

# SIN AS AGENCY LOSS

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*A Restoration-Based Account of Moral Disorder*

Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure (HAPI)

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*Core thesis: Sin does not merely break rules. Sin disorders agency by capturing clarity, desire, authority, memory, refusal, and accountability. Restoration is the recovery of human agency under truth, love, responsibility, and God.*

Status: Working research manuscript, not peer reviewed. This paper is a conceptual and theological extension of the HAPI agency framework.

## Abstract

This paper develops a restoration-based account of sin through the lens of Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure. It argues that sin is not only a legal violation, behavioral failure, or moral stain. Sin is also a disordering of agency. It reduces the human capacity to see clearly, choose truthfully, refuse destructive impulses, act coherently, remember rightly, repent honestly, and remain accountable without collapsing into shame or self-justification. The biblical pattern can be read as the giving of agency by God, the corruption of agency through deception and desire, the capture of agency through fear, idolatry, slavery, accusation, and false authority, and the restoration of agency through Christ. This account supports HAPI by showing that agency preservation is not merely a technical or institutional concern. It is a human and spiritual concern. Systems that preserve agency help people return to truth, responsibility, and repair. Systems that strip agency can reproduce the same patterns that sin produces in the soul: confusion, compulsion, hiding, blame, dependency, and loss of meaningful participation.

Keywords: agency, sin, repentance, restoration, moral disorder, false gates, conscience, shame, accountability, HAPI, human agency preservation, Christian theology.

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## 1. Introduction

HAPI begins with the claim that agency is the capacity for meaningful participation. A person has agency when they can understand, discern, choose, refuse, revise, act, remember, and remain accountable. This paper applies that claim to sin.

Sin is often described as disobedience, rebellion, missing the mark, lawlessness, corruption, or separation from God. Those descriptions remain important. But they do not exhaust the pattern. Sin also changes what the human person is able to do. It distorts sight, desire, memory, conscience, responsibility, belonging, and action.

*Sin is not simply the misuse of freedom. Sin is the progressive loss of the freedom required to love, tell the truth, repent, repair, and act rightly.*

This paper does not reduce theology to psychology or governance theory. Instead, it argues that agency language helps reveal a structural pattern already present in the biblical story. God gives humans meaningful participation. Sin corrupts that participation. False gates capture it. Christ restores it. The Spirit internalizes it. The church is called to steward it without owning it.

## 2. Agency and Moral Disorder

Agency is not the same thing as raw desire. A person is not more free merely because they can pursue whatever impulse arises. Agency requires ordered capacity. It depends on clarity, truthful perception, rightly formed desire, rightful authority, memory, refusal, and accountability.

Moral disorder damages these conditions. It can make the person less able to see what is true, less able to refuse what is destructive, less able to remember honestly, less able to confess without collapse, and less able to repair harm. This is why sin often feels powerful at first and enslaving later.

*Sin presents itself as expanded choice, but its fruit is narrowed agency.*

### The HAPI account

From the HAPI perspective, sin is a pattern of agency corruption. It captures the person through distorted meaning, disordered desire, false authority, fear, shame, pride, accusation, and fragmentation. It does not merely produce wrong actions. It weakens the person who acts.

### A working definition

*Sin is moral disorder that separates human agency from truth, love, God, neighbor, and rightful accountability.*

## 3. Genesis and the First Agency Collapse

The Genesis account presents the first human beings as meaningful participants in creation. They receive life, place, vocation, permission, boundary, relationship, language, and responsibility. They are not passive objects. They are stewards.

The temptation narrative can be read as an agency attack. The serpent does not begin by forcing action. It begins by distorting meaning. The question, "Did God really say?" attacks clarity. The promise that the fruit will make them like God attacks authority. The appeal to desire attacks discernment. The act of taking the fruit expresses corrupted agency.

*The first agency collapse begins before the action. It begins when meaning is distorted.*

After the act, the pattern continues. The humans hide. They cover themselves. They blame. They avoid direct accountability. Their relationship to God, self, neighbor, body, work, and creation becomes fractured. Sin does not simply produce guilt. It produces hiding, fear, alienation, and loss of coherent participation.

