought in another, who (constituted a surety in our place by receiving upon himself the punishment due to us) might bestow the righteousness (*dikaiōma*) of which we were destitute.⁹⁰

Turretin's statement accurately represents the Reformed tradition. The Reformers heavily emphasized Christ's passive obedience, that is, Christ's propitiation of the sins of his

⁸⁹ Benedetto and McKim, *Historical Dictionary of the Reformed Churches*, 2nd ed., 486-87.

⁹⁰ Francis Turretin, *Eleventh through Seventeenth Topics*, vol. 2 of *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1994), 647.

people. Christ has satisfied God's wrath towards the elect. The Reformers also emphasized Christ's active obedience, that is, Christ's holiness of nature, faith, inclinations, thoughts, and actions imputed to the church. Mankind not only needed Christ to pay the penalty for his sin, he also needed Christ to fulfill God's righteous requirement in the law on his behalf.⁹¹

Romans 4:1-8 and the Imputed Righteousness of Christ

Exegesis: Context. The confessional history of the Reformed tradition argued that sinners need Christ's full righteousness imputed to them, in part due to their belief that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin. But is this teaching biblical? One important passage for understanding the need of sinners for Christ's full imputed righteousness is Romans 4:1-8. This passage is built upon Romans 3:21-31, which

⁹¹ In several of the Reformed confessions and catechisms, when they spoke of original sin, they often spoke of Christ's imputed righteousness as well. The two often went hand in hand, the doctrine of total depravity and the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness. If man is totally depraved, then it logically follows that he cannot fulfill the righteous requirement of God's law in any shape or form. All his attempts to do so are tainted by his depravity. If he is to fulfill the law, God must either re-create him as righteous so that righteous inclinations flow from him or God must reckon him righteous through the righteousness of another (alien righteousness). The latter is what God does here on earth unto eternity, and the prior is what God starts here on earth and finishes in the end, all through Christ. For examples from the Reformed tradition, consider these pages from sixteen confessions or catechisms: (1) Zwingli, "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction (1523)," 9, 21, 22-23. (2) "The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530)," in 1523-1552, vol. 1 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 142-43. (3) Calvin, "Calvin's Catechism (1537)," 371. (4) Calvin, "Calvin's Catechism (1545)," 484. (5) "The French Confession (1559)," in 1552-1566, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 144-46. (6) Beza, "Theodore Beza's Confession (1560)," 254, 259. (7) "The Belgic Confession (1561)," 437-38. (8) Peter Mélius Juhász, "The Hungarian *Confessio Catholica* (1562)," in 1552-1566, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. and trans. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. Bernard S. Adams (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 615. (9) Peter Mélius Juhász, "The Confession of Tarcal (1562) and Torda (1563)," in 1552-1566, vol. 2 of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. and trans. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. Bernard S. Adams (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 674. (10) "The Heidelberg Catechism (1563)," 782-84, 799. (11) Bullinger, "The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)," 832, 839. (12) Craig, "Craig's Catechism (1581)," 560. (13) "The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)," 247-49. (14) "Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)," 313, 351. (15) "Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647)," 357. (16) "The Savoy Declaration (1658)," 470-71.

contends that faith is “the only basis of justification”⁹² and all people need and receive Christ’s righteousness in the same manner.⁹³ Romans 4:1-8 reads,

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

This passage fleshes out the points made previously concerning God’s righteousness being given to both Jews and Gentiles through faith alone. If Abraham, the head of God’s Old Testament covenant with Israel, was saved apart from works, then everyone who has faith in Jesus are children of Abraham and are not saved by their works either.⁹⁴

Exegesis: Romans 4:1-2. Paul further removes the difference between Jew and Gentile by pointing to Abraham: “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.” John Murray summarized these two verses in the following syllogism, “(1) If a man is justified by works he has grounds for glorying. (2) Abraham was justified by works. (3) Therefore, Abraham had grounds for glorying. Paul emphatically challenges and denies the conclusion. He is saying in effect: though the syllogism is formally correct, it does not apply to Abraham.”⁹⁵ Murray was correct that Abraham’s obedience to God gained him nothing by way of salvation. All his actions were according to the flesh. If Abraham was justified by works, he has

⁹² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 218.

⁹³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 217. Also, Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 218-19.

⁹⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 217.

⁹⁵ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 130.

something to brag about, but Paul excludes Father Abraham from being able to boast.

Leon Morris noted that it was a common belief among the Jewish leaders that Abraham kept the entire law before it was even given:

They saw Abraham as an outstanding person who had kept the provisions of the law before the law was in fact laid down: “we find that Abraham our father had performed the whole Law before it was given” (Kidd. 4:14); “Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord” (Jub. 23:10). If this view is right, then Paul is very, very wrong.⁹⁶

The apostle Paul rebuked a common myth that Abraham had kept the law, but this would mean that Abraham would have something to boast about. Yet, God looks upon the heart. Abraham could boast to the surrounding nations concerning his morality, but “not before God.”

Exegesis: Romans 4:3-5. Then, Paul showed that Abraham’s righteousness came from God because he was ungodly: “For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.” In verse 3, the apostle Paul quoted Genesis 15:6, “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” D.A. Carson, Emeritus Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, helpfully clarifies,

In Jewish exegesis, Genesis 15:6 was not quoted to prove that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works. Rather, the passage was commonly read in the light of Genesis 22 (the *aqedah*), and was taken as explicit evidence of Abraham’s merit. In 1 Maccabees 2:52, Abraham was found to be *πιστος*, faithful (not simply “believing,” *ἐπίστευσεν*, as in the LXX), faithful *ἐν πειρασμῷ* (which surely refers to Gen 22), and the previous verse explicitly sees this in the category of work (*μνήσθητε τὸν πατέρων ἡμῶν τα ἔργα α ἐποίησεν*, 2:51). About 50 B.C., Rabbi Shemaiah has God saying, “The faith with which your father Abraham believed in Me merits that I should divide the sea for you, as it is written: ‘And he believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him for righteousness’” (*Mekhilta* on Ex 14:15 [35b]). Similarly, *Mekhilta* 40b speaks of “the merit of the faith with which [Abraham] believed in the LORD”—and then Genesis 15:6 is quoted. What this

⁹⁶ Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 195.

means, for our purposes, is that Paul, who certainly knew of these traditions, was explicitly interpreting Genesis 15:6 in a way quite different from that found in his own tradition, and he was convinced that this new way was the correct way to understand the text.⁹⁷

Carson notes that the apostle Paul took a common verse, Genesis 15:6, that was interpreted to bolster Abraham's righteousness and turned it on its head to argue that Abraham was unrighteous. In a similar manner as Carson, Wolfgang Musculus argued,

With this double sentence he applies the cited passage of Scripture to his argument and shows that Abraham's justification, since it was by way of imputation, could not be attributed to works, but that it must necessarily be attributed to faith alone. Why? Because praise given to works of righteousness is owed on the basis of merit as wages, and not on the basis of grace. What's more, to "impute" does not mean to hand over that which ought to be given due to some debt, but rather to give and assign freely what could be rightfully denied. Therefore, this imputed righteousness cannot be attributed to Abraham's works, since imputation is not a rendering of what is owed but a thing given freely.⁹⁸

Both Carson and Musculus clarify that the implication for Paul's hearers was that if Father Abraham was ungodly and justified through faith, not works, then both his physical and spiritual descendants must be ungodly and justified through faith, not works, as well. Paul essentially said that his hearers' righteousness must be the same as the righteousness of Abraham (and of David, Rom 1:6-8), which was a righteousness that came from God, not Abraham himself.

Some of Paul's hearers at this point may mutter, "Abraham was unrighteous, but his faith was not unrighteous." Yet, Paul's point was not to praise Abraham for his faith either. His point was to take salvation ultimately out of Abraham's hands entirely. John Murray explained Paul's formula for Abraham's justification before God when he argued, "it was faith that was reckoned to him for the righteousness with which justification is concerned. In each case of appeal to Genesis 15:6, therefore, we must not,

⁹⁷ D.A. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields," In *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 56-57.

⁹⁸ Wolfgang Musculus, *Epistolam Apostoli Pauli*, 53-54, quoted in *Romans 1-8. Reformation Commentary on Scripture*, New Testament 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 97-98.

for dogmatic reasons, fail to recognize that it is faith that is imputed (vss. 5, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23).⁹⁹ Scripture teaches that Abraham believed God, and God reckoned him righteous. A person who works is owed wages from his employer. Yet, the person who does not work in a way that is pleasing to God, nevertheless, is counted righteous through faith in God as the one who justifies the ungodly. It is not that God has lowered his standard from works to faith concerning salvation, but that God, from beginning to end, imputes all that is necessary for the salvation of his church, both faith and works. Carson argues,

It is sufficient for his argument, at this juncture, that the distinction between merited imputation and unmerited imputation be preserved. Romans 4:3, then, is clarified by Romans 4:4: when faith is imputed to Abraham as righteousness, it is *unmerited*, it is all of grace, because it is nothing more than believing God and his gracious promise. That same approach is then applied in Romans 4:5 to Paul's discussion of justification, and the inevitable conclusion is drawn: "to anyone who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness" (TNIV).¹⁰⁰

Carson's point is that Christ's righteousness imputed to the church includes Christ's perfect faith in His Father. Salvation is wholly of grace, from beginning to end, without any boasting possible from the individual who is the object of the imputation. God is the one who justifies.

