

a paper against Pelagianism:

SALVATION BY GOD'S GRACE BRINGS FORTH GOOD WORKS

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PREFACE

This subject of this paper was chosen because of its immense importance in the life of The Church on earth, for the very souls of men are in jeopardy of eternal damnation should the correct means of salvation based on Holy Scripture be subverted with false doctrines of hell. Can man merit the treasure of eternal salvation in the eyes of GOD based upon his choice to do enough good works? Or must man resort to the Cross of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, there alone to find the free gift via Divine grace of blessed eternal salvation?

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ABSTRACT

Pelagianism proposes that eternal salvation may be obtained by the conscientious choice of man's free will to engage in enough good works, which is contrary to Holy Scripture. Orthodox Protestant Christianity - as heirs of the doctrines of the early Church and its champions such as St. Augustine - rests upon the Biblical thesis that eternal salvation may only be obtained by the free gift of Divine grace with faith in the sacrifice and triumph of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Good works are then a result of, not the cause of, eternal salvation of men before The LORD.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father William Baral, a good hearted man who lived a life of good works, but was saved unto eternal salvation by the free gift of GOD's grace via the power of The Cross of CHRIST three days before his earthly death.

EPIGRAPH:

EPHESIANS 2:8-10, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works, which GOD hath before ordained that we should walk in them!” [KJV]

I. INTRODUCTION

The monk Pelagian was a native of Great Britain who lived in the 5th Century AD. He was a proponent of certain doctrines relating to salvation which, according to Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language - focused on the denial of original sin; the doctrine of free will; the merit of good works.¹ These and related doctrines came to be known as "Pelagianism." Against Pelagianism was and is the orthodox Christian doctrine recorded by Saint Paul as in EPHESIANS 2:8-10, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works, which GOD hath before ordained that we should walk in them!"

² This paper will examine Pelagianism and the path that eventually led it to be declared as heresy.

II. BACKGROUND HISTORY ON PELAGIUS

Pelagius was actually a layman and was well educated in the Latin classics, Holy Scripture, the Latin Church Fathers and Greek text theology. He may have initially left his home in England to go to Rome in order to study law. He was probably baptized in 384 AD and remained in Rome for the next 20 years. In Rome, Pelagius became concerned about the nominal faith of many Christians he encountered there. He embarked on a public call for true faith, pietism and moralism. Pelagius came to stress the essential goodness of human nature, the freedom of the human will and living a life of good works of Christian conduct.^{3 4}

Pelagius wrote while in Rome several works that questioned the nature of CHRIST's work on The Cross. Specifically, he proposed that the death and resurrection of CHRIST does not produce any interior renovation of the sanctified soul. Rather, Pelagian proposed that CHRIST's purpose in His death & resurrection was to give man instruction and example of how to live & die in righteousness to counterbalance the evil

¹ 1, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of The English Language. Noah Webster. Entry for "Pelagian," page PEE-PEL. Pages are not numbered.

² 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

³ 3, Encyclopedia Britannica. Pages 533-534.

⁴ 4, "Influential Antagonists [of St. Augustine]." J. Stephen Lang. Christian History, Issue 67, Volume 19, Number 3. Page 33.

example of Adam's fall into sin in The Garden. Having first denied that Adam's example of sin in The Garden transfers to all mankind in every generation, Pelagius took the liberty of redefining the purpose of CHRIST's work on The Cross.⁵

Indeed, we can readily agree with Pelagius that all men have a free will and we are all responsible to make good choices in our lives - for which we must answer to GOD. But where Pelagius began to push the boundaries of orthodoxy was in his redefining of Divine grace as merely "to make the fulfillment of GOD's Commands easier." Pelagius, in rejecting St. Augustine's doctrines of original sin and predestination, further declared that "a man can, if he will, observe GOD's Commandments without sinning."⁶

In about 405 AD, Pelagius rebuked a Bishop who quoted from a prayer written by St. Augustine in his "Confessions," which asked of GOD, "Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt." Pelagius feared St. Augustine's prayer provided an invitation to Christians to live a lethargic faith and indolent lifestyle.^{7 8}

Thus intensified the long struggle of the early Church to find a balance between man's free will and GOD's grace, between man's good works and GOD's righteousness, that will produce salvation of the souls of men who seek it. This struggle intensified when Pelagius and his disciple Celestius moved to North Africa in about 409 AD. While Pelagius moved on to Palestine some time after the Conference of Carthage in about 411 AD, Celestius remained in North Africa.

