

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

HAMARTIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Sin

The Catastrophe from Which the Gospel Rescues Us

UNIT 6: THE BONDAGE OF THE WILL THE WILL'S ENSLAVEMENT AND ITS LIBERATION BY GRACE

Lesson 17

The Will in Each State of Humanity

Augustine's Four States and the Journey from Eden to Glory

From Posse Non Peccare to Non Posse Peccare — The Will's Complete Redemptive Trajectory

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." — Philippians 1:6

Key Texts: Romans 6:6–14; 7:14–25; Galatians 5:16–17; 1 John 1:8; 3:2; Philippians 1:6; Revelation 21:27

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Philippians 1:6, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lesson 16 examined the Luther-Erasmus debate over the bondage of the will, establishing the theological and historical stakes of the most consequential doctrinal controversy of the Reformation era. This lesson completes Unit 6 by providing the most comprehensive available framework for understanding the will's condition across the full sweep of redemptive history: Augustine's fourfold analysis of the human will in each of its four successive states of existence. Where Lesson 16 established the bondage of the will as the specific condition of the fallen, unregenerate person, this lesson places that condition within the larger narrative arc that moves from creation through fall through redemption to final glorification — establishing not merely that the will is bound in its fallen state but where the will has come from, where it is going, and what its ultimate destiny is in the purposes of the sovereign God who made it.

Augustine's fourfold schema is among the most productive analytical frameworks in the entire history of Christian theology. Its four Latin phrases have become the shorthand vocabulary for describing the will's condition in each stage of the human story: (1) *posse peccare, posse non peccare* — able to sin, able not to sin — the condition of Adam before the fall; (2) *non posse non peccare* — not able not to sin — the condition of fallen, unregenerate humanity; (3) *posse non peccare* — able not to sin — the condition of the regenerate believer in the present age of sanctification; (4) *non posse peccare* — not able to sin — the condition of the glorified person in the final state. The schema is not merely descriptive; it is progressive and eschatological: it narrates the will's journey from freedom through bondage through progressive liberation to final and permanent perfection, and it establishes the specific character of each stage in relationship to the others.

The pastoral significance of this framework cannot be overstated. The person who understands Augustine's four states understands precisely where she is in the human story, what her current condition actually entails, and what she is moving toward. The regenerate believer who struggles with remaining sin — who finds the battle with the flesh more intense than she expected and the gap between her aspirations and her achievements more persistent than she hoped — is not experiencing evidence that the gospel has not worked in her; she is experiencing the specific, normal, expected condition of Augustine's State 3: freed from the dominion of sin but not yet freed from its presence. And the eschatological hope that sustains the believer through the battles of State 3 is the certain, Spirit-guaranteed, Christologically grounded hope of State 4: the day is coming when she will be like Him, because she will see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2).

This lesson examines each of the four states in sequence, with the first two states (Section I and II) providing the background against which the third and fourth states are understood, and the third state (Section III) receiving the most sustained treatment because it is the specific condition of every believer in the congregation and every reader of this curriculum. The fourth state (Section IV) is examined as the eschatological horizon that gives the third state its directional character and its hope-sustaining power. Section V examines the present believer's experience of the war between the Spirit and the flesh in terms of the Romans 7 and Galatians 5 passages that describe it most vividly. Section VI develops the pastoral and doxological implications of the entire trajectory.

A note about the relationship between Lessons 16 and 17: Lesson 16 focused on the second state — the bondage of the unregenerate will — because that is the state most directly relevant to the question of conversion and the grounds for the Reformation's *sola gratia*. This lesson focuses primarily on the third state — the condition of the regenerate believer in the present age — because that is the state most directly relevant to the pastoral care of the congregation. The student who has worked through both lessons will have a complete account of the will's condition across the entire redemptive-historical arc, from the freedom of the garden to the confirmed righteousness of glory, with both the bondage of the second state and the battle of the third state understood in their proper eschatological context.

Augustine's Four States: At a Glance

State	Latin Formula	English	Biblical Basis	Key Feature
State 1	Posse peccare, posse non peccare	Able to sin; able not to sin	Genesis 2:16–17; Ecclesiastes 7:29	Original righteousness; genuine moral freedom; will not yet confirmed in either direction
State 2	Non posse non peccare	Not able not to sin	Romans 8:7–8; Ephesians 2:1–3; John 8:34	Will enslaved to sin; constitutive inability to choose God; total depravity operative
State 3	Posse non peccare	Able not to sin	Romans 6:14; 7:14–25; Galatians 5:17; Philippians 1:6	Freed from dominion of sin; not yet freed from presence of sin; ongoing war with flesh
State 4	Non posse peccare	Not able to sin	1 John 3:2; Revelation 21:27; Romans 8:30; Jude 24	Will confirmed in righteousness; higher than Adamic; permanent freedom through perfect conformity to Christ

I. State 1: Posse Peccare, Posse Non Peccare

The Unfallen Will — Able to Sin, Able Not to Sin

A. Original Righteousness and the Bilateral Capacity of the Pre-Fall Will

The first state of the human will — the condition of Adam and Eve before the fall — is described by Augustine's formula *posse peccare, posse non peccare*: able to sin, able not to sin. The formula captures a genuine and carefully balanced bilateral capacity: the will was genuinely able not to sin (able to maintain its orientation toward God in righteousness and holiness) and genuinely able to sin (able to turn from God in disobedience). Both capacities were real, and their simultaneous reality is the specific character of the pre-fall freedom that made the fall a genuine moral catastrophe rather than a mechanical inevitability.

The positive dimension — *posse non peccare* (able not to sin) — is the expression of original righteousness in the will's volitional dimension. Adam was created not in a condition of moral neutrality but in a condition of genuine righteousness: his knowledge was clear, his affections were ordered, his will was inclined toward God as the proper object of its love and obedience. The positive inclination toward God was real and genuine; Adam was not standing at a moral zero-point from which either God or sin were equally probable. He was standing at a positive moral starting point, equipped with original righteousness, genuinely inclined toward the good, and fully capable of maintaining that orientation. The "able not to sin" is the expression of this positive moral endowment.

The negative dimension — *posse peccare* (able to sin) — is equally real and equally important for the theological integrity of the narrative. Genesis 2:17's prohibition ("from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat", NASB 1995) is not a theological formality; it is a genuine moral command whose transgression is a genuine moral possibility. If Adam were constitutively unable to sin — if the *non posse peccare* of State 4 had been his original condition — the prohibition would be meaningless, the temptation would be impossible, and the fall would be incoherent. The genuine possibility of sin in State 1 is the condition of genuine moral dignity: only a creature genuinely capable of choosing otherwise can be genuinely praised for choosing rightly.

B. Why State 1 Is Not the Final State

The theological significance of placing State 1 first and State 4 last is the recognition that the final state of the redeemed is not a return to the original condition but a surpassing of it. Adam's State 1 freedom was genuine but unconfirmed: it was genuinely oriented toward God but not yet permanently secured in that orientation. The *posse peccare* dimension was the specific vulnerability of State 1 that made the fall possible. God did not create

Adam in the confirmed righteousness of State 4, and the question of why has occupied theologians from Augustine to the present.