Moreover, God "justifies the ungodly" is an astounding statement: (1) Because Paul refers to Abraham as ungodly. (2) Because God's justice demands the death of the ungodly, not their salvation. The gospel is startling considering the wrath and judgment of God that man deserves. C. E. B. Cranfield, the late New Testament Professor for 30 years at Durham University in Durham, United Kingdom, helpfully argued,

Paul's completion of 'believes' by 'in him who justifies the ungodly' is highly significant. To say that Abraham was one who had no claim on God on the ground of works ('to the man who has no work to his credit') is tantamount to saying that he was ungodly, a sinner (we may compare the equation of justification apart from works with the forgiveness of sins in vv. 6-8). So the faith which he had in God was necessarily faith in the God who justifies the ungodly. That God does do precisely

⁹⁹ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 131-32.

¹⁰⁰ Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields," 60.

this is the meaning of His grace (compare 'as a matter of grace' in v. 4). We may recognize in the words 'him who justifies the ungodly' an echo of the language of Exod 23.7; Prov 17.15; 24.24; Isa 5.23; but it is misleading to say, as Barrett does, that they 'describe God as doing what the Old Testament forbids'. In the Septuagint Greek version all these passages refer to human judges: they are forbidden to acquit the guilty - particularly for the sake of bribes. That the justification of the ungodly to which Paul refers is altogether different from the sort of thing against which the Old Testament warns human judges is surely obvious enough. As to the Hebrew text of Exod 23.7, the last part of which is a divine declaration, 'I will not justify the wicked', it attests a truth which is in no way contradicted by the forgiveness to which Paul refers, which is no cheap forgiveness which condones wickedness but the costly, just and truly merciful forgiveness 'through the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus', to be understood in the light of 3.24-26.¹⁰¹

Cranfield was correct that it is wrong for human judges to acquit the wicked, but it is not immoral for God to forgive the wicked. Remember that God is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:26). God gave Christ so that the wicked would not perish but have everlasting life, if they trusted in Christ alone for their salvation (John 3:16). But where does such "trust" come from? Does it come from an ungodly heart? How can the ungodly be capable of such a righteous faith that warrants God's reckoning of full imputed righteousness? Carson is helpful here:

Of course, if this is applied to Abraham, it is tantamount to calling him ungodly, wicked, *ἀσεβῆς*. In other words, it is not enough to say that for Paul, Abraham's faith is not a righteous "act" or "deed" but it *is* a genuinely righteous stance, a covenant faithfulness, which God then *rightly* or *justly* counts to Abraham as righteousness. That does not make sense of the "meriting"/"not meriting" contrast implicit in the wages analogy. More importantly, it does not bear in mind Paul's own powerful conclusion: it is the *wicked* person to whom the Lord imputes righteousness. In the context, that label is applied to Abraham no less than to anyone else. In Paul's understanding, then, God's imputation of Abraham's faith to Abraham as righteousness *cannot* be grounded in the assumption that that faith is itself intrinsically righteous, so that God's "imputing" of it to Abraham is no more than a recognition of what it intrinsically is. If God is counting faith to Abraham *as* righteousness, *he is counting him righteous*—not because Abraham *is* righteous in some inherent way (How can he be? He is *ἀσεβῆς!*), but simply because Abraham trusts God and his gracious promise. In that sense, then, we are dealing with what systematicians call an alien righteousness.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: T & T Clark, 1985), 86.

¹⁰² Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields," 60.

One may quip against Carson that faith is not a work, and therefore falls outside of such godly or ungodly distinction. But, could one call Abraham's faith ungodly? And is not ungodly faith called "unbelief"? Does not the context demand that the faith of which Paul speaks of is a righteous faith in an ungodly person? It is not a morally neutral faith or an ungodly faith, but a righteous faith. And if Abraham (and David, Rom. 4:6-8) is ungodly, how is he capable of such righteous faith? If his works cannot merit God's gracious gaze, then his faith cannot merit God's gracious gaze either. Rather, God imputes the faith of Christ to him, for this ungodly man, Abraham (and David), and all his spiritual descendants need both Christ's full imputed righteousness and his full atoning work credited to their accounts.

Exegesis: Romans 4:6-8. Finally, Paul went from discussing Abraham to pointing out David's ungodliness and need for Christ's righteousness: "just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.'" David, like Abraham, serves as an example of God imputing righteousness from Christ to sinners. David spoke of God counting righteous those whom he forgives and covers, not counting their sins against them. Schreiner summarizes Paul's purpose well in appealing to David: "First, Paul clarifies that God is the one who reckons righteousness—which is implicit in the passive verb ἐλογίσθη (*elogisthē*)—by specifying that he is the subject of the verb λογίζεσθαι (θεός, *theos*, God, in v. 6; and κύριος, *kyrios*, Lord, in v. 8)."¹⁰³ David spoke of the sinful man being blessed when the Lord does not count his sin against him. God alone justifies man, as Schreiner points out; man does not merit justification from God, even Abraham, the Father of Israel, or David, Israel's greatest king. Schreiner continues, "Second,

¹⁰³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 228.

righteousness is defined here in terms of forgiveness of sins (cf. Jeremias 1965: 66; R. Longnecker 2016: 501). To be counted as righteous apart from works is to have one's lawless deeds forgiven, one's sins covered, and one's sin not taken into account.”¹⁰⁴ Earlier, Paul emphasized Christ's active obedience, his righteous faith and works imputed to ungodly Abraham. Here with David, Paul emphasized Christ's passive obedience, his atoning work credited to David. As Schreiner argues, Christ takes the sins of his church away, and through faith, God's forgiveness is applied to them. Schreiner continues, “Finally, the word μακαρισμός (*makarismos*, blessing) testifies to the gracious character of justification. Those who have experienced forgiveness of sins are conscious of receiving a great blessing from God, a gift that brings happiness precisely because it is undeserved and unexpected.”¹⁰⁵ There is no boasting from Abraham or David or their spiritual descendants precisely because the justification of the ungodly is solely the work of God, from beginning to end. As Schreiner points out, sinners do not deserve and should not expect God's gracious look; yet, his grace has been poured out on the ungodly.

Finally, Martin Bucer helpfully argued that justification is threefold:

The first kind of justification is that in which he appoints us to eternal life, and that is strictly according to his goodness alone and a regard for the merits of Christ. Scholastic theologians add, “with respect to the merits that God foresees will exist in his people.” But, I ask, how can he foresee merits that nobody at all can possess unless he himself were to give them, and which he decreed that he himself would give only after he had already decreed to give them salvation? The second of justification is that by which he in some manner gives us a glimpse of eternal life even now and grants that it might be enjoyed by means of his Spirit given to us, “by whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” This justification has additional reference to our faith, but that itself is something that God also gives us out of his gracious goodness and that he effects in us by his Spirit. The third kind of justification is when he at last furnishes us fully with eternal life in its very essence, or even when we enjoy the good things he gives us in this life, no longer only in faith and hope. Our deeds

¹⁰⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 228.

¹⁰⁵ Schreiner, *Romans*, 228.

work together toward this kind of justification, but even then those very deeds are also the gifts and works of the freely bestowed goodness of God.¹⁰⁶

According to Bucer, first, God appoints sinners on behalf of Christ to eternal life. Second, God causes Christians to know God intimately by working faith in them through his Holy Spirit. Third, final justification is eschatological, but Christians already experience some of eternal life now; yet, they do good works out of the abundance of God's imputed righteousness. Christ's active obedience, his perfect fulfillment of His Father's will, and Christ's passive obedience, his perfect propitiation of his Father's wrath, are imputed to the church. These are two sides of the same justification coin, Christ's active and passive obedience, and this coin is given to the church by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the most important discussion about whether concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians, depends on God's inerrant and infallible word, and what it teaches. One can quote Protestants and Roman Catholics, but if they disagree with Scripture, then their quotes are of little value. This chapter has shown that Genesis 3:6, Matthew 5:27-30, Romans 1:24-27, and James 1:13-15 teach that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate. Since concupiscence is morally culpable sin, same-sex attraction and every other sinful impulse are always morally culpable sin as well. That is why, in order to be saved, sinners and Christians alike need their sins imputed to Christ and Christ's full righteousness continually imputed to them, by God's grace alone.

¹⁰⁶ Martin Bucer, *Metaphrases et Enarrations*, 130, quoted in *Romans 1-8*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 7 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 100.

CHAPTER 6

SAME-SEX ATTRACTION CANNOT BE SUBLIMATED TO HOLINESS BECAUSE IT IS MORALLY CULPABLE SIN, EVEN IN CHRISTIANS

Introduction

The previous chapter argued that the Bible teaches in Genesis 3:6, Matthew 5:27-30, Romans 1:24-27, and James 1:13-15 that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. Due to the truth that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin, sinners need Christ's full imputed righteousness in order to be saved—his nature, faith, inclinations, thoughts, and actions. This chapter will focus on the popular notion that parts of same-sex attraction can be reordered or turned to holiness, which is called "sublimation." Much of the error in the Christian discussion of same-sex attraction is its treatment as a "special sin" that is different from other sins. Same-sex attraction is not special; it is concupiscence and is always morally culpable sin. This chapter argues that same-sex attraction cannot be sublimated to holiness for 3 reasons: (1) No attraction contrary to God's design can be sublimated to holiness. (2) No sinful desire can be sublimated to holiness. (3) Only God-designed desires can lead to holiness.

