Able Not to Sin: Why We Are Justly Guilty in Adam

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Abstract

My study of Romans 5 showed that we are condemned in Adam and justified in Christ, but it left open how our fallenness affected the freedom of the will. This paper takes up that question from its beginning, which is not the fallen will but the will that fell. Two common answers fail. One says the decree necessitated Adam's sin; it keeps the decree and loses Adam, and with Adam the justice of God. The other places the Fall outside the decree; it keeps Adam and loses God. I argue a third answer. Scripture makes Adam upright, commanded, and fallen by his own act. Augustine names his first liberty, to be able not to sin. Thysius and Sharp state that liberty in Augustine's words, Zanchi and Junius deny that any necessity lay on Adam, and Walaeus confirms it in substance and draws the parallel with the angels who fell. The Reformed Baptist confession and Coxe say that Adam was mutable and sinned without any compulsion. The covenant of redemption has the Fall in view, and the decree made the Fall certain without making it necessary in Adam or making God its author. My thesis is this: We stand justly guilty in Adam because Adam, created upright, was able not to sin and fell by his own free choice, uncompelled and unnecessitated, so that God's imputing his one trespass to the race he represented is just, and his saving grace in the second Adam is wholly undeserved.

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1. Introduction: The Question Romans 5 Leaves Open

In my study of Romans 5, which is reproduced in full as the Appendix to this paper, I argued that Adam and Christ stand as two heads over two humanities, and that the whole justice of the gospel is bound up with that parallel. From the first head come guilt and corruption. From the second come justification and life. I wrote there that a real dilemma exists "for any account of freedom that will make God the author of Adam's sin in order to keep the decree intact, or that will empty the decree in order to keep Adam free."[1] I also said plainly what that study did not do. It described the fallen man from two sides, as guilty in Adam and as without excuse before the light God has shown, and then I added: "What is left out of that description is how that fallenness, what will be called 'enslavement to sin' in other passages, affected the freedom of the will."[2]

This paper takes up that question from its beginning, which is not the fallen will but the will that fell. If we are to understand why we are guilty in Adam, and why that guilt is just, we must first understand what Adam was before he sinned and how he came to sin. Two answers are commonly given, and both fail. The first says that Adam sinned because he could not do otherwise, since God had decreed it and the decree necessitates whatever it decrees. That answer keeps the decree and loses Adam, and with Adam it loses the justice of God, because a man who could not do otherwise was not tried at all and cannot fairly stand for anyone. The second says that Adam was free because the Fall lay outside the decree, so that God watched and did not govern. That answer keeps Adam and loses God, and it contradicts the Scripture that says nothing comes to pass apart from his purpose.

I will argue a third answer, and I do not claim it is new. It is the answer of Augustine, of the Reformed divines who followed him on this point, and of the Reformed Baptist confession and its chief writers. Adam was created upright and was able not to sin. He was also mutable, so that he might fall. He was not compelled, and he was not necessitated. He fell by his own free choice. The Fall was under God's permission and within his eternal purpose, and so it was certain; but its certainty did not make it necessary in Adam, and it did not make God its author. On that ground the imputation of Adam's one trespass to the race he represented is just, and the grace that saves us in the second Adam is grace indeed, owed to no one.

My thesis, then, is this: We stand justly guilty in Adam because Adam, created upright, was able not to sin and fell by his own free choice, uncompelled and unnecessitated, so that God's imputing his one trespass to the race he represented is just, and his saving grace in the second Adam is wholly undeserved.

I will first show that Scripture makes Adam upright, commanded, and fallen by his own act (§2). I then set out Augustine's distinction between the first liberty and the last (§3), and show that the Reformed divines of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries stated the same thing, some of them in so many words, and that they drew the parallel with the angels who fell (§4). The Reformed Baptist confession and its writers say it with particular clarity (§5). I then place the Fall within God's eternal purpose by setting out the order of that purpose as I hold it: the covenant of

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[1] Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., *Romans 5 and the Necessity of Christ: Federal Headship and Why Everyone in Heaven Needs Him* (12 September 2026), 5, reproduced below as the Appendix with its own pagination. Scripture quotations in this paper are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[2] Smith, *Romans 5*, 25.

redemption has the Fall in view (§6). From there I argue that Adam's ability is the ground of just imputation (§7), answer the main objections (§8), and close with the grace that is wholly undeserved (§9) and a conclusion (§10).

2. The Scriptural Witness: Made Upright, Commanded, Fallen by His Own Act

Scripture begins with a creation that God himself pronounced good. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Gen 1:31 ESV). Man was not made good in some lesser sense than the rest. He was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27 ESV), and the Preacher sums up both the beginning and the ruin in one verse: "See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (Eccl 7:29 ESV). The uprightness is God's work. The schemes are man's. Moses grounds the same contrast in the character of God himself: "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he" (Deut 32:4 ESV). Whatever went wrong in Eden did not go wrong in the workmanship.

Then comes the command. "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen 2:16–17 ESV). A command with a threat attached is addressed to one who can keep it and can break it. God does not threaten a stone, and he does not command a man to do what lies wholly beyond him and then call the failure a crime. That is why the older Reformed writers reasoned from the command itself to Adam's freedom. Zanchi says that from this first mandate "it is openly proved that Adam was so free, that he was not bound by any necessity to do either the bad or the good."[3] The command was a trial, and a trial implies that the outcome is not already forced.

The account of the Fall then places the act squarely on the creature. The woman saw that the tree was desirable, "she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen 3:6 ESV). When God called them to account, the man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Gen 3:12 ESV). The excuse reaches back past the woman to God who gave her, and Scripture does not accept it. Paul adds that "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:14 ESV). Adam sinned with his eyes open. James closes the door on every attempt to trace the first sin, or any sin, back to God as its source: "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" (Jas 1:13–14 ESV).

So far the man stands alone. But Scripture does not leave him alone. Hosea says of Israel, "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant" (Hos 6:7 ESV), and so places Adam under a covenant with a condition he broke. In my Romans 5 study I said that federal theology "needs more than a Latin

[3] Girolamo Zanchi, *De operibus Dei* III.iii.3, q. 1, in *Opera*, tom. 3, col. 709, trans. in Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, eds., *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 61. Latin: "Ex primo igitur mandato, quo Deus cauit, ne Adamus ex fructu arboris scientiæ boni & mali ederet, manifestè euincitur, Adamum ita liberum fuisse: vt neque ad malum, neque ad bonum faciendum, vlla necessitate constringeretur."

word. It needs a real covenant with the first head."[4] Paul supplies the head. "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom 5:12 ESV). "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:18–19 ESV). "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22 ESV). "Thus it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45 ESV).

I argued in that study that Adam is both the seminal and the representative head of the race. "Adam is seminal head, and the corrupt nature is propagated. Adam is representative head, and the one trespass is imputed. The first explains why the children are born corrupt. The second explains why they are born guilty of that one sin."[5] "In Adam" and "in Christ" are not mere reports of physical descent: "They are legal positioning."[6] Scripture already knows this kind of reckoning. Levi paid tithes in Abraham: "Levi was not yet born. God still counted him as acting in and through Abraham."[7]

Put these two strands together and the question of this paper stands out. The one man whose trespass is counted to the many is the same man whom God made upright and commanded, and who took and ate by his own act. Paul's whole argument rests on the fact that the one trespass was a real trespass, the free act of a man who could have done otherwise. If it was not, it was no trespass, and the parallel with "one act of righteousness" breaks, because Christ's obedience was not forced either.