The most theologically satisfying answer is that the confirmed righteousness of State 4 is qualitatively different from the original righteousness of State 1, and the path between them runs through the bondage of State 2, the battle of State 3, and the final glorification that eliminates the vulnerability of State 1 by confirming the will permanently in the righteousness that it could not yet be confirmed in at creation. The Augustinian trajectory is not a circle (creation — fall — restoration to creation's condition) but a spiral: the final state exceeds the first, the confirmed righteousness of glory is more secure and more permanent than the original righteousness of Eden, and the journey through bondage and battle is the specific path that the sovereign God has appointed for bringing the human will from the bilateral freedom of State 1 to the unilateral perfection of State 4. Ecclesiastes 7:29's observation captures the starting point with compression: "God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices." The uprightness was real; the seeking of devices was the *posse peccare* made actual.

"God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."

Ecclesiastes 7:29, NASB 1995

II. State 2: Non Posse Non Peccare

The Fallen Will — Not Able Not to Sin

The second state — the condition of fallen, unregenerate humanity — is described by Augustine's starkest formula: non posse non peccare, not able not to sin. This is the state that Units 4 and 5 of this series have examined in comprehensive detail: the total depravity of every faculty, the total inability of the corrupted faculties for genuine spiritual good, the radical corruption of the heart as the source from which all the specific expressions of depravity flow, and the enslavement of the will to sin as described in John 8:34 and Romans 8:7–8. The non posse non peccare of State 2 is not the claim that every fallen person is maximally wicked in every moment (the doctrine of common grace restrains the full expression of the corruption); it is the claim that no fallen person can genuinely choose God, love God, or please God in the spiritual sense that the first great commandment requires, apart from the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit.

The specific character of State 2's inability is important to understand precisely in relationship to State 1. Adam in State 1 was able to sin (*posse peccare*) and able not to sin (*posse non peccare*). Adam in State 2 — after the fall — is not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). The transition from State 1 to State 2 is not the replacement of one bilateral capacity by another; it is the permanent loss of one capacity (*posse non peccare* — genuine spiritual orientation toward God) and the remaining and now unconditional dominance of the other (*posse peccare* — now expressed as the constitutive inability to do otherwise than sin in the spiritual dimension). The will of State 2 is not a will that has forgotten how to orient toward God; it is a will whose fundamental nature has been corrupted so that the orientation toward God is no longer possible from within. Only a power from outside — the sovereign, regenerating Spirit of God — can restore what the fall has lost.

The doctrinal continuity between Lesson 16's treatment of Luther's two-riders metaphor and this lesson's treatment of Augustine's State 2 is complete: the beast ridden by Satan in Luther's metaphor is the non posse non peccare will of Augustine's State 2. The beast goes where Satan directs, willingly and genuinely, but it cannot direct itself toward God because Satan's directorship has produced in it a constitutive orientation away from God that it cannot reverse by its own resources. The transition from State 2 to State 3 requires what Lesson 16 identified as the sovereign claiming of the enslaved will by God — the effectual calling that creates in the spiritually dead, enslaved, and blind person the very capacity for faith, repentance, and genuine desire for God that State 2's non posse non peccare had made impossible.

“For the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Romans 8:7–8, NASB 1995

III. State 3: Posse Non Peccare

The Regenerate Will — Able Not to Sin, But Not Yet Unable to Sin

State 3: Posse Non Peccare — *Able Not to Sin*

The third state is the specific condition of every genuine believer in the present age, and it deserves the most sustained treatment of the four precisely because it is the state in which the pastoral work of the church is conducted and the spiritual formation of every member of the congregation occurs. The regenerate believer has been transferred, by the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit, from State 2 to State 3: from non posse non peccare (not able not to sin) to posse non peccare (able not to sin). The transformation is real, fundamental, and permanent: the new nature the Spirit has created genuinely desires God, genuinely loves the law, genuinely pursues holiness, and genuinely responds to the gospel’s invitation with the faith and repentance that State 2’s enslaved will could not produce. The change is not superficial; it is the creation of a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26), the new birth (John 3:3–8), the making-alive from spiritual death (Ephesians 2:5).

And yet State 3 is not State 4. The regenerate believer is able not to sin — but she is not yet unable to sin. The new nature has not eliminated the old; it has dethroned it, displaced its dominion, and given the believer a new dominant desire. But the old nature — the remnants of State 2’s corruption operating through what the Reformed tradition calls “remaining sin” — has not been abolished. It still exerts influence, still generates competing desires, still creates the specific tension that Paul describes in Galatians 5:17 (“for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another”) and Romans 7:14–25. The believer in State 3 lives in the tension between the new nature’s genuine desires toward God and the old nature’s residual pull toward sin — a tension that was absent in State 2 (where only the old nature operated) and will be absent in State 4 (where only the new nature, perfected, will operate), but which characterizes the entire present age of the Christian life.

The crucial pastoral mistake with respect to State 3 is the confusion of State 3 with either State 2 or State 4. Confusion with State 2 produces the error of antinomianism or of despair: the confusion that because the believer still sins (the presence of remaining sin) she must still be in State 2 (under sin’s dominion). This is the error that Romans 6:14 corrects: “sin shall not be master over you.” The presence of sin in the regenerate life does not mean the dominion of sin has been restored; it means that State 3 is not yet State 4. Confusion with State 4 produces the error of perfectionism or of presumption: the claim that because the believer has a new nature and the Spirit’s indwelling, she no longer sins or is no longer genuinely tempted. This is the error that 1 John 1:8 corrects: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” State 3 is not State 4, and the person who claims State 4’s non posse peccare as her present condition is making a claim that neither the Word nor honest self-examination supports.

A. Already: Freed from the Dominion of Sin

The “already” dimension of State 3 is Paul’s triumphant declaration in Romans 6:14: “for sin shall not be master over you; for you are not under law but under grace” (NASB 1995). The word translated “master” is *kuriousei* (from *kurios*, lord) — sin shall not lord it over you. This is not a command but a declaration: a statement about the objective condition of the person who has been transferred from State 2 to State 3 by the sovereign work of grace. Sin was master in State 2; it is no longer master in State 3. The dethroning has already occurred, and it is the irreversible product of the Spirit’s effectual work of regeneration.

The “already” includes not merely the formal transfer of dominion but the genuine, experiential, daily possibility of genuine obedience that State 2 could not produce. The person in State 3 is genuinely able not to sin in a way

that the person in State 2 was not. She can genuinely say no to specific temptations; she can genuinely pursue specific acts of obedience; she can genuinely love God and neighbor with a real, if imperfect, love that the enslaved will of State 2 could not generate. The Spirit's indwelling presence (Ezekiel 36:27; Romans 8:9–11) makes this genuine obedience possible — not infallibly, not effortlessly, not without ongoing struggle, but genuinely. The genuine possibility of genuine obedience is one of the most practically significant gifts of the Spirit's regenerating work, and it should be celebrated, pursued, and relied upon in the specific battles of the Christian life.