Methodology

The methodology for this chapter is one of logical implication. This chapter shows how sinners having orientations does not negate moral culpability. It also provides several hypothetical scenarios that reveal the absurdity of trying to turn concupiscence, which is what is left of original sin in Christians, to holiness. This chapter concludes by offering a positive response concerning how to counsel someone struggling with same-

sex attraction. Studies from clinical psychologists will be the main sources used, along with a few other contemporary scholars.

No Attraction Contrary to God’s Design Can Be Sublimated to Holiness

Original Sin

First, consider that no attraction contrary to God’s design can be sublimated to holiness. If concupiscence or sinful desire is not morally culpable sin, then original sin is not morally culpable sin. If original sin is not morally culpable sin, then infants are not “children of wrath” and neither is the rest of mankind (Eph 2:3). If infants are not morally culpable sinners, they are in no need of grace, in no need of Christ’s death or his imputed righteousness. This is called Pelagianism.

Sexual Orientation

Furthermore, sexual orientation is defined by the *American Psychological Association* (APA) as “an enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction that one feels toward men, toward women or toward both.”¹ If having a “sexual orientation,” an “enduring attraction,” removes one’s moral culpability for one’s desires and actions, is it also true that having a “sinful orientation,” an enduring pattern of sinful desires, means one is no longer morally culpable as well? If sexual orientation is real, is sinful orientation real?

What is remarkable about this whole discussion is that “gay Christians” have won many Christians to their cause by arguing that they cannot remember a time when they were not attracted to the same sex.² And just like that, Christians are willing to

¹ “Just the Facts about Sexual Orientation and Youth: A Primer for Principals, Educators and School Personnel,” *American Psychological Association*, 2008, 3, <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/just-the-facts.pdf>.

² Nate Collins, *All But Invisible: Exploring Identity Questions at the Intersection of Faith, Gender, and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 178-79.

abandon thousands of years of church history? What will they do when someone says, “I cannot remember a time when I was not voyeuristic, lustful, suicidal, greedy, prideful, angry,” or any other sin? Can any Christian remember a time when he or she did not desire sin? Does an enduring attraction or enduring desire that is contrary to God and his law remove one’s moral culpability? If the answer is “yes” for same-sex attraction, the answer must be “yes” for every sexual attraction under the sun, and for every enduring sinful desire under the sun as well. If the church creates an arbitrary category of “sinless desire” for same-sex attraction, her children will follow their mother’s example and do so for other “sinless desires” that are contrary to God as well. There is nothing logically keeping future generations from doing with other sins what “gay Christians” and their approvers have taught them.

Sublimation

Wesley Hill and Nate Collins. Wesley Hill, as shown in chapter 4, advocates for sublimating one’s same-sex attraction by separating one’s same-sex sexual attraction from one’s same-sex attraction, and then reordering one’s same-sex attraction to good things—acts of mercy, same-sex friendships, vocations caring for the same-sex, etc.³

Nate Collins, the Founder and President of Revoice, argues something similar in his book *All But Invisible*,

Usually, we think that the most meaningful and rewarding way to experience our sexuality is physically with a spouse. The question under consideration here is whether that is the *only* way to express the urges that people feel when they experience sexual desire. To answer this question, however, we need to examine the fascinating but complex notion of *sublimation*.⁴

Collins does not believe marriage is the only God-glorifying way to express every urge associated with sexual desire. Yet, it is unbiblical to argue that a person can act on one’s

³ Hill, “Is Being Gay Sanctifiable,” <http://www.wordmp3.com/details.aspx?id=17313>, (15:30) - (26:30).

⁴ Collins, *All But Invisible*, 89.

sexual urges outside of marriage, regardless how one defines those sexual urges. If they are sexual, they must be reserved for marriage according to the Bible (Gen 2:20-25; Mark 10:2-9). Collins continues, “Christians *should* outline their own theological account of sublimation, or something like it, so they can understand how libido can be redirected in productive ways that are faithful to the call to pursue holiness.”⁵ The reason why Collins must encourage Christians to outline their own theological account of sublimation is because there is not one in the Bible. Desires that are a result of the fall and concupiscence, cannot be turned to holiness. Furthermore, he writes, “In general, the desire for sexual intimacy can represent either a problem or a possibility. It can be an occasion for either temptation and sin, on one hand, or flourishing. As helpful as this distinction might seem, however, it’s not obvious how it fits the experience of gay people.”⁶ Collins continues,

To discern a path forward that enables gay people to view their sexuality as a possibility and not merely as a problem, we need a more robust understanding of the meaning of sexuality. In chapter 9, we’ll explore how sexuality is a subset of the intrinsic relationality of the human soul and how marriage (together with the physical one-flesh union) is a metaphor of the union of Christ with the church. If this is true, then it seems possible to understand the sexual drive in relational terms—as a desire for relationship, and ultimately as a desire for God. The sexual desire for physical union with another is a signpost of the basic human need for relational connection with others and with God.

Once we grasp this simple truth, it’s just a small mental step to acknowledge that gay people can pursue the fulfillment of their sexuality through relational means instead of through a same-gender physical union. In this Christian understanding of sexuality, sublimation is not the realization of desire at a higher level that is still within the sexual domain (that’s Freudian, not biblical). Instead, it becomes the *fulfillment* of desire at a deeper level, in the relational, and therefore spiritual, domain. We can express our sexuality physically with our body, but we can *fulfill* our sexuality relationally with our heart. True sexual fulfillment is, at its root, a spiritual experience, not merely a physical one. This relational and spiritual fulfillment of sexuality is the goal of sublimation.

With this understanding of sublimation in mind, what might it look like in the daily life of a Christian who has committed himself or herself to a life of celibacy, whether gay or straight? Perhaps the easiest way to answer this question would be to explore the benefits of such a lifestyle. In general, these benefits come in two forms:

⁵ Collins, *All But Invisible*, 90.

⁶ Collins, *All But Invisible*, 90.

increased relational intimacy with others and a deeper spirituality. When a gay person commits to a vocation of lifelong celibacy, sublimating sexual desire in the context of relationships with others can yield a form of emotional intimacy that can be a lifegiving source of relational fulfillment (more about this in chapter 8). Also, sublimated sexual desire in the context of serving God through some ministry of the church can likewise be a lifegiving source of spiritual enrichment.⁷

With a cursory glance at Collins' assumptions here, one can easily see that he is defining sexual desire outside of Scripture. One cannot parse "sex" from "sexual desire." One cannot parse concupiscence out of "sexual desire" if that desire is a result of the fall and is for anyone other than one's spouse. The problem is that Collins and Hill are encouraging men, not to look at their wives the way Adam looked at Eve, but to look at their same-sex friends the way that Eve looked at Adam, just without the genital desire. They call this "sublimation," the turning of their same-sex attraction to holiness.

As argued in chapter 5 of this dissertation, James 1:13-15 goes directly against trying to sublimate one's desires that are contrary to God's design. If a desire tempts one towards sin from within, the desire is not from God. If a desire does not tempt one from within towards sin, it is from God, due to his creating or regenerating work. This argument from Hill and Collins raises at least two questions: (1) "If part of same-sex attraction can be sublimated, can part of every other unnatural attraction be reordered to holy things as well?" (2) "If part of same-sex desire can be sublimated, can part of every other sinful desire be reordered toward holiness as well?" The following section answers both questions.

Part of All Paraphilic Desires

More prominent than homosexual orientation. In psychology, abnormal sexual desires are referred to as paraphilic desires. There are several paraphilic patterns of sexual desire that are more prominent in the population than patterns of same-sex sexual

⁷ Collins, *All But Invisible*, 91-92.

desires. Thus, pastors are more likely to have Christians in their congregations who struggle with these patterns of desire than patterns of same-sex attraction. According to the *Family Equality Council*, approximately 4.3 percent of adults in the United States identify as gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ).⁸ Yet, patterns (defined later) of voyeuristic, fetishistic, and frotteuristic sexual desires are more prominent in the population. In a study conducted by the University of Quebec, Canada in 2016, professors Christian Joyal and Julie Carpentier sought to find out how prevalent paraphilic interests and behaviors were in the general population. They interviewed 1040 adults (475 men and 565 women) and asked several questions of the respondents:

Voyeurism: “Have you ever been sexually aroused while watching a stranger, who was unaware of your presence, while they were nude, were undressing, or were having sexual relations?”

Fetishism: “Have you ever been sexually aroused by an inanimate non-sexual object? Please note that a vibrator does not enter into this category?”

Frotteurism: “Have you ever been sexually aroused by touching or by rubbing yourself against a stranger?”⁹

Their findings were surprising concerning how prominent these paraphilic desires are in the general population.

Voyeurism. The most popular paraphilic desire, (“wish to experience,” 29.1 percent, maybe or absolutely; 9.6 percent, absolutely) and behavior (23.6 percent, sometimes or often; 3.4 percent, often) was voyeurism: “watching unaware strangers in the nude or during sexual activity”; there were over 40 percent with a pattern of

⁸ Family Equality Council, “LGBTQ Family Fact Sheet: In Support of August 2017 Presentation to NAC Undercount of Young Children Working Group,” *United States Census Bureau*, 2017, 1, <https://www2.census.gov/cac/nac/meetings/2017-11/LGBTQ-families-factsheet.pdf>.

