

# As Soon As We Consent

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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Confusion About Personal Responsibility	2
“Causing” Others to Sin	2
Bible Clarity About Free Will	4
Ellen White on Free Will	4
Reconciling the ideas	6
Causing Others to Stumble	7
The Same Question at the Climax of the End-Time	8
Conclusion	9

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## **Confusion About Personal Responsibility**

It is a symptom of this age: Confusion about personal responsibility. Clinging to escape the harvest we have sown is nothing new. All the history of our race shows the same. And, not only the evil try to escape. Sometimes we forget our moral commitments or lose sight of primary values partly but not completely in place--and we fail. Then the personal reality: Will I make excuse?

One excuse we may offer is that the actions of some other person have caused us to sin. Does the Bible support this idea? End-time Christians need to understand this question (as we shall see before we finish). But first, let's look at the Bible "support" offered in favor of this idea.

### **"Causing" Others to Sin**

Let's take them in sequence.

And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord (Numbers 31:15, 16).

Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin (Nehemiah 13:26).

Therefore said I [Saul], The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering (1 Samuel 13:12).

In First Kings we have Jeroboam (14:16), Nadab (15:26), Baasha (15:33, 34), Elah (16:13), Ahab (21:21, 22), and Ahaziah (22:51, 52), all making Israel to sin. In 2 Kings, we

would add Jehoram (3:3), Jehu (10:29, 31), Jehoahaz (13:2), Jeroboam (13:6), Jehoahash (13:11), Pekah (15:26), Manassah (21:11, 16). All these “made Israel to sin.”

With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him (Proverbs 7:21).

And they [the Hebrews] built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin (Jeremiah 32:35).

Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery (Matthew 5:32).

For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:19).

And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed (Revelation 13:12).

Superficially, it may appear that one person can cause, make, force, compel others to sin. And yet, we pause before accepting such an idea in an unqualified sense. Why? Because God has given to every individual a free will. This is so basic a point that we may not have given it much thought. And yet, all of Christianity interacts with it. If we have not free will, then we have not opportunity to choose to accept or deny Jesus. If we have not free will, then we have no moral responsibility.

Two elements are necessary: (1) a standard of morality, and (2) the ability to accept or decline this standard. Apart from these two elements, there would be no morality, no choosing of good or evil, no accepting or denying of Christ. Men would be robots at best.

## **Bible Clarity About Free Will**

Is there clarity in the Bible about free will? In Genesis 4:6, 7 God tells Cain he should rule over himself--including his fallen nature. In Joshua 24:15 Joshua offers an either / or choice then states his own positive decision to follow God. In Ezekiel 18:31 the call is to “cast away from you all your transgressions,” a vain request if not possible. Ezekiel 33:11 makes a similar appeal.

In the New Testament, John 14:15 simply says: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Romans 6:16 insists that we are the servants of whomever we serve. Philippians 2:12, 13 insists that the will of God and the will of man interact in salvation. James 4:17, in saying that the man who knows to do good but chooses not to do good, sins, thereby insists that man can choose to do good. Indeed, in the train of final events men must choose between the seal of God, or, the mark of the beast (Revelation chs. 13, 14). The Bible is full of human choice from Genesis to Revelation.

Man’s free will is, of course, a qualified free will. He is not God; he is not master over the elements; he is constrained by native inability in many things. Making stones into bread is not a possibility. There are also parameters that surround us which we truly have no command over. We were born into a particular situation as male or female, with a particular genetic markers, with particular defects. Some are inclined to diabetes, others to cancer, through no choice of their own. Jacques Ellul has called these “determinations.” We are not free to change them. But there are a range of things that are placed--entirely--within our ability.

## **Ellen White on Free Will**

Ellen White wrote much on free will. Consider her clarity of thought:

No man without his own consent can be overcome by Satan. The tempter has no power to control the will or to force the soul to sin. He may distress, but he cannot contaminate (*The Great Controversy*, p. 510).

So long as we do not consent to sin, there is no power, whether human or satanic, that can bring a stain upon the soul (*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 32).

It is not in the power of Satan to force anyone to sin. Sin is the sinner's individual act. Before sin exists in the heart, the consent of the will must be given, and as soon as it is given, sin is triumphant, and hell rejoices. But there is no excuse for sin, either great or little. Christ has been provided as the tempted one's refuge. 'For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted.'

'For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'

Temptation is not sin, and is no indication that God is displeased with us. The Lord suffers us to be tempted, but he measures every temptation, and apportions it according to our power to resist and overcome evil. It is in time of trial and temptation that we are enabled to measure the degree of our faith and trust in God, and to estimate the stability of our Christian character. If we are easily jostled and overcome, we should be alarmed; for our strength is small. Let us consider the words of comfort that have been left on record for our instruction: 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' God has apportioned the temptation in proportion to the strength he can supply, and he never permits us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist or to endure (*Signs of the Times*, December 18, 1893).