Paul's argument in Romans 6:1–14 establishes the doctrinal ground of the “already.” The believer has been united with Christ in His death and resurrection (verses 3–5): what happened to Christ at Calvary and in the empty tomb has happened, in covenantal and spiritual reality, to the believer who is in Christ. The old self was crucified with Christ (verse 6), dead to sin (verse 11), freed from sin (verse 7). These are not commands to achieve a future state but declarations about an achieved covenantal reality: the person who is in Christ has genuinely died to sin's dominion, genuinely been raised to new life, and genuinely has the right and the power to count herself dead to sin and alive to God (verse 11). The “already” of State 3 is the believer's specific share in the “already” of Christ's own death and resurrection.

B. Not Yet: The Ongoing War with Remaining Sin

The “not yet” dimension of State 3 is Paul's unflinching testimony in Romans 7:14–25, which remains one of the most theologically debated passages in all of Paul's letters. The question of whether Paul is describing the experience of an unregenerate person or a regenerate one has occupied interpreters since at least Augustine's own change of position on the matter. The Reformed tradition has overwhelmingly held that Paul is describing his own present experience as a regenerate believer, and the textual evidence strongly supports this reading: the present tenses throughout the passage, the delight in the law of God in verse 22 (“I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man”), the distinction between the inner self (the new nature) and the flesh (the old nature), and the explicit “thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” of verse 25 all point toward the experience of a person who has a genuine new nature struggling with genuine remaining corruption.

The specific testimony of Romans 7:14–25 is the testimony of a person in State 3: “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin” (verse 14) — not saying that he is in State 2 (the dominion of sin has been broken, Romans 6:14) but that the remaining flesh still participates in the old bondage in its residual dimension. “For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (verse 15) — the specific incoherence of State 3: the new nature's desires and the old nature's behavior pulling in different directions, producing the specific frustration of a person who genuinely wants to do right and still fails to do it consistently. “I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good” (verse 21) — the co-presence of the evil principle (remaining sin) and the good want (the new nature's genuine desire), which is the specific texture of State 3's experience and which is absent in both State 2 (where there is no genuine desire for good) and State 4 (where there is no evil principle remaining).

Galatians 5:16–17 provides Paul's most vivid account of the “not yet” in terms of the ongoing war: “Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (NASB 1995). The war is real, ongoing, and engaged at the level of desire: the flesh desires against the Spirit, the Spirit desires against the flesh, and the resulting conflict means that the person cannot do all the things she pleases in either direction. The command to walk by the Spirit (verse 16) is the specific pastoral instruction for the person in State 3: the path through the “not yet” is not the denial of the war but the Spirit-dependent, grace-reliant, means-of-grace-engaging walk that the Spirit empowers.

“For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

Romans 7:22–23, NASB 1995

IV. State 4: Non Posse Peccare

The Glorified Will — Not Able to Sin

State 4: *Non Posse Peccare* — Not Able to Sin

The fourth and final state of the human will is the eschatological horizon that gives the entire Augustinian trajectory its directional character and the third state's ongoing battle its sustaining hope. The glorified person in State 4 is non posse peccare — not able to sin — not because freedom has been eliminated but because the will has been permanently and irrevocably confirmed in righteousness through the completion of the Spirit's work of renewal and through the beatific vision of God that leaves no room for competing desires. The desire for sin is simply absent, and its absence is not the absence of freedom but the fullness of it: the will, finally and permanently freed from every trace of remaining corruption, is most fully and most truly free when it is most completely oriented toward the God for whom it was made.

The specific biblical testimony to State 4 comes from multiple angles. 1 John 3:2 provides the most comprehensive: "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (NASB 1995). The progression is: we will see Him just as He is — the beatific vision, the direct, unmediated knowledge of God in His full glory — and we will be like Him, the complete conformity to the image of Christ that the beatific vision produces. The seeing produces the likeness, and the likeness is State 4's non posse peccare: a will so completely conformed to the holiness and righteousness of God that no desire for sin can survive in its presence.

Revelation 21:27 establishes the complete absence of sin in the eternal state with the language of absolute exclusion: "and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (NASB 1995). The "nothing unclean" and "no one who practices abomination" are not merely external prohibitions preventing the entry of specific individuals; they describe the condition of those who are in the eternal state — whose complete conformity to the holiness of the new Jerusalem makes the very concept of uncleanness or abomination inapplicable to them. And Jude 24 provides the doxological expression of the same reality: "To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." The standing blameless is State 4's condition; the great joy is the eschatological emotion of the will that has arrived at its final and permanent destination.

A. *Why State 4 Exceeds State 1*

The Augustinian trajectory's most theologically significant feature is its identification of State 4 as qualitatively superior to State 1 rather than merely equivalent to it. Adam in the garden was righteous but unconfirmed; the glorified person is righteous and permanently confirmed. The specific superiority of State 4 over State 1 is the elimination of the posse peccare dimension — the genuine possibility of sin — that was the specific vulnerability of State 1 and that made the fall both possible and actual.

The theological explanation for the superiority of State 4 over State 1 is the difference in the ground of the will's orientation. In State 1, the will's orientation toward God was grounded in original righteousness — a created moral quality that was genuine but finite, real but fragile, inclined toward God but not yet permanently secured in that inclination. In State 4, the will's orientation toward God is grounded in the beatific vision — the direct, unmediated, transformative knowledge of God in His infinite glory, which so captivates and satisfies the will's desire that no alternative object of desire is available or conceivable. The will of State 4 does not resist temptation heroically in the face of genuine attraction to sin; it experiences no temptation because the infinite glory of God has so completely fulfilled its desires that no competing attraction can arise. This is the specific character of the "confirmed in righteousness" condition that distinguishes State 4 from State 1.

The eschatological trajectory also illuminates the purpose of the human journey through States 2 and 3. The redeemed person who has known the bondage of State 2 and the battle of State 3 will have a specific, experiential knowledge of grace in State 4 that Adam in the garden never possessed: the knowledge of what it cost to bring her from non posse non peccare to non posse peccare, the specific, personal, wonder-producing gratitude of the

person who knows what she was rescued from. The angels who never fell do not know what it means to be raised from spiritual death; the redeemed who have been raised from it do. And the specific doxological content of eternity — the “worthy is the Lamb who was slain” of Revelation 5:12 — is the praise of beings who know the full redemptive cost of their State 4 condition, who have experienced the journey from State 2 through State 3 and who will praise the Lamb for the grace that carried them through.

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

1 John 3:2–3, NASB 1995

V. The Present Battle of the Regenerate Will

Fighting from Victory Toward the Horizon of State 4

A. A Battle Fought from a Position of Victory

The outline’s summary of the pastoral application of Augustine’s four states provides the most important single sentence of the entire lesson: “in the present age, the Christian life is a battle — but it is a battle fought from a position of victory, not toward a hope of possible victory.” The distinction between fighting from victory and fighting toward a hope of possible victory is the difference between State 3 properly understood and a confusion of State 3 with State 2. The person in State 2 fights — if she fights at all — toward a position of victory that may or may not be achieved, that depends on her own effort, and that the enslaved will of State 2 cannot ultimately produce by its own resources. The person in State 3 fights from a position of victory: the decisive battle has already been won at the cross and resurrection; sin’s dominion has already been broken; the Spirit has already taken up residence in the new heart; and the outcome of the war is not in doubt.