⁹ Christian C. Joyal and Julie Carpentier, “The Prevalence of Paraphilic Interests and Behaviors in the General Population: A Provincial Survey,” in *The Journal of Sex Research* (March 3, 2016), 5, https://www.cicc-iccc.org/public/media/files/prod/publication_files/Joyal_Carpentier_2016_Journal_Sex_research.pdf.

voyeuristic desire and 27 percent with a pattern of voyeuristic behavior.¹⁰ How should a pastor respond if a college student comes to him and says, “I have struggled with desiring to see women undress without them knowing I am watching for as long as I can remember. I look at voyeuristic pornography off and on, but the desire is persistent; it will not go away. Sometimes I can resist it; other times, it is overwhelming. I never chose this desire; I hate it?” Following Hill’s and Collins’ lead, perhaps the pastor could tell the young man that he can separate the sinful elements of his voyeurism from the good parts of his voyeurism. The sexual elements of his voyeurism need to be rejected, the desire to watch people undress or have sex; but the good parts, the desire to watch people without their knowledge, can be sublimated to holy things. The young man could lead a security team at the church, or run the camera during worship, if the worship services are recorded. Concerning a career, the pastor could encourage the young man to pursue a vocation in fields where watching people without their knowledge is part of the day-to-day work—security, news camera man, lifeguard, or law-enforcement.

The problem with this pastor’s attempt at sublimation is that desiring to watch people without their knowledge is not a holy desire. It is not a love for God or one’s neighbor that motivates the desire, but a sinful desire, a desire to be god, to use another human being for one’s pleasure without his or her knowledge. A holy desire would be to watch people for God’s glory and for their good, not for one’s own selfish desires (Matt 22:37-39). But such a response to voyeuristic desires is not sublimation, it is not a turning of voyeuristic desires toward holiness, but a turning of sinful desires to a less heinous sin. Instead, repentance should be encouraged. The sinful voyeuristic desire must be rejected and replaced with holy desires of love for God and one’s neighbor.

¹⁰ Joyal and Carpentier, “The Prevalence of Paraphilic Interests and Behaviors in the General Population,” 8.

Fetishism. The second most popular paraphilic desire (“wish to experience,” 29.7 percent, maybe or absolutely; 8.3 percent, absolutely) and behavior (22.8 percent, sometimes or often; 3.4 percent, often) was fetishism: “being aroused by inanimate non-sexual objects”; there were 40 percent with a pattern of fetishistic desires and over 26 percent with a pattern of fetishistic behavior.¹¹ One of the most popular fetishistic desires is a foot and shoe fetish.¹² How should a pastor respond if a deacon in his forties comes to him and says, “I have a strange habit that I am ashamed to admit; it is a foot fetish. I have struggled with this for as long as I can remember. Working part-time at a shoe store has helped. I need to be around feet. But it is negatively impacting my marriage. My wife does not want me to mess with her feet; it grosses her out.” Following Hill’s and Collins’ lead, perhaps the pastor could tell his deacon that he is doing exactly what he is supposed to do. He is not acting on the desire in a sexual way, and he has turned the desire to serving the public. The pastor could even put the deacon over a monthly foot-washing ceremony during morning worship to help him associate his fetish with holy community. After all, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17). Perhaps this deacon could help his church truly serve one another in a way that they never have before, because people are often repulsed at the thought of touching one another’s feet.

The problem with the pastor’s approach is that it is focused on his deacon fulfilling his desires that are rooted in original sin or concupiscence, not in the design of God. The deacon does not want to serve people; he wants to use the public and his brothers and sisters in Christ to serve his own sinful desires. When Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, he obviously did not have a fetish; rather, he sought to do the work of a slave to leave an example concerning how Christians are to prefer one another above

¹¹ Joyal and Carpentier, “The Prevalence of Paraphilic Interests and Behaviors in the General Population,” 8.

¹² Julia Shaw, *Evil: The Science Behind Humanity’s Dark Side* (New York: Abrams Press, 2019), 135.

themselves. If a deacon organizes a foot-washing because he has a foot and shoe fetish, he is preferring himself above his church, doing the opposite of what Jesus taught, even if he has no sexual desires in the ceremony.

Frotteurism. The fourth most popular paraphilic desire in the study, (“wish to experience,” 15 percent, maybe or absolutely; 3.8 percent, absolutely) and behavior (17.1 percent, sometimes or often; .7 percent, often) was frotteurism: “being aroused by touching or rubbing up against a stranger”; there were over 18 percent with a pattern of frotteuristic desires and over 17 percent with a pattern of frotteuristic behavior.¹³ How should a pastor respond if a deacon’s wife in her late forties comes to him and says,

I have been a dentist for 22 years, and I have struggled with something strange. I am ashamed to admit it. When I work on men’s teeth, I often put my breasts up against their heads, and as I work, my breasts rub on them some. I need to get close to them to be able to work, but not that close. I am not sure if it is the thrill, adrenaline, or what, but I know it is wrong. Your sermon last Sunday on adultery convicted me, and I had to come talk with you. I do not do this to the women, or even to all the men; just the attractive or young ones?

Following Hill’s and Collins’ example, perhaps the pastor could tell his deacon’s wife that her desire to rub up against strangers is wrong but the desire to touch strangers is not. Jesus touched strangers, after all. Thus, to sublimate this desire for touching strangers, the pastor could suggest that this woman become a greeter for the worship services at church and join the nursing home ministry. Through these two ministries, she can touch many strangers, and many lives as well.

The problem with the pastor’s counsel, like the desire mentioned before, is that he encouraged her to fulfill her ungodly desires rather than encouraging total repentance. A frotteuristic desire cannot be satisfied with something less. If this woman follows her pastor’s counsel, she is going to be frustrated because greeting strangers at church and hugging strangers in the nursing home will not pacify her frotteuristic desires. There will

¹³ Shaw, *Evil*, 135.

be little thrill or adrenaline; not to mention a crime has been committed—abuse, assault, etc. The woman will not be satisfied until she rejects her frotteuristic desires entirely (repentance) and seeks to replace them with love for God and her neighbor, which entails that her breasts, sexually, are for her husband and her sexual desires should be directed toward him alone (Prov 5:18-23). Selfish desires for contact with strangers rooted in frotteurism are not a holy foundation for evangelism or benevolence. Such desires should be rejected entirely and replaced with holy self-less desires of loving God and loving one's neighbor (Gal 5:16-26).

Less prominent than same-sex sexual desires. The above sexual desires were not the only ones that were patterns among the population, transvestism and pedophilia were also named. Joyal and Carpentier asked several more questions of respondents: (1) “Transvestism: “Have you ever been sexually aroused by wearing clothing from the opposite sex?” (2) Pedophilia: “Have you ever engaged in sexual activities with a child aged 13 years old or less after you were an adult?”¹⁴

Transvestism. The sixth most popular paraphilic desire in the study (“wish to experience,” 4.2 percent, maybe or absolutely; .6 percent, absolutely) and behavior (3.3 percent, sometimes or often; .5 percent, often) was transvestism: “being aroused by wearing clothing from the opposite sex”; there were almost 5 percent with a pattern of transvestic desires and almost 4 percent with a pattern of transvestic behavior.¹⁵ How should a pastor respond if a man in his late thirties comes to him and says, “When I was young, when no one was home, I would put on my sister’s clothes, and dance around in front of the mirror. Since I have been married, I do the same thing with my wife’s clothes

¹⁴ Joyal and Carpentier, “The Prevalence of Paraphilic Interests and Behaviors in the General Population,” 5.

¹⁵ Joyal and Carpentier, “The Prevalence of Paraphilic Interests and Behaviors in the General Population,” 8.

when she is gone. But the other day, I started to do this with my daughter's clothes. She is fifteen. It really bothered me. I know it is wrong. Can you help me?" Following Hill's and Collins' logic, this pastor could tell this man that he can separate his transvestic sexual desire from his transvestic desire. The desire to wear women's clothes in private is wrong, but not necessarily in certain settings. Perhaps the pastor could put the man over leading a drama ministry at church or a clown ministry, or both? The drama team could lead a play once every three months, or the clown ministry could minister once per month in the community, or both? As part of his acting, he could play opposite-sex characters as needed, which would require him to wear women's clothing, and possibly pacify his transvestism.

The problem with the pastor's approach is that it is about "managing" the person's sinful desire rather than repentance. One cannot pacify desires contrary to God's design and be holy. Although dressing in women's clothes for arousal is a more heinous sin, dressing in women's clothes to satisfy some unnatural longing to be the opposite sex is still sin. God forbids cross-dressing in Deuteronomy 22:5. Repentance is not "sinning in a less heinous way." Repentance is rejecting the sin by turning from the sinful desire, and through faith embracing Christ while pursuing a holy God-designed desire.

Pedophilia. Another less popular paraphilic desire ("about 4% of men self-report sexual interest in and arousal to young children")¹⁶ and behavior (.3 percent, sometimes or often; 0 percent, often) was pedophilia.¹⁷ How should a pastor respond if a

¹⁶ Sandy K. Wurtele, Dominique A. Simons, and Leah J. Parker, "Understanding Men's Self-Reported Sexual Interest in Children," In *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (November, 2018) 47: 2255-56. Joyal's and Carpentier's study could not be used for statistics on desire for pedophilia because, for a reason I do not understand, they did not include pedophilic arousal in their question about pedophilia like they did for the other paraphilic desires. Instead, they merely asked, "Have you ever engaged in sexual activities with a child aged 13 years old or less after you were an adult?" Joyal and Carpentier, "The Prevalence of Paraphilic Interests and Behaviors in the General Population," 5.