3. Augustine: The First Liberty and the Last

The words in my title come from Augustine. In *On Rebuke and Grace* he asks his readers to consider "with diligence and attention in what respect those pairs differ from one another—to be able not to sin, and not to be able to sin; to be able not to die, and not to be able to die; to be able not to forsake good, and not to be able to forsake good. For the first man was able not to sin, was able not to die, was able not to forsake good." He presses the point with three questions: "Are we to say that he who had such a free will could not sin? Or that he to whom it was said, If you shall sin you shall die by death, could not die? Or that he could not forsake good, when he would forsake this by sinning, and so die?" And he concludes, "Therefore the first liberty of the will was to be able not to sin, the last will be much greater, not to be able to sin."[8]

Augustine gives two liberties here, the first and the last. The fourfold table that later became standard, with the fallen state and the state of grace placed between them, is the later schools' arrangement of his teaching. The Reformed writers I cite below set it out in that form and credit it

[4] Smith, *Romans 5*, 29.

[5] Smith, *Romans 5*, 11.

[6] Smith, *Romans 5*, 26.

[7] Smith, *Romans 5*, 31, on Heb. 7:9–10.

[8] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 33, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, rev. Benjamin B. Warfield, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1513.htm. Augustine is cited by chapter.

to him. For the argument of this paper the first liberty is what matters, and Augustine states it without any qualification: the first man was able not to sin.

He states just as plainly where the fault lay. Adam "forsook God of his free will," and so "he experienced the just judgment of God, that with his whole race, which being as yet all placed in him had sinned with him, he should be condemned." Augustine adds that "even if none should be delivered, no one could justly blame the judgment of God."[9] And in the following chapters he puts the fault entirely on the man. God "had given help without which he could not continue therein if he would; but that he should will, He left in his free will. He could therefore continue if he would, because the help was not wanting whereby he could, and without which he could not, perseveringly hold fast the good which he would. But that he willed not to continue is absolutely the fault of him whose merit it would have been if he had willed to continue."[10]

The next sentence in that chapter is the one I most want my reader to see, because it ties the fault to the ability. Augustine says that if the help needed to stand had been wanting, "either to angel or to man when they were first made, since their nature was not made such that without the divine help it could abide if it would, they certainly would not have fallen by their own fault, because the help would have been wanting without which they could not continue."[11] A creature unable to stand does not fall by its own fault. That is Augustine's principle, and it is the principle of this paper. Adam's guilt is real because his ability was real.

Augustine guards this from the opposite error as carefully. Adam's ability to stand was not autonomy. It was itself a gift of grace. "The first man had not that grace by which he should never will to be evil; but assuredly he had that in which if he willed to abide he would never be evil, and without which, moreover, he could not by free will be good, but which, nevertheless, by free will he could forsake."[12] In the *Enchiridion* he says the same: "although the mere exercise of man's free-will was sufficient to bring in sin, his free-will would not have sufficed for his maintenance in righteousness, unless God had assisted it by imparting a portion of His unchangeable goodness."[13] The asymmetry is the heart of the matter. Adam could stand only with God's help, and that help was given. He could fall by himself, and he did. The standing would have been grace; the falling was his own.

Augustine also tells us why God made man in this way. "Now it was expedient that man should be at first so created, as to have it in his power both to will what was right and to will what was wrong; not without reward if he willed the former, and not without punishment if he willed the latter." God "willed to show how good is a rational being who is able even to refrain from sin, and yet how much better is one who cannot sin at all."[14] The first liberty was a real good. It was a lesser good than the last, but it was not a sham, and it was not a necessity in disguise.

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[9] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 28.
[10] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 32.
[11] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 32.
[12] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 31.
[13] Augustine, *Enchiridion* 106, trans. J. F. Shaw, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight.
[14] Augustine, *Enchiridion* 105.

4. The Reformed Witnesses

It is sometimes assumed that the Reformed divines, because they taught that God decrees whatever comes to pass, must have taught that Adam could not have done otherwise. Many of them did not. On Adam before the Fall, a strong line of Reformed teaching kept Augustine's distinction whole, and some of its writers stated it in his own words.

4.1 Thysius and Sharp State It Outright

The *Synopsis of a Purer Theology*, the Leiden summary of 1625, treats free choice in a disputation over which Antonius Thysius presided. It states the four states in exactly the form I have described, and it closes the fourth state with the words "as Augustine says." "Therefore man by his free choice (liberum arbitrium), in the first state, was able not to sin, but to stand firm in the good; in the second, having become evil through the abuse of free choice, he was not able not to sin, much less to rise again to the good by the powers of his choice; in the third, re-created by divine grace and efficacy, and confirmed in the good by the same, he cannot sin totally and finally by free choice, but is advanced in the good and perseveres; in the fourth state, finally, glorified by God, he will no longer be able to sin, as Augustine says."[15]

The same disputation explains how such a man could fall: "Yet this habit of good was implanted in nature in such a way that man, just as he had been created composite and finite in nature, would also be mutable in will." He "could fall away spontaneously (sponte) and by his own motion. And so it came to pass, God so permitting (permittente). His voluntary fall is proven by the law of God, by the threat added to the law, and by the history of the fall."[16] Here, in one thesis, are the parts of my argument: an upright nature, a mutable will, a fall by the man's own motion, and God's permission over the whole.

John Sharp says the same thing in his own textbooks. "First, man is considered in the state of integrity (status integritatis), in which he had free choice without coercion to choose either good or evil, and so that he could sin or not sin."[17] He gives the internal cause of the first sin with equal clarity: "The internal cause which alone was in Adam when he first sinned was his free will (libera voluntas); for he was not endowed, as we are, with any depraved affections, ignorance, [or] weakness."[18] And he repeats Augustine's distinction between ability and will: "To Adam it was given to be able (posse), if he willed, to continue in the state of integrity, but not to will what he was able to do: but to us it is given both to be able and to will."[19]

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[15] Antonius Thysius, praeses, *Synopsis purioris theologiae* (Leiden, 1625), disp. XVII, "De libero arbitrio," th. XLIV, in the edition of Herman Bavinck (Leiden, 1881), 154: "Ergo homo libero suo arbitrio, in primo quidem statu, potuit non peccare, sed in bono consistere; in secundo vero, liberi arbitrii abusu factus malus non potuit non peccare."

[16] Thysius, *Synopsis*, disp. XVII, th. XVI, 147: "et deficere sponte et proprio motu posset; ut et Deo ita permittente factum est."

[17] John Sharp, *Cursus theologicus* (Geneva, 1622), 274: "Primo consideratur homo in statu integritatis, in quo liberum arbitrium habuit absque coactione ad eligendum vel bonum vel malum, et vt peccare vel non peccare posset." The same words stand in Sharp, *Tractatus de misero hominis statu sub peccato* (Geneva, 1610), 155.

[18] Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 218: "Causa interna, quae sola fuit in Adamo, cum primum peccauit, fuit libera eius voluntas."

[19] John Sharp, *Tractatus de iustificatione* (1609), 153: "Adamo datum est posse si vellet continuare in integro statu, at non velle quod posset: at nobis datum est posse et velle."