This distinction produces a fundamentally different posture toward the Christian life and its ongoing battles. The person who believes she is fighting toward a possible victory experiences each defeat as potential evidence that the victory may not come — that she may not ultimately prevail, that sin’s dominion may be reasserting itself, that the hope of final salvation may be in question. The person who knows she is fighting from a secured victory experiences each defeat as a setback in a battle whose outcome is certain — a reminder that State 3 is not State 4, that the war is real, that remaining sin is still operative, but not as evidence that the war might ultimately be lost. Romans 8:37’s declaration — “but in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us” — is the specific declaration of the State 3 fighter’s position: the conquering is overwhelming, and it is through Him who loved us, not through our own sustained moral effort.

B. The Specific Means of Grace for the State 3 Battle

The person in State 3 fights the ongoing battle with remaining sin through the specific means that the Spirit has appointed as the instruments of sanctification: the Word of God, prayer, corporate worship and the Lord’s Supper, fellowship and mutual accountability, and the practice of deliberate mortification (the Spirit-dependent putting to death of the specific expressions of remaining sin) and vivification (the Spirit-dependent cultivation of specific acts of godliness). These are not the means by which the person earns her way to State 4; they are the means by which the Spirit who is already indwelling applies the victory already won to the specific battles of the specific believer’s specific life.

Paul’s instruction in Romans 6:11–13 is the most direct pastoral guidance for the State 3 battle: “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” The “consider” (*logizesthe*, an accounting term: reckon, count) of verse 11 is the faith-act of applying the “already” of covenantal reality to the “not yet” of experiential battle: reckoning yourself dead

to sin's dominion (the covenantal reality of State 3) and alive to God (the new nature's genuine orientation), even in the midst of the ongoing war with remaining sin. The presenting of the members as instruments of righteousness (verse 13) is the practical application of the reckoning: the Spirit-dependent, act-by-act engagement of the body and its faculties in the service of the new nature's genuine desires rather than in the service of the old nature's residual corruptions.

The eschatological motivation for the State 3 battle is 1 John 3:2–3: “We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” The hope of State 4 — the certain, Spirit-guaranteed hope of final glorification — is the specific motivation for the present work of purification in State 3. The person who genuinely believes she will see Him and will be like Him is the person most powerfully motivated to pursue the progressive likeness in the present — not because she believes her purification will earn the final state, but because the final state she is certain of arriving at orients her present desires and efforts in its direction. State 4's certainty provides State 3's motivation, and the Spirit who guarantees the former empowers the latter.

VI. The Pastoral and Doxological Trajectory

Fighting, Hoping, and Giving All the Glory to the God Who Completes What He Begins

A. The Pastoral Use of the Four States

Augustine's four states provide the pastor with one of the most useful diagnostic frameworks available in the entire theological tradition. The pastor who can locate her counselees within the four-states schema is the pastor who can offer them the specific hope, the specific counsel, and the specific correction that their specific state requires. The person in State 2 needs to hear about the sovereign grace that alone can move him from State 2 to State 3: the effectual calling, the new birth, the Spirit's creative act of regeneration that no human effort can produce. The person who has confused State 3 with State 2 — who is in State 3 but believes she may still be in State 2, who is fighting the remaining sin of State 3 and interpreting it as evidence of State 2's dominion — needs the assurance of Romans 6:14 and the clear diagnostic framework that separates the presence of sin (State 3) from the dominion of sin (State 2). And the person who has confused State 3 with State 4 — who is claiming the non posse peccare of glory as a present experience — needs the honest, Spirit-illuminated correction of 1 John 1:8 and the reminder that the final state is ahead, not behind.

The four states also provide the pastor with the specific motivational framework for sanctification: the eschatological pull of State 4 acting on the person in State 3. The person in State 3 is fighting toward a destination that is certain, and the certainty of the destination is the specific fuel of the ongoing battle. Philippians 1:6's declaration — “He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” — is the sovereign guarantee that the movement from State 3 to State 4 is as certain as the movement from State 2 to State 3 was: it is the work of the same God, completed through the same Spirit, on the basis of the same covenant, for the glory of the same triune name. The battle is real; the victory is certain; and the God who began the good work is the God who will perfect it.

B. The Doxological Terminus: The God Who Brings the Will Home

The doxological conclusion of the entire Augustinian trajectory — from State 1 through State 4 — is the recognition that the God who created the will in State 1, who permitted it to fall into State 2, who sovereignly called it out of State 2 into State 3 through the effectual work of the Spirit, who sustains it through the battle of State 3 by the same indwelling Spirit, and who will bring it to the permanent perfection of State 4 at the resurrection and glorification — this God is the specific, comprehensive, faithful, sovereign agent of the entire journey. The will that arrives at State 4 did not get there by its own resources, its own sustained moral effort, or its own wise choices at the critical moments of the journey. It got there because the God who promised to bring it there is the God who keeps His promises and whose purposes cannot be frustrated.

Jude 24–25 is the New Testament’s most direct doxological expression of this recognition, and it is the fitting conclusion to the entire Augustinian trajectory: “To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” The “kept from stumbling” is the State 3 experience of the God who sustains the ongoing battle; the “stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” is State 4’s arrival at the destination; the “be glory, majesty, dominion and authority” is the only appropriate response to the God who has brought the will through the entire journey. To the God who created, permitted the fall, called out of bondage, sustained through battle, and glorified at last — to Him be the glory, before all time and now and forever. Soli Deo Gloria.

The four states together tell the story of the human will in the fullest possible biblical-theological terms: made free, fallen into bondage, called back to freedom, and confirmed in a permanent freedom more glorious than the original. Every element of this story is the work of the God who is its Author, Protagonist, and Doxological Destination. The will’s journey from posse non peccare through non posse non peccare through posse non peccare again to the final non posse peccare is the will’s specific participation in the larger story of a creation that was good, a fall that was permitted by the God who was already planning the redemption, a redemption that cost the Son His life, and a consummation that will display the wisdom, mercy, and glory of the triune God to a universe that has watched the entire drama unfold. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36, NASB 1995).