III. ENTER CELESTIUS, DISCIPLE OF PELAGIUS

At this point, a deacon of Milan visiting Africa named Paulinus formally charged Celestius of heresy before the Bishop of Carthage. As a result, Celestius was excommunicated and left for Ephesus. Paulinus accused Pelagian's disciple of denying the transmission of original sin from Adam to the race of man. This view opened the

⁵ 5, "Pelagius and Pelagianism." Joseph Pohle. Catholic Encyclopedia. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm>. Pages 1-2. The author comments on a work by Pelagius that reveals a list of theology that the Church would soon declare to be heresy.

⁶ 4, "Influential Antagonists [of St. Augustine]." J. Stephen Lang. Christian History, Issue 67, Volume 19, Number 3. Page 33.

⁷ 3, Encyclopedia Britannica. Pages 533-534.

⁸ 6, Historical Theology - An Introduction. Geoffrey W. Bromily. Page 117.

door to the doctrine that infants are born in a state of innocence, thus calling into question the need for infant baptism to assure salvation of a newborn's soul.⁹

Celestius, assisted and trained by his master Pelagius, put forth the ideas that man can choose to attain perfection in living a sinless life; that Adam's fall into sin was an example only to be avoided if we so choose; that original sin is not transmitted to all generations of men; that consequently infants are not born in a state of sin; that thus infant baptism was not necessary as a safeguard against eternal damnation of a newborn baby who dies before being baptized; that Adam was created as a mortal man destined to experience physical death; that The Old Testament Law can lead one to GOD's Kingdom as well as The New Testament Gospel.¹⁰

Joseph Pohle, in his article "Pelagius and Pelagianism," lists the six theses of Pelagius presented by Celestius - which were branded as heresy by an African Bishop named Aurelius- as the following:"1. Even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died: 2. Adam's sin harmed only himself, not the human race; 3. Children just born are in the same state as Adam before his fall; 4. The whole human race neither dies through Adam's sin or death, nor rises again through the resurrection of CHRIST; 5. The Mosaic Law is as good a guide to heaven as the Gospel; 6. Even before the advent of CHRIST there were men who were without sin." ¹¹

IV. CLARIFYING THE ISSUES

Bromley documents in "Historical Theology - An Introduction" that by the year 412 AD, three peculiarly Pelagian doctrines were clear in Pelagian's own writings: "1. GOD has not willed to command anything impossible, for He is righteous; and he will not condemn a man for what he could not help, for He is holy." (Pel. Epistle to Demetrias, chap. 16); 2. [Ability] "is properly ascribed to GOD, Who conferred it on His creatures, while the other two [will and act]... are to be referred to the human agent."

⁹ 3, Ibid.

¹⁰ 6, Historical Theology - An Introduction. Geoffrey W. Bromily. Page 117.

¹¹ 5, "Pelagius and Pelagianism." Joseph Pohle. Catholic Encyclopedia.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm>. Page 3. These 6 Pelagian theses may be from a lost work of Celestius entitled "Contra traducem peccati" that was submitted by a Deacon Paulinus of Milan to a Bishop Aurelius in order to disqualify Celestius from becoming a Church official in Carthage on account of his heretical doctrines.

(Pel. In Defense of Free Will); 3. "Everything good and everything evil... is done by us, not born with us." (Pel. In Defense of Free Will) ¹²

V. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Imperial authorities had become concerned about these proposed Pelagian doctrines, one of whom named Marcellinus consequently wrote to St. Augustine for his opinions. St. Augustine wrote that in Adam's sin all mankind is infected with sin, thus affirming the doctrine of original sin. St. Augustine further noted that, even if choosing to live a life without sin were possible, man has an innate tendency to sin. St. Augustine concluded that it is only by accepting GOD's grace to live a righteous life can men overcome sin. ¹³

St Augustine became alarmed with the Pelagian doctrine that minimized or even eliminated the need for Divine grace as necessary for all good works. St. Augustine then embarked on a public campaign of writing and preaching against Pelagianism. In Palestine, Orosius accused Pelagius of heresy before a synod conducted by Bishop John of Jerusalem and then before a synod at Lydda before the Primate of Palestine Eulogius. Pelagius was cleared of all charges and exonerated of all heresy charges.