4.2 Not Necessitated

These writers did not only say that Adam could sin or not sin. They denied that his sin came from any necessity. Sharp answers the objection that a doctrine which teaches that men sin necessarily makes God the author of sin. He grants that fallen men sin necessarily, "on account of internal corruption," but he denies that this necessity reaches back to creation: "For the necessity of sinning is not even from creation, but from corruption, which proceeded from man's voluntary disobedience. Man does indeed sin according to the decree (decretum), but through his own will."[20] That sentence holds the decree and the will together, and it puts the necessity of sinning after the Fall, not before it.

Zanchi says it more sharply still. "But add here that Adam had a will not only free from all coercion but even free from all necessity. For nothing there was for him, either externally or internally, by which he was bound to will or do either bad or good. About the external influences it is clear; for neither God willed to, nor the Angels (good or bad), nor the heavens could prompt him with any necessity either towards the good or towards the bad."[21] He draws the conclusion I am drawing: Scripture teaches Adam's freedom "in order to make clear that God was in no way the author of sin, but that the fact that Adam sinned resulted from his own free choice."[22]

4.3 Walaeus Confirms It in Substance

In the disputations of the *Synopsis* that I cite, Antonius Walaeus does not use the words "able not to sin" of Adam. He confirms the substance. The common providence of God, he says, carried with it a communication of benefits "which, in nature in its integrity (natura integra), was sufficient for salvation, as is manifest in the angels who were rejected and in the whole human race considered in its first parent before the Fall."[23] What was sufficient for salvation was sufficient to stand. Walaeus also places the Fall within God's providence without making it necessary. "Meanwhile we confess both that man was not created with an uncertain end, and that the fall of man did not happen without the special providence (providentia) of God." He then gives the reason in words he prints as a quotation: "*But God willed first to show what free choice (liberum arbitrium) could do in man, and then what the benefit of his grace could do.*" And he speaks of God "foreseeing (praevidens) that it would come to pass that man, created in his image, would together with all his posterity abuse his free choice."[24] The Fall is foreseen and governed; the abuse of free choice is man's.

4.4 The Angel Parallel

Walaeus's clearest witness comes in his disputation on the angels, and the parallel with Adam is close enough to be worth setting out in full. He writes that "from their first creation the angels were

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[20] Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 166: "Necessitas enim peccati ne a creatione quidem est, sed a corruptione, quae a voluntaria hominis inobedientia processit. Peccat quidem homo secundum decretum, sed per propriam voluntatem."

[21] Zanchi, *De operibus Dei* III.iii.3, q. 1, *Opera*, tom. 3, col. 708, trans. in van Asselt, Bac, and te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 59. Latin: "Sed adde hic, quòd Adamus non solùm liberam ab omni coactione, habebat voluntatem; verùm etiam ab omni necessitate."

[22] Zanchi, *De operibus Dei*, col. 708, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 60: "Deum auctorem peccati minimè fuisse: sed quòd peccauerit Adamus, hoc ex libero ipsius profectum esse arbitrio."

[23] Antonius Walaeus, praeses, *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, disp. XXIV, "De divina praedestinatione," th. LV, in the edition of Bavinck, 235: "quae in natura quidem integra ad salutem sufficiebat, ut in Angelis rejectis, et genere humano toto, in primo parente ante lapsum considerato, manifestum est."

[24] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XXIV, th. XXIII, 226–27: "sed Deus voluit primo ostendere, quid in homine possit liberum arbitrium, deinde vero quid possit suae gratiae beneficium." The italics are Walaeus's.

endowed with a free will (libera voluntas) no less than men were." That liberty, he says, "also consisted in this, that they had the power (potestas) of persevering (perseverandi) in that good of nature (naturae bonum) in which they had been established by God through creation." He proves it from Scripture: God "is said not to have spared those who sinned," and the devil, "when he speaks a lie," speaks "from his own." His conclusion is the one I want: "Therefore those who fell away did not sin from any defect (defectus) or impotence (impotentia) of nature, but from sheer contumacy (contumacia)."[25] Their first sin came "by the free abuse of the will (liber voluntatis abusus)."[26]

The texts Walaeus cites say exactly this, and Jude says the same. "For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment" (2 Pet 2:4 ESV). Of the devil Jesus says, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44 ESV). Jude adds: "And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6 ESV). The angels "did not stay" and "left." The devil speaks "out of his own character." The language is the language of agents who forsook a place they could have kept.

Walaeus also marks the asymmetry Augustine had marked. The fallen angels fell from their own contumacy, but the elect angels did not stand by their own merit. "We therefore assert, to the contrary, that even the blessed angels must glory only in the Lord, since Sacred Scripture manifestly derives their blessedness from the peculiar grace (gratia) of God."[27] Augustine had already said that the holy angels, "while others fell by free will, themselves by the same free will stood."[28] The angels who stood owe their standing to grace; the angels who fell owe their fall to themselves.

Sharp draws the same parallel. The election of angels, he says, is the predestination by which God, "out of grace, determined to restrain the fall (lapsus) of the angels, who by their own nature were mutable and liable to fall."[29] He also puts the angels and Adam in the same condition. The angels "received a mutable grace and righteousness in a mutable state (status mutabilis)," and Adam before the Fall, "in a mutable state … received only the grace of creation."[30]

The point of the parallel is this. A creature made good and mutable, able to stand, can fall by its own will without God being the author of its fall. Scripture does not say that God made the devil a liar; it says he speaks out of his own character. If that is true of the angels, nothing in the nature of a created will requires us to say anything else of Adam. His case is the same as theirs in every respect but one, and the one difference is the subject of this paper. The angels stood or fell each for himself. Adam stood as the head of a race. When he fell, the race fell in him.

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[25] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XII, "De angelis bonis ac malis," th. XXVI–XXVII, 101–2: "quod potestatem habuerint perseverandi in illo naturae bono, in quo a Deo per creationem fuerant constituti … Non ergo ex aliquo naturae defectu aut impotentia, sed ex mera contumacia peccarunt, qui defecerunt."

[26] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XII, th. XXVIII, 102.

[27] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XII, th. XXXII, 102–3.

[28] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 32.

[29] Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 123: "Angelorum qui natura sua mutabiles et lapsui obnoxij erant."

[30] Sharp, *Tractatus de iustificatione*, 84: "illi in statu mutabili, gratiam et iustitiam mutabilem … quia in statu mutabili gratiam creationis tantum accepit."