“To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

Jude 24–25, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Posse Peccare / Posse Non Peccare	Latin: “able to sin / able not to sin.” Augustine’s description of the first state of the human will — the condition of Adam and Eve before the fall. In the state of original righteousness, the will possessed genuine moral freedom in both directions: it was able to sin (posse peccare), because genuine moral choice required that sin be genuinely possible, and it was equally able not to sin (posse non peccare), because the original righteousness with which God created human nature provided a positive inclination toward good alongside the real possibility of choosing evil. The pre-fall state was not a state of moral indifference or neutrality; Adam was created righteous and genuinely inclined toward God. But the inclination was not yet confirmed in righteousness: the will could turn in either direction, and the fall demonstrated that it did. This state represents the lowest of the four in terms of the security of the will’s righteousness, because the will’s orientation toward good was real but not yet permanent or confirmed.
Non Posse Non Peccare	Latin: “not able not to sin.” Augustine’s description of the second state of the human will — the condition of fallen humanity in the unregenerate state. After Adam’s transgression, the will’s capacity for genuine freedom toward God was lost: the fallen will is constitutively directed toward sin and away from God, and it cannot genuinely choose the good in the spiritual sense that the first great commandment requires. This is not compulsion (the fallen person sins from her own desires, not against them) but it is necessity: she cannot but sin, because her nature is constitutively oriented toward sin. This state corresponds to the doctrines of total depravity and total inability examined in Unit 5: the fallen will is enslaved to sin, unable to please God, unable to subject itself to the law of God, and unable to come to Christ apart from the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit. The non posse non peccare condition is the condition of every unregenerate person, establishing the absolute necessity of the new birth for any movement toward God.
Posse Non Peccare (Regenerate)	Latin: “formula able not to sin.” Augustine’s description of the third state of the human will — the condition of the regenerate believer in the present age of sanctification. Through the Spirit’s work of regeneration, the believer has been given a new nature whose dominant desire is no longer sin but God, and the will has been freed from the enslaving bondage of the second state: it is once again genuinely able not to sin. But this third state is not yet the final state: the regenerate person still bears the remnants of the old nature (what the Reformed tradition calls “remaining sin” or the “old man”), and the war between the Spirit and the flesh (Galatians 5:17) is real, ongoing, and sometimes intense. The believer is freed from the dominion of sin (Romans 6:14) but not yet from its presence (Romans 7:21–25; 1 John 1:8). She is able not to sin — the Spirit’s indwelling makes genuine obedience possible — but she is not yet unable to sin. The third state is between the second (enslaved) and the fourth (confirmed), and the believer’s experience of this state is the experience of Galatians 5:17: “for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another.”
Non Posse Peccare	Latin: “not able to sin.” Augustine’s description of the fourth and final state of the human will — the condition of the redeemed in the state of glory, after the resurrection of the body and the complete removal of all remaining corruption. In the glorified state, the will is permanently and irrevocably confirmed in righteousness: the desire for sin is simply absent, not because freedom has been eliminated but because the nature has been perfectly and permanently renewed so that no inclination toward sin remains. The fourth state is qualitatively superior to the first: Adam’s original righteousness was real but unconfirmed, and it was possible for him to sin and fall. The glorified person’s righteousness is both real and permanently confirmed — the will has been brought to a state of perfect, permanent, irreversible alignment with the holiness of God. The biblical basis includes 1 John 3:2 (“when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is”), Revelation 21:27 (“nothing

Term	Definition
	unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it”), and Jude 24 (“To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy”).
The Already and the Not Yet	The classic biblical-theological framework for describing the believer’s present condition in the overlap of the ages — between the first and second comings of Christ, between the inauguration of the Kingdom and its consummation. In terms of Augustine’s four states, the believer lives in State 3 with the full assurance of arriving at State 4: she is already freed from the dominion of sin (Romans 6:14 — “sin shall not be master over you”), but not yet freed from the presence of sin (1 John 1:8 — “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves”). The already dimension is real and significant: the new nature has been genuinely given, the Spirit genuinely indwells, the dominion of sin has been genuinely broken, and genuine obedience from the heart is genuinely possible in a way it was not in State 2. The not-yet dimension is equally real: the battle with the flesh continues, remaining corruption still exerts genuine pressure, and the final perfection of State 4 is not yet experienced. The believer lives in the tension of these two dimensions, and the Christian life in the present age is the Spirit-empowered engagement with this tension in the direction of the consummation that is certain.
Remaining Sin (Peccatum Manens)	The theological term for the residual corruption of the old nature that persists in the regenerate believer even after the new birth — the ongoing influence of the unregenerated dimensions of human nature that the Spirit’s sanctifying work progressively addresses but does not yet eliminate in the present life. The doctrine of remaining sin is the Reformed tradition’s specific account of the “not yet” dimension of Augustine’s State 3: the believer is genuinely regenerate, genuinely possessing the new nature, and genuinely freed from the dominion of sin — but the old nature has not been eliminated, only dethroned. Paul describes the experience of remaining sin in Romans 7:14–25 with unflinching honesty: “I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin... For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (verses 14–15, NASB 1995). The experience Paul describes is the experience of a genuine believer who has discovered that the Spirit’s work of new birth has created a new nature that desires God while not yet eliminating the old nature that desires sin, producing the specific incoherence of knowing what is right, wanting to do what is right, and still failing to do it consistently.
Freed from the Dominion of Sin (Romans 6:14)	Paul’s declaration in Romans 6:14 — “for sin shall not be master over you; for you are not under law but under grace” (NASB 1995) — is the New Testament’s most direct statement of the “already” dimension of Augustine’s State 3. The regenerate believer has been freed from the dominion (kuriōsei) of sin: sin no longer reigns, no longer exercises the unchallenged mastery over the person that it exercised in State 2. This is not the claim that sin has no influence in the believer’s life — the doctrine of remaining sin explicitly acknowledges the ongoing influence of sin in the believer. It is the claim that the nature of sin’s relationship to the believer has been fundamentally changed: sin was once the undisputed master; now it is a defeated but still dangerous enemy operating in occupied territory, resisted by the indwelling Spirit and the new nature He has created. The freedom is real, but it is the freedom of the battlefield, not of the throne room. The definitive victory has been won at the cross and in the resurrection; the full experience of that victory awaits the final glorification of State 4.
The War Between the Spirit and the Flesh	Paul’s description of the believer’s present experience in Galatians 5:17 — “for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please” (NASB 1995) — is the New Testament’s most vivid account of the ongoing conflict of Augustine’s State 3. The flesh (the principle of remaining corruption operating through the unregenerated dimensions of the old nature) and the Spirit (the divine Person who indwells the believer and empowers the new nature) are in genuine, active, ongoing opposition. The conflict is real: the believer genuinely

Term	Definition
	cannot do all the things she pleases, because the opposing forces within her prevent the unimpeded expression of either the new nature's desires or the old nature's desires. The conflict is also asymmetric: the Spirit who opposes the flesh is the omnipotent divine Person, and the outcome of the war is not in doubt. But the battle is real, and the believer who denies it (1 John 1:8: "if we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves") is denying the reality of State 3 in favor of a premature claim on State 4 that the present life does not yet offer.
Confirmed in Righteousness	The theological description of the specific character of the glorified person's moral condition that distinguishes State 4 from State 1. Adam in the garden was righteous but not confirmed in righteousness: the will's orientation toward good was genuine but not yet permanent, and the possibility of sin was real — as the fall demonstrated. The glorified person is not merely righteous but confirmed in righteousness: the will has been permanently and irrevocably oriented toward God, not by the elimination of freedom but by the completion of the Spirit's work of renewal so that no inclination toward sin remains. The confirmation is the product of the beatific vision — the direct, unmediated knowledge of God in His full glory — which so captures and satisfies the will's desire that no competing object of desire can remain. "We will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1 John 3:2): the seeing produces the likeness, and the likeness is the confirmation. The confirmed will does not resist sin heroically in the face of genuine temptation; it finds no temptation at all, because the glory of God as seen in the face of Christ has so completely satisfied its desires that no alternative object of desire is available or imaginable.
The Augustinian Trajectory	The arc of the human will's history across Augustine's four states, understood as a progressive and purposeful movement from the freedom of State 1 (able not to sin), through the bondage of State 2 (not able not to sin), through the partial liberation of State 3 (able not to sin again, but with ongoing battle), to the permanent perfection of State 4 (not able to sin). The trajectory is not merely cyclical (State 3 does not merely return the will to State 1) but progressive: the final state exceeds the first, because the confirmed righteousness of glory is more secure, more permanent, and more deeply rooted in the vision of God than the original righteousness of creation was. The trajectory also establishes the specific logic of the Christian life: the believer is always between State 2 (where she came from) and State 4 (where she is going), engaging the ongoing battle of State 3 with the confidence that the Spirit who began the good work will complete it (Philippians 1:6) and that the ultimate destination is not the restoration of what was lost in Eden but the consummation of what was promised in Christ: "we will be like Him."