¹⁷ Joyal and Carpentier, "The Prevalence of Paraphilic Interests and Behaviors in the General Population," 8.

man in his thirties comes to him and says, “I cannot remember a time when I was not sexually attracted to children. I have never acted on the desire, but I battle it every day. Can you help me overcome?” Following Hill’s and Collins’ example, the pastor could tell the man to separate his pedophilic sexual attraction from his pedophilic attraction. To sublimate his pedophilic attraction toward holy things, the pastor could put the man over leading the nursery, and teaching children’s Sunday school classes. He could lead Vacation Bible School or start a “big brother” mentoring ministry for children in the church. Baptists are often accused of not loving children biblically in the church since children are not viewed as part of the covenant community (church) until they profess faith in Christ. Perhaps those with pedophilic attraction could be the catalyst to properly show the Baptist church how to really love children? After all, a desire to love children is a good and holy thing, for “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.”

The problem with the pastor’s approach is that the man is not seeking to love and minister to children. Rather, he has an unnatural desire towards children, and he is using them to pacify this unnatural desire. He does not love children more because of his pedophilic desires; he loves them less. The way to repent from pedophilic desires is not through being around children more. Repentance would look like avoiding children until the unnatural desires towards them cease, while also seeking to replace the ungodly desires with holy desires.

No Sinful Desire Can Be Sublimated to Holiness

Part of All Sinful Desires

Since Hill and Collins believe one can sublimate one’s homosexual orientation due to it being an unchosen persistent pattern of desire, then one can argue that original sin can be sublimated as well. As has been shown in the previous chapters of this dissertation, during the Reformation, Protestants argued that God declared Christians righteous through Christ’s passive and active obedience imputed to them and their sin

(including original sin) imputed to Christ. Original sin, though no longer imputed, remains in the regenerate in the form of concupiscence. Therefore, if “unchosen” means “not consciously chosen,” every Christian has a “pattern of unchosen sinful desire” that plagues him or her in this life called original sin or concupiscence. If sexual orientations that are inherently sinful, contrary to God’s design, can be sublimated, then all orientations of sinful desires can be sublimated as well. This section will now consider a few sinful desires—adultery, suicide, greed, pride, and unrighteous anger—and what their sublimation may look like if Hill’s and Collins’ logic is carried to its consistent end.

Adultery. Consider adultery. If a Christian man who is married approaches his pastor to ask for prayer about adulterous desires he is having towards a co-worker, how should the pastor respond? Should the pastor encourage him to befriend the woman, to make a “committed, promise-sealed friendship” as Hill advocates for “gay Christians”¹⁸ or to pursue a “celibate partnership” with her as Collins advocates for “gay Christians”?¹⁹ Of course not. The answer for sexual attraction for someone other than one’s wife is not to pursue a friendship with the person of desire. Rather, the goal should be to get away from the person. And if that cannot be arranged, at the very least, the goal should be to view the person as a mother or a sister, “in all purity” (1 Tim 5:2), or by implication, as a father or a brother.

Suicide. What about those who struggle with suicidal thoughts? If a woman in her thirties comes to her pastor and tells him that she has struggled with suicidal thoughts off and on for as long as she can remember, should he tell her that she can sublimate these sinful desires? What if the pastor said,

¹⁸ Merritt, “Celibate gay Christian leader urges faithful to ‘normalize committed friendships,’ <https://religionnews.com/2015/04/07/celibate-gay-christian-leader-urges-faithful-reimagine-friendship>.

¹⁹ Collins, *All But Invisible*, 98.

Only God has a right to take life. Therefore, you must reject the sinful suicidal desires, but perhaps you can turn your desires to leave this world toward holiness. Maybe God is calling you to be a missionary? With no fear of death, you could take the gospel to an unreached tribe of head-hunters, like the recent Christian missionary John Chau. He was martyred in November of 2018 while trying to share the gospel with the Sentinelese tribe that lives on the Andaman island chain in the Indian Ocean?²⁰

The problem is that having suicidal thoughts does not make a missionary, but rather is potentially disqualifying. Missionaries should not have a death wish; Christ did not have a death wish, as is evident from his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42). The desire to be with Jesus in Heaven is holy (Phil 1:21-26), but the desire to take one's life in the name of the self-justifying statement, "I want to be with Jesus," is sin. If a person really wants to be with the Lord Jesus, one will trust and submit to his Father's providence, even if this means life is unbearable. Paul summarized his desire to be with Jesus in Philippians 1:21-26, and he does not even hint at desiring suicide, although he longs to be with Jesus. Moreover, a missionary goes in order to make disciples (Matt 28:18-20) because she loves God and others, not because she wants to use unbelievers to possibly take her own life. "Suicide by unreached people group" is not a righteous goal, even if the gospel will be proclaimed as well.

Greed. What about greed? If a businessman in a church comes to his pastor and says that he has struggled with greed since he received fifteen dollars for his tenth birthday as a child, should the pastor tell him that maybe he can turn his greed to holiness? The pastor might suggest, "You should lead the building fund program at church, or you could lead a tithing campaign that would encourage people to give to the ministries of the church." Perhaps the man could turn his desire for amassing large amounts of money to amassing large amounts of money for the church.

²⁰ J. Oliver Conroy, "The life and death of John Chau, the man who tried to convert his killers," *The Guardian*, February 3, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/03/john-chau-christian-missionary-death-sentinelese>.

The problem with such an approach is that giving to the Lord should not be led by a greedy person. One cannot be “greedy for Jesus.” The Bible says that “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:6-7), and a greedy person is the exact opposite of a “cheerful giver.” A greedy person is a “cheerful taker,” and the only response to greed, the love of money, is repentance not vain attempts at “reordering greedy desires for Jesus.”

Pride. Now, consider the sin of pride. How should a youth pastor respond if one of his teenagers comes to him and says, “I believe God is calling me to be a pastor. I love doctrine, leading, and debating. And I love correcting people. Plus, I have a knack for teaching. Everyone seems impressed when I teach at FCA.” A youth pastor could respond with something like,

That is a possibility, but you need to be careful to not be prideful. The goal of pastoring is God’s glory, not recognition or applause. But you can sublimate your pride by turning it to being prideful about God’s work in you. So, you do not boast in your own ability, but you boast in Jesus’ gifting you of your ability. Instead of taking credit for your teaching ability, you boast of Jesus’ giving you great teaching ability.

The problem with this youth pastor’s attempt at sublimation is that it is still a “back door” way to boast in one’s own ability. It is not inherently sinful to know one is good at something. However, it is inherently sinful to boast in one’s ability, even if one is claiming to boast in Christ’s gifting. The Bible commands humility (Phil 3:3-11), which is exalting others above oneself, not boasting in oneself, which is self-exalting pride.

Anger. How about anger? How should a pastor respond if a man in his thirties comes to him and says, “I have been an angry person since puberty. I hide it at church and in public but have a short fuse with those I love. My wife, parents, and kids catch the brunt of my anger. Your sermon on unrighteous anger really impacted me. I want to show my family how much I love them. Where do I start?” The pastor may suggest that the man needs to reject the ungodly elements of his anger, like taking it out on his wife and children, but that he can turn his unrighteous anger towards defending holy things.

Perhaps the man could turn his anger to protesting at the local abortion clinic due to the murder of infants that takes place there.

The problem with the pastor's suggestion is that unrighteous anger is always unrighteous. It cannot be redirected toward holiness or God. Often, the foundation of anger is a desire to be sovereign; and one gets frustrated and angry when one cannot control one's circumstances or other people. If one is angry due to unrighteous reasons, protesting at the abortion clinic because of one's self-righteous anger is still an exercise of unrighteous anger. Taking one's unrighteous anger out on strangers is no better than taking out one's unrighteous anger on one's wife or children. God is angry at abortion and at those who commit it, but vengeance belongs to God and the means he has ordained (Rom 12:14-21), the government (Rom 13:1-7), not civilians. If one is going to protest at an abortion clinic, love for God and love for one's neighbors should be the motivating factors, not an attempt to sublimate unrighteous anger.

