

The Bulwark

MAY 22, 2026

“RING OF GYGES”

Seen below is a graphic depicting a part of a story entitled the “Ring of Gyges” that Greek philosopher Plato set forth as kind of a thought experiment. The gist of the story is on a shepherd who quite innocently finds a golden ring that had been hidden deep within the earth and made visible by an earthquake. As the story goes on, the shepherd discovers the ring had a magical power, that being to enable the wearer to become invisible at will. With the notion of invisibility fresh in mind, Plato then raised the question if people didn’t have to fear being caught and subsequently punished, would they do what was just or unjust? Is morality the result of a fear for punishment?



Antonella Marchetti, a noted professor of developmental and emotional psychology, known for her work in children’s moral development was quoted recently as having said, “Morality is present even in the youngest children-and it is powerful.” That quote was linked to a 2025 study that manifested a moral code within a child from the very outset. Which coincides with what is seen Deuteronomy 1:39. *“Moreover, your little ones who, you said, would become plunder, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good and evil...”*

James in his epistle asserted, *“Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do*

it, to him it is a sin.” (4:17) He wasn’t writing to children. We know the right thing to do and we also know that which is wrong. So do we do the right thing out of fear of punishment, knowing full and well what Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome, *“Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.”* (11:22)

So back to the question, do we do the morally right thing out of fear of being caught or because it is the just or right thing to do? Most were taught from the earliest days of life the difference between right and wrong; and with it punishment of one sort or another was implemented. All being done as a deterrent so that such behavior wouldn’t be repeated in the future (see Hebrews 12:4-11). Calvinistic teaching says that sin is inherited and children are born with the stain of sin. Totally depraved. But that flies in the face of what the Bible sets forth. *“The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”* (Ezekiel 18:20)

Individually we are responsible for what we do, regardless of motiva-

tion. Maybe the larger question should be if we are consistently doing the right thing, mindful of our relationship with God. In Paul’s letter to the brethren in Rome noted the following. *“Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”* (7:24) In order to fully appreciate what Paul is expressing, one needs to look back to verse fourteen and then come forward. He succinctly sets forth the internal conflict between doing God’s will and the inclination of the flesh to enjoin in sin. But he provides the answer and it is seen in Christ. *“For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man.”* (7:22)

“Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!...” (Romans 7:25) (wbe)

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