4.5 Junius: Freedom by States, and No Necessity on Adam

Franciscus Junius, in the disputation on free choice held under him at Leiden in 1592, lays the ground for all of this by insisting that freedom must be described by states. "For the freedom in the regenerate man differs from the freedom in the unregenerate man; the freedom belonging to Adam's state of integrity is another freedom than the freedom after the Fall or the freedom we shall possess in the state of glory."[31] When he comes to Adam, he says that although man was made in holiness and integrity, "yet, because he was not so constituted that he was not mutable, he always retained a potency of willing or doing the opposite of what he willed and did." He then quotes Augustine: "from the rectitude of his nature and 'the very support of grace, he was able (*posset*) to desert when he willed so, or to remain in it, if he willed so.'" And he closes with a sentence whose Latin cannot be improved: "God had endowed him with the ability: but willing what he was able to [will] remained free to his own choice."[32]

Junius then states what I have been calling the second half of the thesis, that Adam's fall was unnecessitated. "Still, in this mutability, the first man had choice, free from all necessity." He proves it from the image of God, for "nothing is more adequate to this [image] than a solid freedom; nothing is more incompatible with this than the fetter of necessity," and from the two trees, the one promising and the other "forbidding with a threat of death."[33] So Adam, "being bound to the conservation of this innate rectitude by no necessity except of law and obedience, … squandered it by his own inner principle and most freely, when by consuming the fruit of the forbidden tree he declined from the norm of life prescribed to him."[34]

Two more sentences from Junius belong here, because they take us forward to the rest of the argument. The first places the Fall within God's decree without making God guilty of it, and places the race in Adam: "For by this singular fact (which God permitted and ordained to a righteous end, according to his eternal decree and counsel and without any guilt) the image of God was totally obliterated." The corruption reached "the common nature of all posterity, who sinned in him," and "the same gifts which he had received for himself and his posterity, he lost for himself and his posterity by his deed."[35] The second is the corollary Junius added to the whole disputation: "The providence of God was not the cause why Adam fell, nor did it even bring any necessity upon him to act well, as long as he was in the state of integrity."[36] The editors of the modern translation sum it up well: "God's providence did not force any necessity on Adam to do the good before his fall, nor did God make Adam fall, but God made Adam such that he could fall by his own choice."[37]

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[31] Franciscus Junius, *Theses Leydenses* (Leiden, 1592), disp. XXII, "Free Choice," th. 16, trans. in van Asselt, Bac, and te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 100.

[32] Junius, disp. XXII, th. 35, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 103: "*Posse* etenim ei dederat Deus: *velle* autem, quod *posset*, arbitrio suo reliquerat liberum." Junius cites Augustine, *De correptione et gratia* 11.32.

[33] Junius, disp. XXII, th. 37, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 103–4.

[34] Junius, disp. XXII, th. 38, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 104.

[35] Junius, disp. XXII, th. 39, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 104.

[36] Junius, disp. XXII, corollary, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 107.

[37] Van Asselt, Bac, and te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 124.

5. The Reformed Baptist Voice

What these Reformed divines taught, the Reformed Baptists confessed and taught with particular care. Nehemiah Coxe says of Adam under the covenant of creation: "Under this Covenant Man was left to the Freedom of his own Will; It was in his own Power and Choice, either to obey, and be eternally happy, or to sin and so expose himself to eternal Misery; he was not so confirmed in Grace, as that he could not sin and dye, but he was indued with that Power, and Rectitude of Nature, as that he might not have sinned, nor ever dyed, tho' he had not a non posse peccare, and so a non posse mori; yet he had a posse non peccare, and so a posse non mori."[38] In his summary of the chapter he puts it in a line: "Man left to the freedom of his own Will under it; his mutability, the original of Sin."[39]

The Confession itself is precise. "Although God created Man upright, and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatned death upon the breach thereof; yet he did not long abide in this honour; Satan using the subtilty of the serpent to seduce Eve, then by her seducing Adam, who without any compulsion, did wilfully transgress the Law of their Creation, and the command given unto them, in eating the forbidden fruit; which God was pleased according to his wise and holy Councel to permit, having purposed to order it, to his own glory."[40] Westminster had said that our first parents, "being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned."[41] The Baptist confession added that Adam sinned "without any compulsion" and "wilfully." On the will, it says: "Man in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power, to will, and to do that which was good, and well-pleasing to God; but yet was mutable, so that he might fall from it."[42] Man was created "having the Law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change."[43]

The Confession puts all of this inside the decree, and it says what the decree does not do. "GOD hath Decreed in himself from all Eternity, by the most wise and holy Councel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever comes to passe; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin, nor hath fellowship with any therin, nor is violence offered to the will of the Creature, nor yet is the liberty, or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."[44] A decree that establishes the liberty of second causes does not necessitate them.

There is one place where a reader might think the Reformed Baptists say the opposite, and I will meet it directly. Coxe, following John Norton, writes: "1. Adam might not have sinned. 2. It could not be but that Adam would sin, are both true; and notwithstanding they may so seem, yet they are

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[38] Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants That God Made with Men before the Law* (London: J. D. for Nathaniel Ponder and Benjamin Alsop, 1681), 29–30. In quotations from seventeenth-century printings the long s is printed as s; spelling and punctuation are otherwise as printed.

[39] Coxe, *Discourse*, 15–16.

[40] *A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians … in London and the Country* (London, 1677), 6.1, pp. 23–24, hereafter 2LCF, cited by chapter, paragraph and page.

[41] *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Confession of Faith, with the Quotations and Texts of Scripture Annexed* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, [1647]), 6.1, p. 14, hereafter WCF.

[42] 2LCF 9.2, p. 35.

[43] 2LCF 4.2, pp. 17–18.

[44] 2LCF 3.1, p. 13.

not opposite one unto the other." The first, he says, "is true of Adam in the sense of division, considered as in himself." The second "is true of Adam in a sense of composition, being considered as subordinate to the Decree."[45] Norton states the rule: "The same action in a divers sence, is both evitable, and inevitable. Evitable in a divided sence, i. e. in respect of mans liberty, Inevitable in a compounded sence, i. e. in respect of the Decree."[46]

"It could not be but that Adam would sin" sounds like necessity, and in one sense it is. But Coxe tells us which sense. Considered in himself, Adam might not have sinned. Considered together with the decree, it could not be that he would not sin, because what God has decreed will come to pass. That is the necessity of the consequence, not the necessity of the consequent. Coxe draws exactly that distinction two pages earlier. Some things come from "causes that work necessarily, necessitate consequentis; others of free agents, which are to us wholly contingent; yet do also necessarily come to pass, necessitate consequentiae." And he names what kind of necessity this is: "But this is a necessity of infallibility, not of coaction, and doth establish, not infringe the liberty of free agents."[47] The Fall was certain. It was not forced. Norton had already said that God "freely enabled man with power, whereby he might have lived for ever, and not have Sinned," and that God's decree was "only the Antecedent, not the cause. Man an Antecedent, and the cause of Sin."[48]

So I read Coxe and Norton. "It could not be but that Adam would sin," in the compounded sense, is the certainty that belongs to whatever God has decreed. It does not take back "might not have sinned" in the divided sense, which describes the man as he actually was. Both are true, and the second is the one that bears on Adam's guilt, because guilt belongs to the man as he acted.

6. The Order within the Decree: The Covenant of Redemption Has the Fall in View

Everything said so far would be easy if the Fall lay outside God's purpose. It does not. Thysius says it came to pass "God so permitting." Walaeus says it "did not happen without the special providence (providentia) of God." Junius says God "permitted and ordained" it "to a righteous end, according to his eternal decree and counsel and without any guilt." The Confession says God was pleased "according to his wise and holy Councel to permit" it, "having purposed to order it, to his own glory."[49] The question is how a Fall that God permitted, ordained, and purposed to order can still be the free act of a man who was able not to commit it. My answer lies in the order of God's eternal purpose, and in particular in where the covenant of redemption stands within it.