### **The pattern**

1. Meaning is distorted.
2. Desire is activated against trust.
3. Authority is seized apart from God.
4. Action is taken outside rightful order.
5. Shame enters.
6. Hiding replaces openness.
7. Blame replaces accountability.
8. Agency becomes fragmented.

## **4. Mechanisms of Agency Loss in Sin**

Sin strips agency through repeated mechanisms. These mechanisms appear in personal life, families, religious systems, institutions, and technical systems.

### **Deception**

Deception corrupts clarity. A person cannot act freely in the deepest sense when they are responding to a false picture of reality.

### **Desire capture**

Desire becomes capture when it stops serving love and starts governing the person. The person may still choose, but the range of choice narrows around appetite, fear, pride, or craving.

### **Compulsion**

Compulsion weakens refusal. The person can see the harm but cannot easily stop. Addiction is an extreme example, but less visible compulsions also exist: approval seeking, outrage, control, avoidance, lust, status, and resentment.

## **Fear**

Fear coerces agency. It does not always remove choice, but it can make truthful action feel impossible.

## **Accusation**

Accusation attacks repair. It tells the person that guilt is identity, that confession is unsafe, and that restoration is unavailable.

## **Pride**

Pride corrupts authority. It makes the self the final reference point and rejects correction, dependence, and accountability.

## **Shame**

Shame collapses participation. It drives hiding, secrecy, self-protection, and the loss of honest relationship.

## **5. Sin Is Not Freedom**

A common illusion is that sin expands freedom because it removes constraint. But not all constraint is captivity. Some constraints preserve the conditions that make agency possible. Truth constrains falsehood. Love constrains exploitation. Covenant constrains abandonment. Discipline constrains self-destruction.

The question is not whether a person is constrained. The question is whether the constraint preserves or captures agency.

*Righteous order is not the enemy of agency. Righteous order is the structure in which agency can remain alive.*

Sin often imitates freedom by offering immediate permission. But over time it reduces clarity, weakens refusal, damages memory, distorts accountability, and fractures relationship. It makes the person less capable of being who they were created to be.

In HAPI terms, sin is not agency expansion. It is agency erosion disguised as self-rule.

## **6. Shame, Hiding, and Blame**

After the first sin, the humans do not move directly into repair. They hide. Hiding is a sign that agency has been destabilized. The person no longer stands openly in truth. The self becomes divided between what happened and what can be admitted.

Shame is not the same as healthy conviction. Conviction can lead to confession, repair, and restored participation. Shame often leads to concealment, self-rejection, and paralysis. Conviction says, "This must be brought into truth." Shame says, "I cannot be seen."

*Conviction can restore agency. Shame often captures it.*

Blame is another agency-loss pattern. It relocates responsibility away from the actor. When blame replaces confession, the person avoids accountability but also loses the possibility of repair. Responsibility and agency are linked. A person who cannot own the truth cannot fully return to coherent action.

## 7. Idolatry and Captured Authority

Idolatry is not only worship of an object. It is the transfer of ultimate authority to something that cannot rightly bear it. Money, power, pleasure, nation, institution, ideology, status, tribe, image, and even religious systems can become false authorities.

When an idol governs, agency becomes reorganized around the idol. The person begins to sacrifice truth, conscience, love, body, family, memory, and responsibility to maintain the false center.

*An idol is a false governance layer over the human soul.*

This connects directly to false gates. A false gate takes authority over a boundary it does not own. It may claim to protect holiness, order, safety, or identity, but if it captures conscience and blocks direct return to God, it becomes a rival authority.

True authority restores agency under God. False authority captures agency for itself.

## 8. Repentance as Agency Restoration

Repentance is often reduced to feeling bad, admitting fault, or satisfying an authority process. But biblically and structurally, repentance is deeper. It is a turning back into truth. It restores clarity, responsibility, refusal, memory, and action.

