

Preliminary

[George Santanaya, *The Life of Reason*, 1905] – “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

Wrong Concept: Salvation involves collaboration between man and God – giving man a basis for boasting

Right Concept: Our salvation is a result of grace, even the faith we possess is a gift from God... Eph 2:8, 9; 2 Pt 1:1 Phil 1:29

1. The Augustinianism vs Pelagianism: Controversy Over Free-Will

Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430): Sinful man who is saved by God's grace – one of the greatest theologians in Church History

Pelagius (354 – 420?): A British (humanist) monk of cultured mind who came to Rome in about 383 AD

- He received a higher education in the country of his birth and studied law in Rome in the year 410 AD
- He accepted the full responsibilities of the Christian life and lived according to the law which is binding upon all Christians.
- His preaching is based on ethics (e.g., Sermon on the Mount) – to imitate and follows Christ as supreme example
- Pelagius was eventually condemned as a heretic by the bishop of Rome in 418 and by the Council of Ephesus in 431

Outset: The rigorous asceticism of his adherents acted as a reproach to the spiritual sloth of many Roman Christians, whose moral standards greatly distressed him, and he believed that Augustine's teaching on divine grace contributed to their immorality

Core issue: It started when Augustine, wrote a simple prayer that began to circulate throughout Christendom.

[Augustine, *The Confessions of: All Hope is in the Mercy of God*, xxix, 40] – “Lord, command whatever you will; and give us the grace to do what you command”

Point: Augustine was simply asking God to do for us what we can't do for ourselves

- All of life is grace: that we live, we breathe; we do what we do because God enables us to be that way and to live that way¹
- Every real Christian at his best moment would acknowledge the rightness of both of those requests because when we pray we're asking God to do for us what we can't do for ourselves – including salvation!

Objection: The provocation of this prayer stimulated Pelagius to react against its content.

Rebuttal: God would never give a command unless man was capable of his own free will and ability, to accomplish it... “*If I ought, I can*” – (Pelagius, quoting 1 Cor. 10:13)

➤ Asserting that *no one* was contaminated by the Fall, nor were they born in sin – denying the Doctrine of Original Sin
Argument: Each person was created like a new Adam: perfect and not influenced by the fall.

- (a) Infants are (Latin: *tabula rasa*) “*blank sheet of paper*” – therefore perfectly capable of obeying and pleasing God
- (b) Adam's body was mortal – destined to die physically whether or not he ever sinned.
- (c) Adam's sin belonged only to him – physical death is not a penalty for sin passed on to Adam's posterity.
- (d) Sin exists because we imitate Adam's *bad example* – it depends on man himself to use his will aright.

[Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior & Lord*, 33] – “(For Pelagius), The human soul was not tainted by sin. Adam's influence upon mankind was limited to his having been a *bad example*.”

Point: The will of man is completely unaffected by sin - man can eliminate sin from his life by an act of the will.

On Justification: [Pelagius] – *Self acquired virtue is the supreme good which is followed by reward*

- The ground of the sinner's justification is his own merit
- Grace is external prerequisite to salvation – election and foreknowledge are nonsense!
- Christ's Redemption forgave only personal sin, the NT and the Law of Moses were extremely external aids = “*guidepost graces*” given to the human race to attain salvation.
- The law as well the gospel, can lead us to holiness → to heaven
- Christ crucifixion is a great act of self-sacrifice that we need to emulate

Point: Christ as related to his function and value, he is the supreme example for mankind to be save³

[James M. Boice & Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrine of Grace, Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel*, 81] – “This is probably the root view of most people today, including many Christian. But it is faulty because it limits the nature and scope of sin and because it leads to a denial of the necessity of God's unmerited grace in salvation. Moreover, even when the gospel is preached to a fallen sinner (according to this view), what ultimately determines whether he or she will be saved is not the supernatural working of God through the Holy Spirit but rather the person's will, which either receives or reject the Savior, this gives glory that ought to go to God.”

Biblical Presentation

Note 1: Human was made “*in the image and likeness of God*” – Gen. 1:26, 27

Federal Headship: All of those born after Adam carry within themselves a corrupt nature and the guilt of his first sin... see Ps 51:5; Rom. 5:12, 15-19; 1 Cor. 15:22

- Original sin refers to the *consequences* for the human race of that first sin... Gen 3:17ff

Result: Man become a “*mess of sin*” (*massa peccati*) - *incapable* of raising itself from spiritual and physical death

- Physical death is an indication that we are all living in a corruptible state of spiritual death... Rom 5:12; 6:23

Note 2: Augustine did not deny that fallen man still has a will and that the will is capable of making choices.

- From the moment of Adam's creation, he was granted free will
 - (a) *posse peccare* – the ability to sin.
 - (b) *posse non-peccare* – the ability not to sin, or to remain free from sin
 - (c) *non-posse peccare* – the inability to sin
 - (d) *non-posse, non-peccare* – the inability not to sin.

Point: Free will (*liberium arbitrium*) = ability to choose what you want the most

Issue: Lost of moral liberty = ability to want what is truly right – c.f. Gen. 6:5, Isa. 53:6; Jn. 3:19; Rom. 1:30f.