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[45] Nehemiah Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis, or a Confutation of the Heresies and Gross Errours Asserted by Thomas Collier* (London, 1677), 93, following John Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist* (London: John Macock for Henry Cripps and Lodowick Lloyd, 1654), 75.

[46] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 75.

[47] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.

[48] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 73.

[49] Thysius, *Synopsis*, disp. XVII, th. XVI, 147; Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XXIV, th. XXIII, 226; Junius, disp. XXII, th. 39, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 104; 2LCF 6.1, pp. 23–24.

6.1 An Order of Reason, Not of Time

First, a guard. When I speak of an order within God's purpose, I do not mean a sequence in time. God did not first know, then later covenant, then later still decree. Norton says it well: "But God is one Act in whom there is no succession."[50] What we distinguish in God we distinguish, as he puts it in another place, "in order of our conception."[51] Keach is careful in the same way about the covenant of redemption. "Its Rise, and Constitution, was from Eternity, tho' the Revelation, and Publication, was in Time."[52] It was made with Christ for us "from eternity," and it was first revealed "to our First Parents as soon as they fell, and broke the Covenant of Works."[53] Coxe says the same of all God's works: "things are therefore thus effected in time, because God had decreed this order before time."[54] So when I say below that the covenant of redemption comes "after" the Fall, I mean after God's knowledge of the Fall, in the order of his own understanding and will. I never mean that God responded to the Fall in time or acted upon it after it happened. God's knowledge, his covenant and his decree are one eternal purpose, ordered in reason and not in time.[55]

6.2 The Order I Hold

With that guard in place, the order I hold is this. God knows, within his own understanding, what mutable Adam would freely do under the condition of God's own supposed will to create him, to uphold him, to concur with him, and to permit him. In view of that knowledge, the Father and the Son covenant to redeem a people from the fallen race. Then, by one decree, God wills to create, to uphold, to permit the Fall, and to carry out the covenant. The decree to permit therefore permits what God already knew Adam would do in his mutability. It does not produce it.[56]

Each part of that order guards a part of the thesis. Because the knowledge concerns what Adam would freely do, the Fall is not manufactured by the decree; Adam's ability not to sin is not cancelled before he has used it. Because the covenant of redemption is made in view of that knowledge, redemption answers a Fall that is man's and not God's. Because the decree to permit follows, the Fall is not outside God's purpose. It comes to pass under his permission, within his decree, and toward the end he has set. And because the whole is one eternal act in God, nothing in it waits on history to happen first.

6.3 Building on Coxe and Keach

I did not invent the central claim of this order, that the covenant of redemption has the Fall in view. It is the Reformed Baptist order. Coxe writes "That the infinitely Wise and Gracious God, who from Eternity foresaw the Fall of Man, had also from Eternity a gracious Purpose in himself, according to the Counsel of his own Will, to redeem and save a Remnant of lost Mankind from

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[50] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 60.

[51] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 56: "The Sufficiency of God, in which the possibility of the creature is founded, precedeth the Decree in order of our conception."

[52] Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant, a Sweet Cordial for a Drooping Soul* (London, 1693), preface.

[53] Keach, *Everlasting Covenant*, 17.

[54] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.

[55] I have set this out more fully in Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., "Without Any Compulsion: Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology, the Covenant of Redemption, and the Clearing of God from the Authorship of Sin" (unpublished paper, October 2026), §7.4.

[56] Smith, "Without Any Compulsion," §7.2.

their lapsed and fallen State," and that "these eternal Counsels that were hid with himself, were transacted in a way of Covenant between the Father and the Son, even in a Covenant of Redemption now revealed in the Scriptures of Truth."[57] Keach is blunter: "That God foresaw from Eternity, that Man would fall from that happy and blessed State in which he was Created." Without that, "there would have been no room, no need, no occasion for God to enter into a Covenant of Peace with his own blessed Son, in behalf of Mankind without a War foreseen, there could I say, be no occasion of a Covenant of Peace and Reconciliation." And "this Covenant of Peace was entered into between the Father and the Son before the World began."[58] Elsewhere he speaks of the elect's recovery "out of the Fall, or out of their lapsed State foreseen by him."[59] The *Tropologia* puts the logic in a sentence: "Christ's Suretiship or Undertaking in the behalf of the Creature, was part of the Result of God's eternal Counsel; yet this Office of his may be considered as subsequent to Man's Obligation."[60]

The Confession does not state an order of the decrees, and I do not claim that it does. But it ties the eternal covenant to fallen Adam's posterity in words Westminster does not use. After the Fall "it pleased the Lord to make a Covenant of Grace," and that covenant "is founded in that Eternal Covenant transaction, that was between the Father and the Son, about the Redemption of the Elect; and it is alone by the Grace of this Covenant, that all of the posterity of fallen Adam, that ever were saved, did obtain life and a blessed immortality."[61] Westminster speaks of the covenant of grace made after man by his Fall had "made himself uncapable of Life by that Covenant," but it names no eternal transaction between the Father and the Son at that point.[62] The Baptist confession founds the covenant of grace in an eternal covenant whose object is the posterity of fallen Adam. That is the covenant of redemption with the Fall in view.

6.4 Where I Go beyond Coxe

I must say plainly where my order goes beyond Coxe, because he also says something else, and I will not hide it. In the *Vindiciae* he writes that "the foreknowledge of things to be that is in God, supposeth his Decree that they shall be."[63] And of the Fall he says that "if the most high decreed to permit it, and so from Eternity foreknew it as future," it follows that there is "a necessity of Infallibility, that in time it would so come to pass; but leaves man as a free agent to the liberty of his own will, without any coaction thereto."[64] There the decree to permit comes first, and the foreknowledge follows from it. Norton says the same: "the Futurition of the creature is nothing else but God willing the creature to be."[65]

So there are two orders in Coxe, and they pull against each other. In the *Discourse* the covenant of redemption looks to a Fall that God foresaw. In the *Vindiciae* God foreknows the Fall because he

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[57] Coxe, *Discourse*, 36–37.
[58] Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace; or, The Covenant of Peace Opened* (London: S. Bridge, 1698), 9–10.
[59] Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 301–2.
[60] [Benjamin Keach and Thomas DeLaune], *Tropologia, or, A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London: John Richardson and John Darby for Enoch Prosser, 1681), bk. II, 92.
[61] 2LCF 7.2–7.3, pp. 26–27.
[62] WCF 7.3, pp. 15–16.
[63] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.
[64] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 92.
[65] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 54.

has decreed to permit it. If the second order is pressed, the decree to permit stands before the covenant, and the covenant answers a Fall that the decree had already made future. My order carries the first through and corrects the second. Knowledge comes before the decree. The covenant of redemption is eternal, but it stands in God's purpose after his knowledge of Adam's mutable fall, and the decree to permit follows the covenant. In that sense I build on Coxe, and I take his *Discourse* further than his *Vindiciae* would allow.[66]