Negatively Impacting Future Generations

One final thought—encouraging sublimation of sinful desires rather than repentance of sinful desires leads to more people in the church who struggle with these sinful desires. The sinful desires the church sanctifies, her children and others will struggle with more; which means that the more “gay Christians” attempt to sublimate their same-sex attraction, the more “gay Christians” there will be in the future. Robert Gagnon weighs in helpfully on this issue. He only provides statistics of homosexual acts being celebrated, and how that influences others to participate in these behaviors, but these statistics are logically applicable for celebrated sinful desires as well. Gagnon writes,

In the United States today, the odds of a given child becoming homosexual increase dramatically depending on the social environment. We will focus on two cultural markers, though others could be noted (e.g., religion or income): urban/rural differences and the level of education. Data from the 1992 National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS) conducted by Edward Laumann, Robert T. Michael, Stuart Michaels (all of the University of Chicago) and John Gagnon (State

University of New York), combined with data from the 1988 General Social Survey, confirm the conventional wisdom about homosexuality being primarily an urban phenomenon: 9.2% of men in the central cities of the twelve largest urban areas identified themselves as homosexual compared with a mere 1.3% in rural areas and 2.8% generally; hence, a 708% increase from rural to urban, 329% increase from general to urban. Lesbianism and female bisexuality is much less of an urban phenomenon, though significant increases still appear: 2.6% compared to 1 .4% generally (a 186% increase) and less than 1% rural. The authors write that a relatively uniform distribution of homosexuality in different social groups "would fit with certain analogies to genetically or biologically based traits such as left-handedness or intelligence. *However, that is exactly what we do not find.*

Homosexuality . . . is clearly distributed differentially within categories of . . . social and demographic variables." Migration may account for some of this, but cannot explain all, especially since the differences also show up for those aged fourteen and sixteen. Thus, "*an environment that provides increased opportunities for and fewer negative sanctions against same-gender sexuality may both allow and even elicit expression of same-gender interest and sexual behavior.*"²¹

The percentage difference of self-identifying homosexuals between areas where homosexuality is publicly celebrated and where it is not as accepted is telling. This is the principle from Christ and Paul that "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Mark 8:14-15; Gal 5:9). When sin is celebrated among a people, it spreads. Not only does the public celebration of homosexuality lead to its growth among the population, the indoctrination of future generations through public education and popular culture—television, music, and books—leads to its growth as well. Gagnon continues,

As regards education, among those whose level of education does not extend beyond high school only 1.8% of men and .4% of women identified themselves as homosexual/bisexual. Among college graduates the rates are 3.3% of men and 3.6% of women, a 183% and a 900% increase respectively. Women who are college graduates are thus nine times more likely to identify themselves as lesbian or bisexual than women who only graduated from high school. One might argue that education opens up women to their "true" sexuality, or that women's studies programs on many college campuses indoctrinate women with ideologies supportive of lesbianism. Laumann and others attribute the dramatic rise in rates of female homosexuality either to "greater social and sexual liberalism . . . and . . . greater sexual experimentation" that coincides with higher education or to "a higher level of personal resources (human capital)" that can allow women to please themselves rather than men. The fact that the incidence of homosexual self-identification in men is affected far more by urban location than educational attainment, whereas for women it is just the opposite, suggests that the two sexes respond differently to different types of cultural stimuli. Male homosexuality appears to be governed more by pure libido, whereas female homosexuality is more cognitive and relational.

²¹ Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 416-17.

However one explains the increases, it seems clear that consistent exposure to a smorgasbord of variant sexual behaviors and the intense questioning of a heterosexual norm in educational settings can result in sevenfold to ninefold increases in the numbers of people identifying themselves as homosexual or bisexual. Given the fact that there still are major cultural reservations about homosexual behavior in the United States, there is every reason to believe that the further erosion of such reservations could lead to significantly higher increases of homosexuality in the population. Possibly with time the current 2-3% rates of self-identifying homosexuals and bisexuals could "max out" in the population at 15-25%. This suggests that it is possible for aggressive homophile instruction in the schools to recruit some additional children into a homosexual lifestyle who otherwise would have gone through life as self-identifying heterosexuals.²²

The difference between men and women is fascinating. Education was not a significant factor for men, but for women it made a big difference. It has yet to be seen how having a "gay Christian" as a pastor, priest, deacon, teacher, or other church leader negatively impacts the children that grow up under his leadership. Will they grow up to struggle more with being gay themselves? Based on the above statistics, it logically follows that growing up under a "gay Christian" who celebrates sublimating same-sex desires will influence more young believers towards seeing same-sex desires as "the doorway to blessing and grace," Wesley Hill's words, as well.²³ What child, teenager, or adult in a Bible-believing church would not want to pursue a "doorway to blessing and grace," and what pastor would not encourage a Christian to pursue a "doorway to blessing and grace"?

Only God-Designed Desires Can Lead to Holiness

Chapter 5 of this dissertation showed that God cannot be associated with evil. Therefore, only God-designed desires can lead to holiness. He does not tempt with evil and cannot be tempted by evil (James 1:13-14). Evil in the hearts of human beings does not come from God, but from man (James 1:13-15). A temptation from within is a sinful desire. Sinful desires do not come from God, only from man. Therefore, they can only

²² Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 417-18.

²³ Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, 79.

produce sin, not holiness—they lure and entice, conceive sin, and grow into death (James 1:14-15). Otherwise, one must argue that holiness can come from man apart from God, which is a Pelagian assumption. This reality raises the question concerning how pastors should counsel Christians who struggle with the temptation or sinful desire of same-sex attraction.

Start with the Gospel

Understand the gospel. First, a pastor must make sure one's counselee is a Christian that has a clear understanding of the gospel. Apart from the good news of Christ, there is no hope of being reconciled to God the Father (John 14:6). All mankind, on their own, are bent towards themselves in rebellion against God (Rom 3:23). But God has looked upon these rebels with compassion and love. When man could not save himself due to his sin, God sent his one and only Son to save him (John 3:16). The Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, became Man, fulfilled all of God's requirements for mankind, but then died as if he broke the law and sinned against God (2 Cor 5:21). All those who repent and believe in Christ, that he died and rose from the dead, are credited with his righteousness, his passive obedience, his death, and his active obedience, his fulfillment of God's moral law (Rom 3:21-4:25).

Understand repentance. Second, pastors should encourage those they counsel to take responsibility for their same-sex attraction (Eph 2:1-3; 1 Cor 6:9). By taking personal responsibility for their concupiscence, they admit that they are not a victim of same-sex attraction, but a willful participant, at the very least, in their flesh (Rom 7:13-20). Plus, if one agrees with Hill and Collins that one should take responsibility to sublimate one's same-sex attraction, then one can also take responsibility to repent of same-sex attraction. If one has enough control over same-sex attraction to reorder it to holy things, then it logically follows that one has enough control over it to reject it continually. If Christians are not willing to take responsibility for their concupiscence,

they cannot enjoy the reality that Christ took responsibility for their concupiscence on the cross (Rom 4:25; 2 Cor 5:21). The law commands everyone not to desire or covet a neighbor's wife or anything that belongs to one's neighbor (Ex 20:17; Deut 5:21). And the apostle Paul summarized the law by quoting the same command in Romans 7:7. People often trip over whether their desire is "chosen" or "unchosen" instead of focusing on the ultimate issue, one's lack of conformity to God's holy standard. If one does not conform to God's moral law, one sins. Inclinations (concupiscence), whether they are "chosen" or "unchosen," are sins if they are against God. The response to both "chosen" and "unchosen" desires is the same, repentance. This raises another question, "How does one repent of desire?"

Understand the fight. Third, once people take responsibility for their same-sex attraction, pastors should help them declare war against it. But in order to declare war, they must admit that they are not a "special case" trapped in some sort of "special sin" that must be treated differently than other sins. Even a cursory glance at Scripture reveals a large list of vices that many godly men and women dove into. Not a single person on earth has been sinless since the Garden of Eden, except Christ. Thus, those who struggle with same-sex attraction are in good company; the whole universal church is full of strugglers. Pastors should remind them that pastors battle sin too, as does every godly person they know. Every single Scripture writer struggled with sin, because neither Christ nor God wrote any books of the Bible with their own hand (though the Bible is the infallible and inerrant word of God due to holy men being carried along by the Holy Spirit, 2 Tim 3:15-17; 2 Pet 1:16-21). Every Christian battles sin every day, and if they think they do not, then hidden pride has blinded them (1 Cor 10:6-13).

Furthermore, Pastors must be careful not to determine victory or defeat for the struggler before one even begins to fight. The pastor's responsibility is to tell the person who struggles with same-sex attraction to fight, not to say that one will or will not cease

to struggle with same-sex attraction in this life. After all, they will struggle with sin the rest of their lives, like the person counseling them will (Rom 7:7-25; 1 John 1:5-10). Some may never struggle with same-sex attraction again; others may struggle the rest of their lives; while others may struggle for years and find complete victory at an unknown future date. Pastors should not attempt to predict the future but should instead encourage strugglers to rest in the grace of God and the imputed righteousness of Christ (Rom 7:25-8:1).

Moreover, pastors must remind their brothers and sisters in Christ that they do not fight because they will definitely overcome same-sex attraction in this life; they fight because Jesus is their Lord (Phil 3:1-21). They must fight because his tomb is forever empty. It is of utmost importance for pastors to help them base their fighting on objective truth rather than on their faulty subjective evaluation of their own progress. Self-evaluations really are not worth the trouble since one's discernment is faulty; rather encourage them to fight and keep fighting until eternity. Christ is worth the fight. No one has loves us like our triune God does.

Tools for War

Enjoy Christian community. Furthermore, when pastors encourage those who struggle with same-sex attraction to fight, they must give them tools to fight with. But what are these tools? First, one must encourage them to lean on the church for community. The best community outside of temptation is not same-sex friendships chosen in part due to same-sex attraction, a desire for "male intimacy," or due to attempts at sublimating same-sex attraction, like Wesley Hill and Nate Collins argue. Rather, pastors should encourage heterosexual marriage, opposite-sex friendships, and same-sex friendships devoid of same-sex attraction. Marriage should be encouraged because it is God's design for those who burn with passion (1 Cor 7:9). Opposite-sex friendships should be encouraged because Adam and Eve and men and women were made for one

another (Gen 2:20-25). Literally, God designed men and women for one another, to complement one another. The best avenue for a person who struggles with same-sex attraction is heterosexual marriage. And the best avenue for marriage is first, friendship. Finally, one can seek same-sex friendships devoid of same-sex attraction. A same-sex friendship devoid of same-sex attraction is a friendship with a brother or a father (1 Tim 5:1-2 by implication).