- We are able to choose what we desire, but our desires remain chained by our evil impulses – the absence of glorifying God [N.R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power 1: The Age of the Early Church Fathers*, 249] – “Augustine said, the corruption of original sin has robbed us our freedom. We are still free to do what we want to do; but until God saves us, all we ever *want* to do is sin. So we are not free to do what we *ought* to do. In another sense, though, Augustine held that lost sinners do still have free-will; our wills are free in the sense that even when we sin, we always sin willingly, with our own choice and consent – nothing forces us to sin against our wills. We could sum up Augustine’s view thus: it is absolutely certain that we will always sin willingly, unless the grace of Christ saves us.”

Conclusion: Rejecting the doctrine of original sin leads to the development of a flawed theological framework

Logical Point: [Kennedy, *Amazing Grace*, 119] – “If Pelagius were right that man today is born in the same way that Adam was created as immortal and sinless, and if we were created in the same way today, then we don’t need Christ. We don’t need a Savior!”

2. The Reformation: Desiderius Erasmus (*Semi-Pelagianism*) vs. Martin Luther

Outset: It all started within the issue of salvation through Roman Catholic Indulgences.

- September 1, 1524, Erasmus of Rotterdam (RC apologist), published a work entitled *Diatribes Concerning Free Will*

Thesis: *Man has the ability within himself to believe* and, through that faith, then access all that goes with faith in justification and reconciliation with God.

Note: Semi-Pelagianism is a modification of the doctrinal teaching of Pelagius.

- Man and God are cooperating together in order to accomplish redemption... “*works-based salvation*”
- Synergism (Syn = *with; together with*)... i.e. Synchronized justification

Objection: Martin Luther responded with “*The Bondage of the Will*”

Note: Luther maintained the full Augustinian position against the semi-Pelagian position of Erasmus.

- Luther believed that being “born again” or “born from above” was monergistic

Monergism: Mono = *one/alone*; Ergos – *work* (works of God alone)

Point: Man was dead in trespasses and sin, and it was only God, who brought man back to life – by sending the Holy Spirit to revive, regenerate, and resurrect man from the hopeless condition of spiritual death

Supporting verses: Eph 2:1; Rom 1:16, 17; Jn. 3:6

[*Book of Concord, Article II, Free Will: p.89*] - “... man of himself, or from his natural powers, cannot contribute ANYTHING or HELP to his conversion, and that conversion is not only in part, but altogether an operation, gift and present and work of the Holy Ghost alone, who accomplishes and effects it, by His virtue and power, through the Word, in the understanding, [of the] heart and will of man”

3. The Arminian vs Calvinist Controversy

Outset: During the course of James Arminius’ life, until his death in 1609, he rejected many of the teachings of the Reformation and returned to the semi-Pelagian view of Rome.

- In 1610, his follower’s drafted 5 articles of faith based upon his teachings... “*Five points of Arminianism*”

Note: These stood in contradistinction to what the Church of Holland had been teaching since the Reformation.

- These five articles, also called the “*Remonstrants*” or “*protests*” that presented to the Reformed Church.
- The Arminian party insisted that the Church’s statements of faith, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, be adapted to conform to the five points of Arminianism.
- In November 1618, the Council of Dort was convened for the purpose of examining the views of the Arminian party
- 82 members, 18 civil commissioners, and 72 delegates from Germany, Switzerland, England and elsewhere were in attendance
- From the first day until the Synod’s close in May of 1619, some 154 sessions were held.

Result: An overwhelming rejection of the five points of Arminianism.

- The Synod of Dort responded to each of the five points in turn, formulating the “Five Points of Calvinism”

[J.I. Packer, *John Owens's Death in the Death of Christ*, 4-5] – “Arminianism made man’s salvation depend ultimately on man himself, saving faith being viewed throughout as man’s own work.”

Synod of Dort’s Five Points of Calvinism

Total Depravity – in response to the Arminian view of free will.

Unconditional Election – in contradistinction to conditional election.

Limited (Particular) Atonement – in opposition to general or universal atonement.

Irresistible Grace – in reply to resistible grace.

Perseverance of the Saints – in answer to the idea that a saved man could be unsaved

Conclusion: The entire process of salvation is in the work of God and is by and through grace alone.

The Reformed Doctrine of Grace emphasizes God's sovereignty in salvation. It holds that salvation is entirely the work of God, from election to redemption, through sanctification, to glorification. This view contrasts with other Christian perspectives that allow for more human involvement in the process of salvation, such as through free will or good works... Eph. 2:8; Gal. 1:8, 9

References:

¹Eric Holmberg, *Amazing Grace; The History and Theology of Calvinism*; ²N.R. Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power 1: The Age of the Early Church Fathers*; ³Bruce W. Gore, *Philosophy and History of Christian Thought: The Pelagian Controversy*; ⁴Steele, Thomas, Lance Quinn, *The Five Points, Defined, Defended and Documented*; Others: Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior & Lord*; B. B. Warfield, *Two Studies in the History of Doctrine*; James M. Boice & Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrine of Grace, Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel*; Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*; John Hendryx, *The Silver Thread: Augustine Vs. Pelagius in Church History*