The step of placing this knowledge before the decree is not mine either. It belongs to a minority among the Reformed Orthodox, and I have traced it elsewhere in Alsted, Crocius, Gomarus and Le Blanc de Beaulieu.[67] Walaeus reports it as the view of "some" among "the Orthodox," and names Gomarus among them, who hold it "partly because of certain passages of Holy Scripture that appear to affirm it, and partly so that the immutability of all God's decrees may be maintained and it may in some measure be explained how God is not, through his decree, the author or the cause of evil." Walaeus then defends it, with his own qualifications, and one of his arguments goes straight to the covenants. "For God first resolved to offer man life on the condition of obedience to the law, but after the fall on condition of faith in Christ. Either, then, this hypothetical knowledge of the lapse must be placed ahead of the legal covenant, to which God afterward subordinated the other, or one would have to say that God, having decreed and foreknown the first covenant, only then, after man's fall, changed his purpose and put the other covenant in its place."[68] God does not change his purpose. Therefore the knowledge of the Fall stands before the covenant of works in the order of his purpose, and the covenant of grace is subordinated to the first in view of it. Walaeus is careful to add that this knowledge places no "infallibility" in things "apart from God's decree," because "here a hypothetical decree must of necessity be presupposed as well," and that it is no third kind of knowledge, "because it is part of the knowledge of simple intelligence."[69]

6.5 Why This Matters for the Thesis

This is why the order matters for the question of guilt. In my order the Fall is in view, not in force. The decree secures its certainty. That is the necessity of infallibility, the necessity of the consequence, which Coxe and Norton rightly affirm. But the decree does not produce the act, and so it does not take away the man's ability not to commit it. Adam's ability not to sin is real, the guilt is his, and the covenant of redemption is grace from the start, because it was made for sinners whose sin God foreknew and did not cause.

Augustine speaks in just this way. God "foreknew that evil things would arise out of good, and knew that it pertained to His most omnipotent goodness even to do good out of evil things rather than not to allow evil things to be at all." And of Adam God "foreknew what he would do in unrighteousness; foreknew, however, but did not compel him to this; but at the same time He knew what He Himself would do in righteousness concerning him."[70] The knowledge of what Adam

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[66] Smith, "Without Any Compulsion," §7.2.

[67] Smith, "Without Any Compulsion," §7.2 and nn. 100–105, where the Latin sources are cited.

[68] Antonius Walaeus, *Loci communes*, "De scientia Dei," in *Opera omnia*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Franciscus Hackius, 1643), 175: "Ergo vel hanc hypotheticam scientiam lapsus oportet legali fœderi præponere, cui postea Deus alterum subordinavit: vel dicendum esset, Deum primo fœdere decreto & præcognito, tum demum post lapsum hominis, mutasse propositum, & alterum fœdus substituisse."

[69] Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 175: "Nec ideo ponitur infallibilitas in rebus citra Dei decretum" (margin); "decretum hypotheticum hic necessario quoque supponendum"; "quia illa ad scientiam simplicis intelligentiæ pertinet."

[70] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 27, 37.

would do and the knowledge of what God would do in righteousness concerning him stand together, and neither compels.

I add one caution from Norton, because the order can be misstated. The acts of God's purpose are not to be set out as though each were a means to the next. "we ought not to think, or say thus, God created man that he might permit him to sin, and permitted him to sin that he might punish him for sin." They are "co-ordinate, that is, conjoyned into, and making up one way, serving unto Gods end."[71] My order does not say that God created Adam in order that he should fall. It says that God, knowing what mutable Adam would freely do, purposed in the Son a redemption from that fall, and by one decree willed to create, to uphold, to permit, and to redeem. Scripture and the confessions do not settle the order of the decrees, and the placing of the covenant of redemption within that order is my own inference from the end the older writers give it.[72] But it is an inference that keeps every element of their teaching on Adam whole.

7. Why Ability Grounds Just Imputation

We now come to the center of the thesis. Why does it matter for our guilt that Adam was able not to sin?

7.1 Guilt Follows Ability

Augustine's principle has already been stated: if the help needed to stand had been wanting, angel and man "certainly would not have fallen by their own fault."[73] Guilt follows ability. A trespass is a trespass because the one who commits it could have refrained. Walaeus defines guilt as "that relation (respectus) by which the sinner, through his sin, is turned away from God and is bound and ordered to penalty."[74] Guilt is the bond between a real sin and a just penalty. Where there is no real sin, there is no just bond.

Zanchi applies the principle to Adam and to us in one passage. Adam "was righteous and just so that he could obey the law of God if he willed; and consequently if he would not obey, the just punishment was promulgated." Our case is different, and yet our inability does not excuse us: "The fact that we cannot keep the law and on the contrary cannot but transgress it, adheres to us as guilt because we lost in Adam the freedom from necessity. For that reason, whether we can or cannot obey, the just punishment awaits us."[75] This is the whole argument of my thesis in a sentence. Our present inability is guilty, and not merely unfortunate, because it is the fruit of a freedom that was lost in Adam. If Adam had never had that freedom, there would have been nothing to lose, and our inability would be our misfortune rather than our guilt.

7.2 Representation and Imputation

Adam's sin is ours because he acted as our head. Sharp argues it so: "What the head does (insofar as it is head) is imputed to the whole body: but Adam, who was the head of the human race, and in

[71] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 57.
[72] Smith, "Without Any Compulsion," §7.2.
[73] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 32.
[74] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XVI, "De peccato actuali," th. XXI, 137–38.
[75] Zanchi, *De operibus Dei*, col. 709, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 61.

whom all were representatively (repraesentatiue), and who is therefore called the type of Christ who was to come, *Rom.* 5:14, truly sinned insofar as he was head."[76] He distinguishes the two parts of original sin as my Romans 5 study did: "Hence original sin is said to be twofold: imputed and inherent (imputatum et inhaerens). *Imputed* [original sin] is that defection of Adam which has been imputed to all his posterity who were in his loins."[77] The Confession says the same: "They being the root, and by Gods appointment, standing in the room, and stead of all mankind; the guilt of the Sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed, to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation."[78] Junius, as we saw, says the posterity "sinned in him," and that the gifts Adam "had received for himself and his posterity, he lost for himself and his posterity by his deed."[79]

The usual objection comes from Ezekiel: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son" (Ezek 18:20 ESV). Sharp answers it in three steps. The consequence does not follow, "because that [sin] is now our own." The proposition is true of sins that are taken away by regeneration, or that the son does not follow. And "the son does not bear personal sins, that is, those belonging to one individual: but the sin of Adam was not [the sin] of one individual, because he represented the whole species: for as he received the gifts for himself, and to be continued to his posterity if he had stood, so he lost them for himself and his posterity."[80] I made the same point in my Romans 5 study. The passages that say the children do not bear the fathers' sins "are not talking about this one sin of Adam under probation in the garden, and they are not speaking of this specific headship issue."[81] Ezekiel speaks of fathers and sons in the ordinary course of life. Romans 5 speaks of the one man under probation whose act was a public act.