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that Augustine's fourfold schema accurately describes the specific condition of the will at each stage of the human story, and that the specific state of the will in each stage has specific doctrinal implications that pastoral care must engage with theological precision. State 2's non posse non peccare establishes the necessity of sovereign, effectual grace for conversion; State 3's posse non peccare establishes both the genuine freedom of the regenerate will (already freed from dominion) and the genuine reality of remaining sin (not yet freed from presence); and State 4's non posse peccare establishes the certainty and the glory of the eschatological destination toward which the Spirit is moving every genuine believer. To misunderstand any of these states is to misdiagnose the specific condition of the specific person in one's pastoral care, and to misdiagnose is to misprescribe.

We must especially believe the precise distinction between State 3 and State 2 that Romans 6:14 establishes: freed from dominion is not the same as freed from presence. The presence of remaining sin in the regenerate believer's life is not evidence that State 2's dominion has been reasserted; it is the specific, expected, normal condition of State 3. The regenerate person who struggles with remaining sin is not failing to be a Christian; she is being exactly the kind of Christian that State 3 produces: genuinely new-natured, genuinely Spirit-indwelt, genuinely freed from dominion, and genuinely still fighting the residual battle of the old nature's remaining influence. The pastor who can offer this specific correction to the specific confusion is the pastor who has mastered the four-states framework and can apply it with theological precision and pastoral compassion.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The doctrine of the four states should produce in the believing heart a very specific combination of honest self-knowledge and confident hope: honest about the reality of State 3's battle (not claiming State 4's non posse peccare as a present experience; acknowledging the reality of 1 John 1:8), and confident about the certainty of State 4's arrival (not doubting the God who began the good work will perfect it; resting in Philippians 1:6). The specific emotional texture of State 3 is neither the despairing acknowledgment that sin's presence might mean sin's dominion, nor the complacent presumption that sin's dominion is behind means sin's presence is also past, but the specific, sober, hope-filled realism of the person who knows exactly where she is in the journey, exactly where she came from, and exactly where she is going.

Desire, above all, the eschatological anchor of 1 John 3:2: "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." Let the State 4 destination be a live, motivating, daily reality in your spiritual life — not a distant theological aspiration but the specific, certain, personally guaranteed destination toward which the Spirit is moving you in every act of sanctification. The will that arrives at State 4's non posse peccare will have been brought there by the same Spirit who moved it from State 2 to State 3, and the arrival will be as sovereign, as certain, and as gloriously undeserved as the initial movement was. Desire this with the intensity that 1 John 3:3 describes as the appropriate response to the hope: "And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." The hope of State 4 purifies in State 3.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Commit Augustine's four Latin formulas to memory — posse peccare / posse non peccare (State 1), non posse non peccare (State 2), posse non peccare (State 3), non posse peccare (State 4) — and practice using them as a diagnostic framework in your pastoral ministry. The next time a counselee presents with spiritual struggle, confusion about her standing before God, or questions about whether the Christian life "is working" in her, apply the four-states framework to the diagnostic conversation: Is she in State 2 and needs to hear about the sovereign grace that alone can move her to State 3? Or is she in State 3 and needs to understand that remaining sin's presence does not imply dominion's return? Or is she confusing State 3 with State 4 and needs the corrective of 1 John 1:8? Each diagnostic conclusion points toward a specific pastoral provision, and the precision of the diagnosis produces the precision of the provision.

- Read Romans 6:1–14 as a study of the “already” dimension of State 3, and then read Romans 7:14–25 as a study of the “not yet” dimension. For each passage, identify: (a) what the passage establishes about the believer’s objective covenantal condition (the “already” of union with Christ in Romans 6, the “not yet” of remaining flesh in Romans 7); (b) what the passage says about the believer’s experiential reality in the ongoing battle; and (c) what specific counsel or specific hope the passage offers for the person in State 3. Bring the insights from both passages together and articulate a single paragraph that captures the specific character of State 3 — the tension of the already and the not yet — in a way you could use in a pastoral conversation.
- Study Galatians 5:16–25 as Paul’s most comprehensive account of the State 3 battle and its means of grace. Identify: (a) the specific command of verse 16 and what it establishes about the believer’s responsibility in the State 3 battle; (b) the description of the war of verse 17 and what it establishes about the character of State 3’s tension; (c) the works of the flesh (verses 19–21) as the specific expressions of the old nature’s residual influence in State 3; and (d) the fruit of the Spirit (verses 22–23) as the specific expressions of the new nature’s genuine desires in State 3. Then ask: how does the command to “walk by the Spirit” (verse 16) serve as the specific pastoral instruction for the State 3 battle — neither a passive resignation to the war’s outcome nor a frantic self-effort to produce the Spirit’s fruit, but the Spirit-dependent, means-of-grace-engaging, active cooperation with the divine Person who is already at work within?
- Apply the eschatological motivation of 1 John 3:2–3 to a specific area of your own ongoing sanctification. Identify one area of State 3’s battle that is currently most intense for you — one specific expression of remaining sin that is most resistant to the Spirit’s work and most persistent in its influence on your desires and choices. Then apply 1 John 3:3’s principle: “everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” What would it mean specifically to bring the State 4 hope to bear on this specific State 3 battle? How does the certain, Spirit-guaranteed destination of non posse peccare — the complete and permanent absence of this specific pattern of remaining sin — motivate the specific, present, Spirit-dependent effort to mortify its current expression?
- Reflect on the relationship between Augustine’s four states and the believer’s assurance of salvation. The person in State 3 can experience moments of doubt about whether she is truly regenerate, particularly in the midst of intense battle with remaining sin. Using the four-states framework, articulate the specific assurance available to the person in State 3 that is grounded not in the absence of remaining sin (which would be State 4’s assurance, prematurely claimed) but in the presence of the new nature’s genuine desires, the Spirit’s indwelling testimony (Romans 8:16), and the sovereign faithfulness of the God who began the good work (Philippians 1:6). What specific evidence of State 3 — not the absence of remaining sin but the presence of the new nature’s genuine, Spirit-empowered engagement with the battle — constitutes the appropriate ground of the State 3 believer’s assurance?