*Repentance is not humiliation. Repentance is the recovery of agency under truth.*

A repentant person is not merely punished into compliance. A repentant person begins to see clearly again, name reality honestly, refuse the destructive pattern, receive mercy, repair what can be repaired, and walk in a different direction.

### Repentance restores five agency functions

1. Clarity: the person tells the truth about what happened.
2. Authority: the person returns from self-rule or false authority to God.
3. Refusal: the person becomes able to say no to the destructive pattern.
4. Memory: the person remembers rightly without hiding or self-erasure.
5. Accountability: the person owns consequence without being destroyed by accusation.

## 9. Jesus and the Restoration of Agency

Jesus restores agency throughout the Gospels. He heals bodies, forgives sins, restores sight, calls people by name, confronts false authority, releases the oppressed, restores the excluded, and sends people back into responsible life.

He does not treat people as passive recipients of religious control. He often asks questions, calls for response, restores dignity, and gives commands that return the person to action: rise, walk, stretch out your hand, follow me, go and sin no more, feed my sheep.

*Jesus does not restore people by capturing them. He restores them by returning them to truth, responsibility, love, and life with God.*

This does not mean Jesus ignores sin. He confronts sin directly. But his confrontation is restorative, not merely administrative. He exposes what binds the person so the person can be freed. He confronts false gates because they burden people without restoring them.

### Christ as the true gate

In John 10, Jesus describes himself as the gate and shepherd. In HAPI language, this is the true gate pattern. The true gate does not capture the sheep for institutional possession. The true gate gives rightful passage, protection, recognition, and life.

## 10. The Spirit and Internalized Governance

If sin is agency loss, restoration cannot remain only external. A person can obey externally while remaining internally captured by fear, shame, pride, resentment, or performance. The biblical promise of renewal points toward internalized governance: a heart and mind reshaped by truth, love, and the Spirit.

This is important for HAPI. External controls can prevent harm, but they cannot by themselves restore mature agency. A good gate protects the boundary while the person or system matures. A false gate creates permanent dependence.

*A true gate protects agency until wisdom can be internalized. A false gate keeps the person dependent on the gate.*

The Spirit restores agency from within by reordering desire, strengthening refusal, deepening discernment, healing fear, and producing fruit that cannot be manufactured by performance alone.

## 11. False Gates, Performative Righteousness, and Agency Theater

Religious systems can reproduce agency loss when they confuse visible compliance with restored agency. A person may perform the correct behaviors while remaining fearful, ashamed, dependent, dishonest, or unable to approach God directly.

This is agency theater. The person appears obedient, but meaningful agency has not been restored. The system sees compliance and calls it health. But the person may have lost voice, conscience, confidence, memory, and direct participation before God.

*Performative righteousness can look like order while hiding agency collapse.*

The Pharisee pattern is not merely strictness. It is a governance distortion: heavy burdens, public performance, social recognition, boundary control, and the use of law without mercy. Jesus confronts this because it blocks restoration while claiming to represent righteousness.

True spiritual governance restores people to God. False spiritual governance makes people dependent on the human gate.

## 12. Everyday Agency Loss

The sin-as-agency-loss pattern appears in ordinary life.

### **Addiction**

Addiction narrows agency around craving, relief, secrecy, and repeated failure. Restoration requires more than punishment. It requires capacity, truth, support, refusal, repair, and new patterns of life.

### **Anger**

Anger can feel powerful while reducing agency. The person becomes reactive instead of discerning. They act from injury rather than truth.

### **Lust**

Lust converts persons into objects and desire into command. It weakens the ability to love rightly.

### **People pleasing**

People pleasing looks gentle but can be fear-governed agency. The person loses truthful refusal.

### **Control**

Control attempts to secure life by reducing the agency of others. It is often fear disguised as responsibility.

### **Despair**

Despair collapses future-oriented agency. The person can no longer imagine meaningful action.