7.3 An Apt Representative

Here Adam's ability does its decisive work. Imputation is just only if the representative was fit to represent and his act was truly his. A representative who could not have done otherwise would not represent anyone. His act would be the working out of a necessity laid on him, and to charge it to the race would be to charge the race with what no one did freely. But Adam was able not to sin. He stood upright, with the law of God written on his heart and power to fulfil it, with every help he needed, and with nothing within him pressing him toward evil. If any man could have stood, he could. That is why I wrote in my Romans 5 study that "you and I are guilty of the sin of Adam in the garden, as guilty as he was," and that "God has judged all humanity as guilty and deserving of hell because we would have done the same thing Adam did if we had been Adam, period."[82]

I offered there an illustration of my own, and I repeat that it is mine and not Paul's: "If all humanity had been created simultaneously, and if an election had been held for one person to represent us, Adam would have been our choice, given that he was and is the best among us."[83] "Adam is an apt representative, not a random assignee. God does not damn on a bare whim. He imputes the actual

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[76] Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 232: "in quo omnes repraesentatiue fuerunt."
[77] Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 234.
[78] 2LCF 6.3, pp. 24–25.
[79] Junius, disp. XXII, th. 39, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 104.
[80] Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 232.
[81] Smith, *Romans 5*, 12.
[82] Smith, *Romans 5*, 13, 14.
[83] Smith, *Romans 5*, 22.

act of an accurate representative."[84] The present paper supplies what makes that representation accurate. Adam's act was "the actual act" of a man able not to commit it. It was not a script written for him. It was his own, freely done, and in it he did what we in his place would have done.

7.4 The Freedom I Attribute to Adam

I should name the freedom I am attributing to Adam, using my own terms, which the older writers did not use. I call it limited ultimate freedom (LUF). It is ultimate within the temporal arena, in that Adam's choice was his own and not the product of a prior determination by God. It is limited by the causal antecedents of creation and the sustaining of creation, because the creature is not the ground of his own existence; he was created, and he was not consulted about his creation or about being sustained in it. In Adam the limitation was one of grounding only. After the Fall the limitation of a will bound to sin is added.[85] Where I speak of Adam's freedom as libertarian, I mean LUF in this sense and nothing more. I never mean a freedom outside the decree or independent of God.

LUF is held together with what I call a softer determinism. The ground of it is the distinction I have just drawn. God created his creatures and sustains them in their creation without consulting them, and so some determinism can never be escaped: the creature's inability to participate in his own creation or the sustaining of his existence is an inescapable defeater for all who deny some level and some version of determinism. Advocates of libertarian freedom of the will are asking for complete autonomy, a state of being unavailable to any being other than God himself. What the creature has is a limited freedom, and that is why I call it limited ultimate freedom. The compatibilism I hold is asymmetrical: it properly separates Adam from his fallen posterity and allows for Adam to be free in a libertarian sense with regulative control before the fall. Softer determinism and LUF stand in conjunction without conflict.[86] The older writers did not use these labels, but they held the substance. Zanchi's will "free from all necessity," Junius's "choice, free from all necessity," Sharp's "Man does indeed sin according to the decree (decretum), but through his own will," and the Confession's decree that establishes "the liberty, or contingency of second causes" all say that God's decree and the creature's freedom stand together. The labels are mine. The substance is theirs, and it is Scripture's.

8. Objections Answered

8.1 "Then the Fall Was outside the Decree"

Some will say that if Adam was able not to sin, and fell unnecessitated, then the Fall must have lain outside God's decree. It did not, and nothing in my argument requires it. Walaeus confesses "that all things which come to pass in the world, even those which have the character of the greatest crimes, come to pass according to the hidden will (voluntas) and providence of God," and he cites

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[84] Smith, *Romans 5*, 22.

[85] Smith, "Without Any Compulsion," §2. "Limited ultimate freedom" and "softer determinism" are my terms, not those of the older writers.

[86] Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., unpublished messages and notes (author's files): 29 September 2026, 2:20 PM (complete autonomy), 2:36 PM (the inescapable defeater; a compatibilism "much softer"), and 2:40 PM (limited ultimate freedom); 3 October 2026, 10:42 PM (absolute autonomy; not consulted); 4 October 2026, 9:31 AM (not consulted); 7 October 2026, 10:09 PM (asymmetrical compatibilism); 8 October 2026, 7:47 PM (softer determinism and LUF in conjunction without conflict).

the cross. "Yet it does not follow from this that God shares in any way in their fault (culpa), as the Libertines (Libertini) blasphemously say, because the good work of God must be carefully distinguished from the evil work of the creature in the same action (actio)."[87] Of the evils that come to pass by his permission, God "is properly not the effecting cause, but only the ordering and regulating cause."[88] Scripture shows both together at the cross: "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 ESV). Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel were gathered together "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:28 ESV). Joseph said the same of his brothers: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20 ESV).

Sharp says the same of Adam. Before the Fall man had free choice "either to good or to evil, yet in such a way that he could do nothing without the eternal counsel of God; nor does this necessity with respect to God take away man's freedom in choosing."[89] My thesis does not say that the Fall was outside the decree. It says that the Fall was unnecessitated in Adam. The decree made it certain. Adam made it.

8.2 "Coxe and Norton Say It Could Not Be but That Adam Would Sin"

They do, and I have already shown in what sense (§5). The same sentence that says "It could not be but that Adam would sin" says "Adam might not have sinned," and Coxe tells us that the first is true "in a sense of composition, being considered as subordinate to the Decree," the second "in the sense of division, considered as in himself." He calls the necessity involved "a necessity of infallibility, not of coaction."[90] I hold exactly that. What I deny is that the compounded sense describes what Adam could and could not do as he stood in the garden. Coxe's own words, "he had a posse non peccare," describe that.[91]

8.3 "Sharp Says God Made Adam in Order That He Should Fall"

Candor requires me to note one passage in Sharp that runs the other way. Arguing about the extent of the call of grace, he writes that God "decreed (decreuit) to permit it, and permitted it willingly; and therefore he made them such that they would be able to fall (labi possent); nay, he made them with this counsel (consilium), that they should fall."[92] That last clause is precisely what Norton warned against, the thought that "God created man that he might permit him to sin." It also sits uneasily with Sharp's own statements that Adam could sin or not sin, and that "the necessity of sinning is not even from creation."[93] The first half of his sentence I accept: God made our first parents such that they would be able to fall. The second half I do not follow, for the same reason I do not follow Coxe's *Vindiciae*. If God made Adam with the counsel that he should fall, the decree is no longer permitting what mutable Adam would do. It is appointing the Fall as a means, and the

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[87] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XVI, th. XXXI, 139.

[88] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XVI, th. XXXII, 139.

[89] John Sharp, *Tractatus de misero hominis statu sub peccato* (Geneva, 1610), 185: "ita tamen vt nihil sine aeterno Dei consilio, facere posset; nec haec necessitas respectu Dei tollit hominis in eligendo libertatem."

[90] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91, 93.

[91] Coxe, *Discourse*, 30.

[92] Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 438: "ita permittere illud decreuit, ac volens permisit, ideoque tales condidit, vt labi possent, imo hoc consilio condidit, vt laberentur."

[93] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 57; Sharp, *Cursus theologicus*, 166, 274.

ability not to sin is emptied before it is ever used. The order I hold, in which the covenant of redemption is made in view of a Fall God knew and did not cause, avoids that conclusion and keeps what Sharp himself says elsewhere.

8.4 "Ability Not to Sin Makes Adam Autonomous"

It does not, and Augustine already answered the charge. Adam could not stand without God's help. The help was given, and he could forsake it. "Because such was the nature of the aid, that he could forsake it when he would, and that he could continue in it if he would; but not such that it could be brought about that he would."[94] To be able not to sin with God's help is not to be independent of God. It is to be a creature God has made and upheld, and to whom he has left the use of what he gave. That is exactly what LUF means by a freedom limited by grounding. Adam did not give himself his being, his uprightness or his help. He was given all three. What he did with them was his.