Key Texts: *Romans 6:1–14; 7:14–25; 8:7–8, 37; Galatians 5:16–25; 1 John 1:8; 3:2–3; Philippians 1:6; 2:12–13; Revelation 21:27; Jude 24–25; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Romans 11:36*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, how would you have described the relationship between the Christian's genuine freedom from sin and the ongoing struggle with remaining sin? Did you tend to explain remaining sin as evidence that the person might not be genuinely regenerate (confusing State 3 with State 2), or as evidence that the person has not yet fully surrendered to the Spirit (as though State 4's non posse peccare were available in the present life through a second definitive work of grace)? How has Augustine's four-states schema clarified, challenged, or confirmed your prior framework for understanding the ongoing struggle?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Romans 6:1–14 and identify the specific grounds Paul provides for the declaration of verse 14 ("sin shall not be master over you"). What covenantal reality does Paul establish in verses 3–6 (union with Christ in His death and resurrection) that grounds the declaration? What does the word "consider" (λογίζεσθε) in verse 11 establish about the relationship between the covenantal reality and the believer's experience — is it a command to achieve the covenantal reality, or to reckon an already-achieved reality as operative in the present life? And what does the presenting of members as instruments of righteousness (verse 13) establish about the nature of the believer's ongoing responsibility in light of the already-achieved covenantal reality?
3. Read Romans 7:14–25 carefully. What is the specific tension Paul describes between the "inner man" (verse 22) and the "flesh" (verse 25)? What does the "joyfully concurring with the law of God in the inner man" (verse 22) establish about the character of the new nature in State 3 — does the new nature delight in God's law, or does it merely comply with it under compulsion? And what does the "thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" of verse 25 establish about the ultimate ground of the State 3 believer's hope in the midst of the ongoing battle with remaining sin?
4. Read Galatians 5:16–17 and analyze the specific character of the war Paul describes. What are the two combatants, and what is the specific nature of the opposition between them (verse 17: "for these are in opposition to one another")? What does the consequence clause of verse 17 ("so that you may not do the things that you please") establish about the experience of the State 3 believer — why is she unable to do all the things she pleases in either direction? And what does the command of verse 16 ("Walk by the Spirit") establish about the specific means by which the Spirit's side in the ongoing war is engaged?
5. Read 1 John 3:2–3 in its context of 1 John 2:28–3:3. What is the specific causal connection John draws between the beatific vision ("we will see Him just as He is") and the conformity to Christ ("we will be like Him")? What does this connection establish about the mechanism of State 4's non posse peccare — is the confirmed righteousness of the glorified person the product of sustained moral effort that finally overcomes remaining sin, or the product of the transformative vision of God that the glorification itself provides? And what does verse 3 ("everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself") establish about the eschatological motivation for present-age sanctification?
6. Read Philippians 1:3–6 and identify what Paul says about the character and the certainty of the "good work" God has begun in the Philippian believers. Who began it? What does the "He who began a good work... will perfect it" structure establish about the relationship between the initiation and the completion of sanctification — are they the acts of different agents (God beginning, the believer completing) or of the same agent (God completing what He began)? And what does the phrase "until the day of Christ Jesus" establish about the duration and the certain terminus of the sanctifying work?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson argues that State 4's non posse peccare is qualitatively superior to State 1's posse non peccare because the confirmed righteousness of the glorified person is grounded in the beatific vision rather than in original righteousness, and because the will confirmed by the vision of God's full glory experiences no

temptation rather than resisting genuine temptation heroically. Evaluate this claim. Is the beatific vision's transformative effect on the will an explicitly biblical teaching, or is it a theological inference from 1 John 3:2's "we will be like Him because we will see Him"? And is the absence of temptation in State 4 (no competing desire) a more adequate account of the non posse peccare than simply the confirmation of a will that continues to face temptation but invariably resists it?

8. The Reformed tradition has held, against perfectionist readings of the Christian life, that Romans 7:14–25 describes the ongoing experience of the regenerate believer rather than the pre-conversion experience Paul is looking back on. Evaluate the textual evidence for this reading. What specific features of Romans 7:14–25 point toward the regenerate interpretation (present tenses, delight in the law, the distinction between the inner man and the flesh)? Are there features of the text that create difficulties for the regenerate interpretation? And does the context of Romans 7 — coming between the triumph of Romans 6:14 and the triumph of Romans 8:1 — suggest that Paul is describing a condition of bondage or a condition of ongoing battle from within the freedom of State 3?
9. Augustine's four states suggest that the human will's trajectory across redemptive history is not a circle (return to Eden) but a progressive ascent (exceeding Eden in the confirmation of righteousness). Evaluate the theological implications of this progressive schema. Does the non posse peccare of State 4 represent a higher form of freedom than the posse non peccare of State 1, or does the elimination of the posse peccare dimension represent a restriction of freedom rather than its enhancement? And is there a sense in which the glorified person's inability to sin represents a limitation of her moral dignity — or does the lesson's argument (that the absence of temptation is not the elimination of freedom but its fullest expression) adequately address this concern?
10. The lesson presents 1 John 3:3 ("everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure") as the eschatological motivation for present sanctification: the State 4 hope motivates State 3 effort. Evaluate this as a motivational account of sanctification. Is the eschatological motivation the primary or merely one motivational basis among others for the Christian's pursuit of holiness? How does this eschatological motivation relate to other motivations Paul identifies: gratitude for justification (Romans 6:1–4), union with Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6:11), the Spirit's indwelling (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), and love for God and neighbor (John 14:15; Matthew 22:37–39)?
11. The lesson asserts that the battle of State 3 is "fought from a position of victory, not toward a hope of possible victory," and that this distinction fundamentally changes the believer's posture toward the ongoing struggle with remaining sin. Evaluate this claim. Does the assurance of ultimate victory (the certain arrival at State 4) risk producing complacency in the State 3 battle, or does it produce the specific courage and perseverance that the battle requires? What is the specific mechanism by which the certainty of State 4's destination motivates rather than undermines the urgency of State 3's battle? And how does the answer to this question illuminate the Reformed tradition's consistent affirmation of both the sovereignty of grace and the genuine responsibility of the believer in the work of sanctification?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. Apply Augustine's four-states diagnostic to a specific current pastoral concern in your ministry. Identify a person in your care whose spiritual struggle or confusion most likely reflects one of the diagnostic errors the lesson identifies: (a) a regenerate person confusing State 3 with State 2 (interpreting the presence of remaining sin as evidence of sin's dominion), or (b) a person claiming State 4's non posse peccare as a present experience (denying 1 John 1:8 through a perfectionist account of the Christian life). For the specific person you identify, articulate the specific pastoral correction the four-states framework suggests, and identify the specific Scripture passage that most directly addresses the specific diagnostic error.
13. The lesson identifies the specific character of State 3 as the already-and-not-yet tension between freedom from sin's dominion (Romans 6:14) and the ongoing presence of remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Romans 7:14–25). Evaluate your own experience of the Christian life against this description. Which dimension of the tension do you find most difficult to maintain in proper balance: the "already" of freedom from dominion

(do you fail to reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God, or do you underestimate the genuine freedom the Spirit's work has created?) or the "not yet" of remaining sin (do you deny the reality of 1 John 1:8, or do you exaggerate the significance of remaining sin in a way that suggests you may be in State 2's dominion rather than State 3's battle)? What specific corrective emphasis would bring your experience into better alignment with State 3's properly understood "already and not yet"?