It is through the mighty agency of the Holy Spirit that the government of Satan is to be subdued and subjected. It is the Holy Spirit that convinces of sin, and expels it from the soul by the consent of the human agent (*Review and Herald*, April 25, 1893).

The strongest temptation is no excuse for sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel any one to sin. The will must consent, the heart must yield, or passion cannot overbear reason, nor iniquity triumph over righteousness (*Signs of the Times*, October 4, 1883).

As soon as we consent to give sin up, to acknowledge our guilt, the barrier is removed between the soul and the Saviour (*Signs of the Times*, July 29, 1913).

What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise (*Steps to Christ*, p. 47).

We do not sin until we consent. Likewise, we do not do right until we consent. And, the morally accountable person is always in a situation of consenting to one or the other. We are always serving God or serving Satan; we are always exercising the power of the will, that “God has given to men.” We are never completely free because we are never completely powerful. Nevertheless, we are exactly so free that a capability has been divinely gifted to us, and we cannot be overcome unless we consent to do evil.

### **Reconciling the ideas**

Then how do we reconcile the ideas that some are caused to sin by others, and yet that all men have true free will? This is not difficult, so long as we let the Bible speak in its plainness.

Let us return to Proverbs 7:21:

With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him.

Here is a woman who causes a man, doubtless one physically much stronger than herself, to yield. How? Simple: by seduction. She makes him a proposition and sells that proposition to

him. She appeals to a desire that he should not entertain, but he remains and listens and entertains it. He wanted to be convinced and he was convinced. There is no force applied here in the sense of irresistible force. How do you think that would go, standing before God in the judgment and saying of the prostitute that one consented to, “But God, she forced me to sin.” She did have a role in the situation; she introduced the temptation, but he chose to be drawn away by his own desires and enticed (James 1:14).

We can apply these ideas at another New testament text, Romans 5:19:

For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Yes, Adam disobeyed and a consequence of his disobedience was to introduce weaknesses and tendencies to evil in fallen man. But the power of choice “God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise.” Alas, all choose to sin and thus become sinners. At the same time, Jesus is ready to atone for all of that and to make many righteous. Again, for that to happen they must use the power of choice, that power which “God has given to men; it is their to exercise.” If they exercise it aright, helped by God’s Holy Spirit, Jesus will make them righteous.

The key to the matter is our consent. To whom will we consent?

### **Causing Others to Stumble**

There is a danger that through our actions, we will provide the kind of increased risk that Adam, Balaam, Saul, Solomon, Nadab, Asa, Baasha, Elam, Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Jeroboam, Jehoahash, Pekah, Manassah, the harlot, the second beast of Revelation 13, and so many more besides, did in creating strong situations of temptation that in a secondary sense, would cause others to sin.

Paul pled that “no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Romans 14:13). And two verses on, “if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.”

Perhaps the greatest stumblingblock we can put in front of someone is our own inconsistent behavior. How will others perceive our actions? Imagine even one voice, missing from heaven, because in some measure, one’s example led them astray. How grim and unspeakably sad that would be.

So, there is a risk because God has given to us free will. But there is the flip side. Not only that some will choose evil, but that some will choose good. You are at risk of following Satan. You are also at risk of following Jesus. If you become like Jesus, you become like He whose very name (character) means salvation. This makes demons tremble and angels sing. I am all for choosing that which makes the angels that are around me to sing.

### **The Same Question at the Climax of the End-Time**

We pointed out that this was an end-time problem in particular. Revelation 13:12 puts the question thus:

And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

Yes, the second beast, the United State of America, in whatever form it takes in the end, under the control of a Protestantism which has long departed from its protest against the false doctrines of Babylon, will exercise its influence to cause the state to create laws to compel our participation in a false day of worship. But not even 310 million of our neighbors can force us to sin. They can contribute to it, creating a setting and a situation in which we will be especially at

risk of worshipping Satan's beast's dragonic power. But they cannot compel. Jesus outlined this all 2,000 years ago:

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna (Matthew 10:28 ESV, margin).

### **Conclusion**

Can one be caused to sin by forces outside of himself? Situations of strong temptation contribute by creating special difficulty, but, always, in the final analysis, the moral question is personal: Have I agreed to sin? As soon as we consent, we sin. Or, as soon as we consent, we do righteousness. No one can be caused, forced, compelled, made to sin. Pressure may be applied to us, but this is why we need another power to help us. We need Christ within in order to resist. An ability has been given to us by which we may resist, and a power is available through which we may resist.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:21).

**Biographical note:** Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.