8.5 "The Reformed Did Not Call This Libertarian"

They did not, and I do not claim that they did. "Libertarian," as I use it of Adam, means LUF in the sense defined above, and that label is mine. Nor do I claim that the Reformed Baptist writers taught a will independent of the decree, because I do not teach it either. What the older writers did teach is the substance I have shown: Adam was able not to sin, he was free "from all necessity," his will was "free from all coercion" and "even free from all necessity," and he fell "most freely," "without any compulsion," by his own inner principle. That is enough for the thesis.[95]

8.6 "Knowledge before the Decree Makes God Dependent on the Creature"

This is the most serious objection to the order I set out in §6, and the Reformed tradition itself raised it. Gisbertus Voetius rejected middle knowledge, which he called, in the words of his modern editors' translation, "that insane fiction of a middle knowledge (*scientia media*)." His editors explain that he thought it implied that "human will would so to speak confront God with its decision 'before' God has decreed anything at all."[96]

The knowledge I place before the decree is not that. God's knowledge of what Adam would do is not learned from the creature. It lies within God's simple intelligence. It is grounded first in God's own understanding and supposed will, and only within that in the creature God conceives.[97] No creature stands before God with a decision of its own before God has willed anything, because the condition under which God knows what Adam would do includes God's own will to create him, uphold him, concur with him and permit him. Walaeus makes the same point when he says that "here a hypothetical decree must of necessity be presupposed as well: one cannot say, this will happen if that is posited, unless that very thing is posited by God's decree; for it cannot posit itself."[98] Nothing outside God confronts God. God knows his own possible works.

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[94] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 31.

[95] Junius, disp. XXII, th. 37–38, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 103–4; Zanchi, *De operibus Dei*, col. 708, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 59; 2LCF 6.1, pp. 23–24.

[96] Van Asselt, Bac, and te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 164–65, in the chapter "The Will as Master of Its Own Act: A Disputation Rediscovered of Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676)."

[97] Smith, "Without Any Compulsion," §9.4.

[98] Walaeus, *Loci communes*, 175: "decretum hypotheticum hic necessario quoque supponendum: nam non potest dici, hoc fiet si hoc ponatur, nisi illud ipsum ex Dei decreto ponatur; se ipsum enim ponere non potest."

Voetius and I do not agree on the order, and I will not pretend that we do. But his editors report a conclusion of his that I can make my own: "The created will is no more necessitated by God's decree than it is by itself."[99] If that is true even on his order, it is true on mine.

9. Grace Wholly Undeserved

The last clause of my thesis now follows. If Adam was able not to sin and fell by his own free choice, then the race that fell in him is guilty, and God owes it nothing. Paul says so: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:23–24 ESV). "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23 ESV). We "were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph 2:3 ESV). "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8–9 ESV). "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Rom 11:6 ESV).

If Adam had been necessitated, all of that would be different. A race condemned for a sin that its head could not avoid would have a complaint against its Judge, and a salvation offered to it would be, in some measure, the setting right of a wrong. But Adam was not necessitated, and so the gospel is not God setting right a wrong he did. It is God saving those who wronged him. "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy" (Titus 3:5 ESV). And God shows his righteousness in doing so, "so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26 ESV).

Walaeus states the point against those who call God's election tyranny. "For, first, he cannot be accused of tyranny who exacts his right from one delinquent and guilty person, even if he does not exact it from others equally guilty." And he cites Augustine: "*For if both were set free, it would lie hidden what was owed to sin by justice; if no one, what grace would bestow*."[100] The grace by which God keeps or raises his elect "has its cause in singular grace (gratia) and mercy (misericordia), which is owed to no one."[101] It is not tyranny for God to require of the race what he once gave it in its head. He gave Adam everything needed to stand. He requires what he gave. When he forgives, he gives what he did not owe.

The covenant of redemption is the deepest ground of this. The Father and the Son covenanted to redeem a people in view of a Fall that man freely chose. There was no claim upon God in the fallen race, and there was nothing in it to move him. Keach's phrase is exact: without "a War foreseen, there could I say, be no occasion of a Covenant of Peace." The war was ours.[102] The peace was his. Only this account allows God to be good, gracious, just and wise without being a tyrant, while he keeps in his own hands the salvation of men in an act of pure and genuine grace.

Augustine shows where this grace leads. What Adam would have received as the reward of standing, the redeemed receive as a gift. "But now that good deserving has been lost by sin, in those who are delivered that has become the gift of grace which would have been the reward of

[99] Van Asselt, Bac, and te Velde, *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 164.
[100] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XXIV, th. LVIII, 236. Augustine, *Ep.* 105, as Walaeus quotes it.
[101] Walaeus, *Synopsis*, disp. XXIV, th. LVI, 235–36.
[102] Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 10.

deserving."[103] The first liberty, to be able not to sin, was lost in Adam. The last liberty, not to be able to sin, is given in Christ. The Confession says it plainly: "The Will of Man is made perfectly, and immutably free to good alone, in the state of Glory only."[104] Junius says that in glory "our condition will be most simple and therefore our will most free, but it will be disposed to that which is good only and this necessarily and eternally, although not coerced," and that we "shall perfectly bear the image of that heavenly man Christ."[105] Paul says the same: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:49 ESV). The first Adam could stand and fell. The second Adam stood, and those in him will never fall.

10. Conclusion

I set out to answer the question my Romans 5 study left open, and I have answered it from the beginning: from the will that fell, before the will that is fallen. Scripture makes Adam upright, gives him a command he could keep, and lays his sin on him alone. Augustine names his first liberty, to be able not to sin, and ties his guilt to his ability. Thysius and Sharp state that liberty in Augustine's words. Zanchi and Junius deny that any necessity lay on Adam, from God or from within. Walaeus confirms it in substance and draws the parallel with the angels who fell by their own contumacy. The Reformed Baptist confession and Coxe say that Adam had "a posse non peccare," was "mutable, so that he might fall," and sinned "without any compulsion."[106] The Fall was under God's permission and within his eternal purpose. The covenant of redemption has the Fall in view: God knew what mutable Adam would freely do, the Father and the Son covenanted to redeem a people from that fall, and God decreed to create, to permit, and to redeem. The decree made the Fall certain. It did not make it necessary in Adam, and it did not make God its author.

We stand justly guilty in Adam because Adam, created upright, was able not to sin and fell by his own free choice, uncompelled and unnecessitated, so that God's imputing his one trespass to the race he represented is just, and his saving grace in the second Adam is wholly undeserved.

My Romans 5 study is the companion to this paper. It shows from Paul, and from the pattern of one representing the many elsewhere in Scripture, that we are condemned in Adam and justified in Christ, and that no one enters heaven except by Christ. This paper shows why that condemnation is just and why that justification is grace. The study is reproduced in full as the Appendix, with its own pagination, so that the two can be read together.

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[103] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 32.
[104] 2LCF 9.5, p. 36.
[105] Junius, disp. XXII, th. 58, in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 107.
[106] Coxe, *Discourse*, 30; 2LCF 9.2, p. 35; 6.1, pp. 23–24.

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Appendix

Romans 5 and the Necessity of Christ: Federal Headship and Why Everyone in Heaven Needs Him

Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., 12 September 2026

Reproduced in full, with its own pagination (pages 1–39).