## 13. HAPI Implications

HAPI is not a church doctrine and does not replace theology, pastoral care, or spiritual formation. But the framework can help identify whether a system is restoring agency or reproducing the patterns of sin.

A HAPI-informed system asks:

- Does this process restore clarity or deepen confusion?
- Does it strengthen refusal or create coercion?
- Does it preserve memory or erase what happened?
- Does it allow confession and repair or only punishment and stigma?

- Does it restore direct responsibility before God and neighbor or capture the person under a human gate?
- Does it create mature agency or permanent dependency?

This applies beyond religion. Workplaces, schools, healthcare systems, AI systems, courts, families, and digital platforms can all either preserve or strip agency. The spiritual pattern helps clarify the institutional pattern. Systems go wrong when they turn humans into objects of management rather than participants in truth and repair.

*Agency preservation is not soft permissiveness. It is the structure required for truthful accountability and real restoration.*

## 14. Conclusion

Sin as agency loss provides a coherent bridge between moral theology, human experience, institutional governance, and HAPI. Sin does not simply break an external rule. It damages the person's ability to participate truthfully in reality. It corrupts clarity, desire, authority, memory, refusal, and accountability.

God gives agency. Sin corrupts agency. False gates capture agency. Christ restores agency. The Spirit internalizes restored governance. The church and every agency-preserving institution must steward agency without claiming ownership over the soul.

*The goal of restoration is not merely that people behave correctly. The goal is that people become capable of truth, love, refusal, repair, accountability, and life with God.*

For HAPI, this paper strengthens the foundation: agency preservation is not merely a technical governance principle. It is a deep human pattern. Wherever agency is stripped, people become less able to understand, choose, refuse, remember, repair, and participate. Wherever agency is restored under truth and love, governance becomes real, healing becomes possible, and responsibility becomes livable again.

## Appendix A. Key Propositions

1. Sin is moral disorder that separates agency from truth, love, God, neighbor, and rightful accountability.
2. Sin often presents itself as freedom but produces narrowed agency.
3. The first agency collapse in Genesis begins with distorted meaning before destructive action.
4. Shame, hiding, and blame are signs of destabilized agency.
5. Repentance is agency restoration under truth, not mere humiliation.
6. Jesus restores agency by restoring truth, dignity, forgiveness, responsibility, and direct response to God.
7. False gates capture agency by controlling access to identity, belonging, conscience, or restoration.
8. Performative righteousness can simulate order while hiding agency collapse.
9. External control without internal restoration can prevent action while failing to restore agency.
10. HAPI supports systems that restore meaningful participation without eliminating accountability.

## Appendix B. Working Glossary

### Agency

Meaningful participation under conditions of capacity, authority, clarity, refusal, memory, and accountability.

### Agency loss

The reduction of a person's ability to understand, choose, refuse, act, remember, repair, or remain accountable.

### Sin

Moral disorder that separates human agency from God, truth, love, neighbor, and rightful accountability.

### Repentance

The restoration of agency through truthful return, confession, refusal of destructive patterns, repair, and renewed direction.

### False gate

A human or system boundary that claims authority over access, identity, belonging, conscience, or restoration in a way that captures agency.

**True gate**

A rightful boundary that preserves life, truth, accountability, and restored participation.

**Agency theater**

The appearance of participation, obedience, consent, or accountability without the actual conditions that make agency real.

**References and Biblical Motifs**

The Holy Bible. Core motifs discussed include Genesis 1-3; Exodus 1-14; Psalm 51; Isaiah 58; Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36; Matthew 4; Matthew 11; Matthew 23; Luke 15; John 8; John 10; Romans 6-8; Galatians 5; 2 Corinthians 3; James 1; 1 John 1.

Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure (HAPI). Theory of Agency, Agency Loss, Agency Restoration, Governance as Agency Preservation, False Gates and True Gates, Agency Theater, and HAPI Audit Model working thesis papers, 2026.

Agent Action Gate / Pre-Gate Deliberation Layer / Alignment Governance Stack project materials, 2026.