14. The eschatological hope of 1 John 3:2 ("we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is") is presented as both a doctrinal truth and a motivational reality for the present work of sanctification. Honestly assess how live and motivating this hope is in your own daily Christian experience. Is the State 4 destination a reality that actively shapes your present desires, your present efforts, and your present engagement with the specific battles of State 3's war? Or has it become a theoretical affirmation without motivational traction in the specific details of the daily Christian life? What specific practices of Scripture meditation, corporate worship, or eschatologically-oriented prayer would make State 4's hope more live and more motivationally operative in your specific situation?
15. Paul's instruction in Romans 6:11 ("consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus") invites the believer to a specific faith-act: reckoning the covenantal reality of State 3's freedom as operative in the present life. Apply this instruction to a specific pattern of remaining sin in your own experience. What does it mean, in the specific context of this specific pattern of remaining sin, to "consider yourself dead to sin"? Is this a matter of denying the reality of the remaining sin (which 1 John 1:8 corrects) or of refusing to allow the remaining sin's presence to re-establish its dominion over your choices and desires (which Romans 6:14's declaration empowers)? How does the distinction between State 3's battle and State 2's dominion apply to the specific experience of the specific pattern of sin you are addressing?
16. The lesson closes with the recognition that the God who brings the will from State 2 through State 3 to State 4 is the specific, comprehensive, faithful, sovereign agent of the entire journey, and that the appropriate doxological response is the Jude 24–25 ascription of all glory to the God who keeps from stumbling and makes the redeemed stand blameless with great joy. Assess the degree to which this recognition characterizes your understanding of your own Christian life: is the God who is bringing you from State 3 to State 4 the specific subject of your most frequent and most heartfelt gratitude? Or has the theology of sovereign grace, fully affirmed intellectually, failed to translate into the specific, personal, wonder-producing doxology that the recognition of God's comprehensive agency in the will's journey demands? What would it mean, specifically and practically, to live in the daily awareness that the same God who rode your enslaved will to faith in State 3 will bring your still-warring will to confirmed perfection in State 4 — and to give Him the glory for both?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's time of prayer by reading Philippians 1:3–6 slowly, receiving it as the personal, apostolic assurance of the God who is moving every genuine believer from State 3 to State 4: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Allow the specific content of Paul's confidence to settle with its full personal weight: it is not the person who will perfect herself; it is God who began the work and will perfect it. The trajectory from State 3 to State 4 is not in your hands but in His, and the confidence is not tentative but full — Paul is "confident of this very thing," not "hopeful that this might happen." Receive this assurance as the specific pastoral gift that the four-states framework provides to every person in State 3: you are not fighting toward a possible victory; you are fighting from a secured one, toward a certain destination, under the oversight of the God who will not allow the good work He has begun to remain incomplete.

Pray in the structure of Augustine's four states, moving through each state as a deliberate act of theological self-location and doxological response. Begin with State 1's reminder: that you were made in original righteousness, with genuine freedom to choose God and genuine capacity for the communion for which you were created. Spend a moment in gratitude for the original goodness of the creation that God declared good and the image of God in which you were made. Then move to State 2: that apart from the Spirit's sovereign, effectual work, you would have remained *non posse non peccare* — enslaved, unable to choose God, constitutively incapable of the saving faith that conversion requires. Receive the specific, personal, wonder-producing recognition that the transition from State 2 to State 3 was entirely the sovereign work of the God who rode your enslaved will to faith, opened your closed heart, illuminated your darkened mind, and gave you the repentance and faith that you could not generate on your own. Pray with the specific gratitude of one who knows that she was in State 2 and is now in State 3, not because she made a wise choice but because the God of Ephesians 2:4–5 was rich in mercy and because of His great love. Then move to State 3: the honest acknowledgment of the ongoing battle, the specific confession of the specific remaining corruptions that are most active in your present experience, and the specific request for the Spirit's power to walk by the Spirit in the specific areas of the specific war. Name the expressions of remaining sin that are most persistent; ask for the Spirit's mortifying work in those specific areas; and receive the specific assurance of Romans 6:14 — sin shall not be master over you — as the word of the sovereign God who has dethroned what you are asking Him to continue to subdue. Finally, look toward State 4: the certain, Spirit-guaranteed, Christologically grounded arrival at the *non posse peccare* of the glorified will. Receive 1 John 3:2 as your specific, personal, apostolically guaranteed eschatological promise — "we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" — and let it produce the specific purity-motivating hope of verse 3: "everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

Pray together in three directions for the application of this lesson's content. First, for those in your congregation who are in State 2 and have not yet been moved by the Spirit's effectual work to State 3: name them specifically; ask the sovereign God to do the specific sovereign thing that their State 2 condition requires — to claim the enslaved will by His Spirit, to open the closed heart, to call from the tomb of spiritual death. Trust the God of Acts 16:14 to open the specific hearts for which you are asking, using the specific means of the proclaimed Word through which He ordinarily works. Second, for those in your congregation who are in State 3 and are confused about their location — who are experiencing the battle of State 3 and interpreting it as evidence of State 2's dominion, or who are claiming State 4's perfection as a present experience and denying 1 John 1:8: pray for the Spirit's illuminating work to clarify their location in the journey, to give them the honest, Spirit-grounded self-knowledge that the four-states framework provides, and to give them the specific assurance or the specific correction that their specific diagnostic error requires. Third, for yourself and for the entire people of God in State 3: that the battle with remaining sin would be fought with the specific courage of those who know they are fighting from victory, with the specific hope of those who know they are moving toward State 4, and with the specific dependence on the Spirit that the battle of Galatians 5:17 requires. And that the entire journey — from State 2 to

State 3 and from State 3 to State 4 — would be received with the doxology it deserves: to Him who began the good work and will perfect it, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.

Close with Jude 24–25 as the fitting doxological conclusion to the entire Unit 6 and its treatment of the will’s bondage, liberation, ongoing battle, and final perfection: “To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” This is the doxology of the State 3 people on their way to State 4: the people who know that the “kept from stumbling” of the present is the sovereign work of the God who holds them, and that the “stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” of the future is the same sovereign work carried to its eschatological completion. To the God who keeps and to the God who glorifies — to the same God who called from State 2 and who will bring to State 4 — be glory before all time, and now, and forever. Amen. Soli Deo Gloria.

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus... to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

Philippians 1:6; Jude 25, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Genesis 2:16–17; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 6:1–14; 7:14–25; 8:7–8, 37; Galatians 5:16–25; 1 John 1:8; 3:2–3; Philippians 1:3–6; 2:12–13; Revelation 21:27; Jude 24–25; Ezekiel 36:26–27; Romans 11:36

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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