Another thought about the dangers of counseling those seeking relief from same-sex attraction—sin rarely comes alone; it usually comes in bundles. Those who struggle with same-sex attraction will struggle with other sins as well. That much is implied in Romans 1:24-32. Sin cannot be compartmentalized. If one is willing to turn God's design upside down in one's heart concerning sexual attraction, one will be willing to turn God's design upside down in other ways as well. All sinful desires must be fought, not only same-sex attraction. These tools for war may be used against other sins as well.

Pray without ceasing. Second, besides community, the various spiritual disciplines utilized against other sins may be used against same-sex attraction. Pastors should encourage Christians to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:16-18). Prayer is a weapon, not because "prayer changes things," but because God changes things. Remember that Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane, before he was arrested, told his disciples to pray so that they would not enter into temptation (Luke 22:39-46); this means that Christians can use prayer against the tempter within, concupiscence, and the Devil, so that they too may reject and resist temptation. Plus, due to the church's righteous standing in Christ, his passive and active obedience credited to them, she has the ear of her Father (1 John 5:13-15). He will offer help in one's time of need.

Memorize Scripture. Third, pastors should encourage Christians to memorize Scripture. When Jesus was tempted by the Devil, the Devil quoted Scripture, twisting it

in order to trick Jesus. But Christ quoted Scripture right back to the Devil, correcting his errant theology (Matt 4:1-11). If Christ used Scripture he memorized against the tempter without, Christians can use Scripture they have memorized against the tempter within, concupiscence. Christ's perfect response to the temptation of the Devil shows his church the importance of knowing and using Scripture to combat all forms of temptation, whether one is rebuking the Devil or others from without or rebuking oneself from within.

Sing Scripture. Fourth, pastors should tell them to sing Scripture (Eph 5:15-21). Worship is a powerful tool to use against one's sin. If staring into sin means that sin stares back (Rom 1:24-27), then staring into God means that God stares back (2 Cor 3:18). God's design must "push" his image-bearers towards God while simultaneously they enjoy God as the ultimate goal through their worship of him, which "pulls" worshipers into God Himself (Gen. 1-3). To summarize, one becomes what one worships, for ill or for good (Ps 115:1-8).

Pursue discipleship. Fifth, pastors should help them pursue discipleship (Matt 28:18-20). One helpful response to inward sin is to "get out of oneself." One cannot turn from sin by focusing on sin. Rather, one must focus on something else, something greater, something holier (Phil 4:8). One's affections must be overpowered by God's beauty (Phil. 3:8-10). One will only find despair in focusing on sin or on one's reflection in the mirror. The greatest good and the greatest goal of human affections is God (Ps 89:1-52). Knowing him more through understanding his revealed will, the Bible, will greatly impact one's ability to fight sin and to worship God properly (Job 1).

Pursue Accountability. Sixth, pastors should spur them to pursue accountability. Christians need the church, not merely for fellowship but also for accountability. Christians should spend as much time with other Christians as possible;

no need to go it alone like an unbeliever. Christians have brothers and sisters all across the world and should lean on them (Gal 6:1-2). Through gifting the church individually, God has ensured that Christians must depend on one another in order to grow in their relationships with Christ (Rom 12:1-8). Not only do those who struggle with same-sex attraction need their fellow Christians, their fellow Christians need them as well (1 Cor 12-14). That is God's design.

See and enjoy God through common grace. Seventh, pastors should help them see and enjoy God through common grace. One easy way to enjoy God's common grace today is in the popular culture works of his image-bearers. Remember the apostle Paul's closing admonition to the Philippian church, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4:8). At first glance, it looks like Paul is only referring to thinking on the Old Testament, but he actually referenced the reality that all truth is God's truth, whether from pagans or from Christians. All truth that exists is true because God created it true, either directly or through his image-bearers. The words Paul used, "honorable," "lovely," "commendable," and "excellence," come from the pagan Greco-Roman moral philosophers of Paul's day. Gordon Fee, Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, summarizes this reality well:

For many who were raised in evangelical traditions, verse 8 ought to be a breath of fresh air. Contrary to what is often taught, implicitly if not explicitly, there is a place in Christian life for taking into serious account the best of the world in which we live, even though it may not be (perish the thought!) overtly Christian. Or to put it another way, it is decidedly not Paul's view that only what is explicitly Christian (be it literature, art, music, movies or whatever) is worth seeing or hearing. Truth and beauty are where you find them. But at all times the gospel is the ultimate paradigm for what is *true, noble or admirable*.

There is nothing else like verse 8 in Paul's extant letters. It reflects a world with which the Philippians were familiar before they had ever become followers of Christ and friends of Paul; for although some of these words are common stock in Jewish wisdom, they are especially the language of Hellenistic moralism (and would be quite at home in Epictetus's *Discourses*). In effect Paul tells the Philippian believers

to take into account the best of their Greco-Roman heritage, as long as it has moral excellence and is *praiseworthy*.²⁴

In light of Fee's explanation of Paul's word-choice in Philippians 4:8, in order to battle sin within and without, Christians should read good books, listen to good music, and watch good movies and TV shows, not as idols, but as avenues through which to enjoy God. All of pop culture, like most of life in this sinful world, is grace mixed with idolatry. Pastors should encourage them to separate the common grace from the idolatry by wresting God's goodness from the pagan's popular culture works and connecting it back to the God who created them for his glory, much like Paul did in Athens with the "unknown God" (Acts 17:16-34). In other words, one should worship God as one embraces with thanksgiving his fingerprints in the popular culture works of his image-bearers.²⁵ Pagans may deny God with their lips and in their works, but they cannot deny that they reflect him; they cannot deny that they live in his world, and they cannot deny his fingerprints all over their works. Thus, Christians should take these fingerprints and connect them back to God in light of the redemptive work of Christ, for in him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:2-3). And not only should image-bearers be enjoyed, but the Image of the Invisible God, Jesus Christ, should be enjoyed (Col 1:15-20), especially.

See and enjoy God through special grace. Seventh, pastors should continually remind them to see and enjoy God through special grace. Not only must one begin with the gospel, but one must end with the gospel as well (John 17:3; 1 Cor 2:1-5). There is some negative rhetoric in the "gay Christianity" movement that the gospel is not heterosexuality, but pushing back is the reality that the gospel is not same-sex

²⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, ed. Grant R. Osborne, D. Stuart Briscoe, and Haddon Robinson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 178.

²⁵ For more information on how to enjoy God through popular culture, see my book coming out in Spring of 2020, Ted Turnau, E. Stephen Burnett, and Jared Moore, *Pop Culture Parent: Helping Kids Engage Their World for Christ* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2020).

friendships, celibacy, or sublimation either.²⁶ The Christian life is one of joy in Christ, not of despair over sin (Phil 4:10-13). If one's sins have been carried far away by Christ and one has received the imputed righteousness of Christ, then one always has this objective reality to rejoice over (Phil 3:8-10). As Paul declared in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This includes Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction, voyeuristic desires, pride, anger, and every other sinful desire in the history of humanity. Christians should not be happy about sin, but they should not be unhappy about being in Christ either. God will finish what he started in his children (Phil 1:6); now his Son's bride must "go and sin no more."

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Christian life is one of continual repentance, not of perpetual sublimation. By the Spirit, the gospel is powerful to transform, but one ignores the power of the Spirit to use the gospel to transform if one starts to tell God what he can and cannot do. Same-sex attraction is not a special sin that warrants special categories of "sinless desire" that have their source in sinful man apart from God. Rather, same-sex attraction is a sinful pattern like other sinful patterns that need to be rejected and replaced with holy God-designed desires. Where sin is great, God is greater. When sinners are good at sinning, Christ is better at saving. And when sublimation spreads its lies, God's truth eternally abides.

²⁶ Heterosexuality is not the gospel, meaning it is not God's design for salvation, but it is God's design for all sexuality (Gen 2:20-25; Mark 10:2-9).

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This dissertation has presented a comprehensive biblical, historical, theological, and philosophical analysis of concupiscence, arguing that it is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. Same-sex attraction is morally culpable sin because it is a form of concupiscence, a fleshly lawless inclination that resides in the regenerate so long as they live in this flesh. The remainder of this concluding chapter will summarize the arguments of this dissertation and suggest further areas of study, including five potential writing projects.

Summary of Chapters

This dissertation has argued that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. And because same-sex attraction is a form of concupiscence, it too is always morally culpable sin. Evangelicalism is in a war, as the Revoice conference shows, a war between truth and error. She must decide if she agrees with Geneva or Rome, and whether she agrees with Nashville or St. Louis (Revoice). One cannot agree with Geneva and St. Louis at the same time or Rome and Nashville at the same time. To help the reader distinguish between Geneva and Rome, Nashville and St. Louis, and truth and error, this dissertation has provided a historical analysis in Chapters 2 and 3, a philosophical analysis in Chapters 4 and 6, a theological analysis in Chapter 5, and summaries in Chapters 1 and 7.

Chapter 1 summarized the historical debate between Roman Catholics and the Reformed tradition over whether concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate. Then, the contemporary debate among professors within the Reformed

tradition was summarized. Next, the thesis was stated, since concupiscence is always morally culpable sin, and since the source of same-sex attraction is the fall not God's design, it follows that same-sex attraction is a form of concupiscence, morally culpable sin. This is the position of Scripture, Augustine, and the Reformed tradition. The only holy response to any form of concupiscence is repentance.

Chapter 2 showed that for most of Augustine's Christian life, he taught that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. The chapter summarized five major points to prove the thesis: (1) Early in his ministry, Augustine grounded sin in one's will. (2) A few years later and throughout the rest of his ministry, he taught that the will is involved in everything a person does, including concupiscence. (3) He explicitly taught that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. (4) Concupiscence, to Augustine, made one guilty which required baptism to cleanse the guilt. (5) He went back and forth between teaching that concupiscence is morally culpable sin even after baptism and teaching that concupiscence is removed of guilt in the baptized but needs to be resisted.

Chapter 3 presented the history of the Reformed tradition versus the Roman Catholic tradition concerning whether concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. The overwhelming consensus of the Reformed tradition, 1500s through the 1600s, following Augustine's teachings, was that concupiscence was morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate. The dogma handed down from the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent, in rejection of Augustine, was that concupiscence was not morally culpable sin in the regenerate. And in the Catechism of Trent, they rejected Augustine again by arguing that concupiscence and coveting are different sins; the prior was not morally culpable and the latter was morally culpable since it is a volitional choice to submit to concupiscence. This chapter also showed that the theological descendants of the Protestant Reformers carried the truth that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin forward through the 1700s, 1800s, and 1900s.

Chapter 4 evaluated some of the arguments from Wesley Hill and Robert Gagnon that concupiscence is not morally culpable sin. Hill distinguishes same-sex sexual attraction from same-sex attraction, arguing that the former is sinful, but the latter is not. Gagnon, on the other hand, argues that a desire to sin is not morally culpable sin since it is not volitional. Both men consider themselves within the Reformed tradition; however, they reject the Reformed tradition's doctrine that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in the regenerate.

Chapter 5 explained how Genesis 3:6, Matthew 5:27-30, Romans 1:24-27, and James 1:13-15 teach that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin. After each text was exegeted, opposing positions were examined. For Genesis 3:6, Melinda Selmys' doctrine of sublimation was examined and refuted. She views Eve as a positive example in Genesis 3:6 for the objective reordering of her same-sex attraction. Next, For Matthew 5:27-30, Matthew Lee Anderson's position that one must willfully choose to lust before it is sin was explained and rebutted. Then, Robert Gagnon was appealed to for the sake of understanding Romans 1:24-27 as teaching that same-sex desire is morally culpable sin, but then his own statements that same-sex attraction is not morally culpable sin were shown to be inconsistent with his own exegesis. Next, Matthew Lee Anderson was engaged again, this time on his understanding of James 1:13-15 as defining sin as only volitional, instead of correctly understanding that James presents a personified example of the progression of sin. James argued that inner temptation can only conceive what it is morally, which is sin. Finally, the chapter concluded by explaining how the Reformed tradition's understanding that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin lead to their view that sinners need Christ's full imputed righteousness. Romans 4:1-8 was exegeted to show that the Reformed tradition was biblically correct. If Abraham and David needed Christ's full imputed righteousness, then all sinners do as well, if they are to be saved.

Chapter 6 defended the thesis that same-sex attraction cannot be sublimated towards holy things because it is always morally culpable sin. The chapter began by

examining the popular notion that parts of same-sex attraction can be sublimated or reordered toward holiness. Sublimation was shown to be in error for three reasons: (1) Only God-designed attraction can be sublimated to holiness. (2) Only holy desire can be sublimated to holiness. (3) Only God-designed desires can lead to holiness. Same-sex attraction is often presented as a special category of sin that operates by standards not permitted for other sins, like voyeurism, fetishism, frotteurism, transvestism, pedophilia, adultery, suicide, greed, and pride. Yet, this chapter showed that same-sex attraction is a form of concupiscence, not a special category of sin that can be turned to holiness, any more than any other sinful desire can be turned to holiness. The chapter concluded by presenting a summary for how to biblically counsel a Christian who struggles with same-sex attraction.

Areas for Further Research

The goal of this dissertation was to provide an exhaustive understanding of concupiscence, and one of its forms, same-sex attraction. Yet, there are only so many pages one can write. There is still much to research. One could examine the other Church Fathers besides Augustine on concupiscence, like Ambrose, Jerome, Pope Gregory I, Basil of Caesarea, Athanasius of Alexandria, Gregory of Nazianzus, and John Chrysostom. One could also examine the medieval period from the Church Fathers to the Reformation and the Council of Trent to trace the understanding of concupiscence. Additionally, one could spend much time examining the development of the Reformed tradition's understanding that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians, from the 1700s to the present. Also, one could research the Particular Baptists' from the mid-1600s to the present.

Finally, considering the research read for this dissertation, here are five suggested topics for further writing projects: (1) Defense of the thesis that despite

arguments to the contrary,¹ Zwingli affirmed the doctrine of original sin. Indeed, he wrote of its support,² did not affirm its denial,³ was defended by Martin Bucer on this account,⁴ and influenced no one to reject it, not even his successor Henry Bullinger. (2) Defense of the thesis that, despite contemporary gainsayers, Jesus' impeccable prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane are a perfect model for those facing difficult providence. (3) Defense of the thesis that the biblical definition of celibacy, following Jesus' example, is purity of heart, not contemporary definitions that include "burning with lust," a "desire for marriage," or merely "not having sex." (4) Defense of the thesis that sexual attraction for anyone other than one's spouse is sin because God created sexual attraction (Gen 2:20-25) relationship-specific (for marriage) and person-specific (for spouses), and because sexual attraction is fulfilled through Christ's non-sexual eternal marriage to his church.⁵ (5) Defense of the hypothesis that, based on exegeting Genesis 3:6 and James 1:13-15, James 1:13-14 is a summary of Genesis 3:1-6.

¹ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishing, 2013), 142.

² Huldreich Zwingli, "Declaration of Huldreich Zwingli Regarding Original Sin, Addressed to Urbanus Rhegius," in *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, vol. 2, ed. William John Hinke (Philadelphia: The Heidelberg Press, 1922), 14-15.

³ Zwingli, "Declaration of Huldreich Zwingli Regarding Original Sin, Addressed to Urbanus Rhegius," 18-19. Zwingli argued that original sin indeed condemns all Gentile men, women, and children. Yet, because God is the one who saves at his behest, according to His own will and not according to man's will, he did not want to say that God condemns everyone because of original sin; God may be saving people because He alone is in control of who receives his grace and mercy.

⁴ Bucer, *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, 124.

⁵ Jesus has no sexual attraction since his marriage to his bride, the church, is a permanent non-sexual union that fulfills God's original purpose for marriage (Gen 2:20-25; Mark 10:2-9; Eph 5:21-33). Of course, Jesus would be attracted to a woman if God brought him a female bride, since he is truly man, but God brought him a non-sexual eternal marital union instead.

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ABSTRACT

A BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL APPRAISAL OF CONCUPISCENCE WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

Jared Heath Moore, PhD
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Chair: Dr. Mark T. Coppenger

This dissertation contends that same-sex attraction, since it is a form of concupiscence, is always sinful, morally culpable. Chapter 1 defines concupiscence and summarizes the historical and contemporary debate between Roman Catholics and the Reformed tradition, along with the current debate among the Reformed over whether to agree with Geneva or Rome. Chapter 2 argues that Augustine taught, for most of his Christian ministry, that concupiscence is morally culpable sin. Chapter 3 shows how Roman Catholics rejected Augustine's teachings on concupiscence, while the Reformers and their theological descendants followed Augustine's teachings on concupiscence, emphasizing that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that some within the Reformed tradition today are rejecting the Reformed tradition's teaching that concupiscence is always morally culpable sin and embracing a position closer to the Roman Catholic view. Then, chapter 5 shows that Genesis 3:6, Matthew 5:27-30, Romans 1:24-27, and James 1:13-15 teach that concupiscence is morally culpable sin, even in Christians. This chapter concludes with a pastoral application—if concupiscence is always morally culpable sin, then sinners can only be saved and Christians can only remain saved if the full righteousness of Christ is imputed to them.

Chapter 6 argues that since same-sex attraction is a form of concupiscence, morally culpable sin, it cannot be sublimated or re-ordered to holiness. Only God-designed attraction and God-designed desires can be turned to holiness. Finally, chapter 7

summarizes the thesis and arguments from previous chapters. It concludes by offering suggestions for further research and potential writing projects.

VITA

Jared Heath Moore

EDUCATIONAL

BA, Trinity College of the Bible, 2008
MAR, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009
MDiv, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

MINISTERIAL

Youth Ministry Intern, Gum Springs Baptist Church, Walling, Tennessee,
2000-2001
Youth Pastor, Cedar Hill Baptist Church, Baxter, Tennessee, 2001-2002
Youth Pastor, Pine Eden Baptist Church, Crossville, Tennessee, 2002-2006
Senior Pastor, Union Fork Baptist Church, Soddy Daisy, Tennessee, 2006-
2010
Senior Pastor, New Salem Baptist Church, Hustonville, Kentucky, 2010-2016
Senior Pastor, Cumberland Homesteads Baptist Church, Crossville, Tennessee,
2016-

ACADEMIC

Adjunct Professor, Mid Continent University, 2013-2014
Teaching Assistant, SBTS, 2015-

ORGANIZATIONAL

Evangelical Theological Society