However, sympathizers of Pelagius attacked St. Jerome's Bethlehem monastery, as Jerome was also strongly critical of Pelagianism. As a result of the incident against St. Jerome's monastery in Palestine, coupled with an appeal from the African Church, Pope Innocent I in 417 AD excommunicated Pelagius. ¹⁴ Upon the death of Pope Innocent I, the new Pope Zosimus was more favorably inclined to Pelagius and his disciple Celestius. Pope Zosimus in fact wrote to the African Church and berated them for condemning the Pelagians. The anti-Pelagian Churchmen maintained that the case had already been settled by Pope Innocent I. By 418 AD, further violence erupted in Rome itself by pro-Pelagian Churchmen. This brought down upon the Pelagians their exile from Italy itself by the Roman Emperor Honorius. Pope Zosimus finally also excommunicated both Pelagius and Celestius from The Church and condemned their

¹² 6, Historical Theology - An Introduction. Geoffrey W. Bromily. Page 117.

¹³ 6, Ibid.

¹⁴ 3, Encyclopedia Britannica. Pages 533-534.

views as heresy.¹⁵

The schism in The Church however continued when Pope Zosimus issued his “Tractoria Epistola” condemning Pelagianism in the form of a circular letter to which all sitting Bishops were required to assent to with their signatures. Dissenting Bishops called for a general council, but this call was rejected. 18 sitting Bishops, including Bishop Julian of Eclanum, refused to sign and were thus deposed.¹⁶ Pelagius reacted to his excommunication from The Church, affirmed by both Pope and Emperor, by modifying his doctrine in a confessional appeal. He admitted that “grace was necessary, not only for every hour or moment, but for each individual action of our lives.” His confession was not considered adequate to reverse his excommunication, and he was then expelled from Jerusalem. Pelagius then disappears from the historical record and his fate beyond this point is unknown for certain.¹⁷

VI. ENTER JULIAN OF ECLANUM, DISCIPLE OF PELAGIUS

This sadly was not the end of the controversy within The Church over Pelagianism. Julian of Eclanum continued to support Pelagian’s doctrines and engaged in lengthy written arguments with St. Augustine. These theological debates ended between the two men only when St. Augustine died in 430 AD. In 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus condemned Julian and Pelagianism as heresy.^{18 19} Julian adopted Pelagian doctrines when they were considered liberal, but still within the realm of Christian orthodoxy and grounds for reasonable theological debate. Julian further expanded Pelagianism into overt heresy, holding that man's free will made him an autonomous agent from GOD’s will. St. Augustine wrote aggressively against this doctrine, labeling Julian as the "architect of the Pelagian heresy."²⁰

It is of note that the early Church responded aggressively to label Pelagianism in all its forms as heresy. Pelagianism was condemned by no less than 4 regional Church

¹⁵ 3, Encyclopedia Britannica. Pages 533-534.

¹⁶ 3, Ibid.

¹⁷ 3, Ibid.

¹⁸ 3, Ibid.

¹⁹ 4, "Julian of Eclanum - Pernicious Pelagian." J. Stephen Lang. Christian History, Issue 67, Volume 19, Number 3. Pages 34

²⁰ 4, Ibid.

councils between 412 to 529 AD. Closer to our own age, Pelagianism has been condemned by the Roman Council of Trent in 1546 AD, as well as numerous Protestant synods and confessions. From 1561 to 1619, the Swiss-German Reformed, Lutheran, French Reformed, Lowlands Reformed, Dutch Reformed and Anglican Protestant Churches all condemned Pelagianism.²¹

VII. SEMIPELAGIANISM

J. Pohle in his article “Semipelagianism” notes that an effort by monks in Marseilles some time after 428 AD to harmonize the two extremes of Pelagianism and Augustinianism on the means of salvation appeared. Semipelagianism is best appreciated as an attempted harmonization of the means of salvation between that of man’s total free will to be saved by choosing good works alone versus man’s total dependence to be saved by GOD’s grace alone.²² An earlier conflict developed between an opponent of Pelagius named Vitalis of Carthage and Augustine in about 420 AD. Vitalis rejected the Pelagian doctrine that salvation may be obtained by simply choosing not to sin by the power of the human will. Vitalis instead offered a compromise view that saving faith must begin with a choice of man’s free will to seek it and accept it when he encounters saving grace in Christian preaching. This soft, half-Pelagianism would come to be known as “semipelagianism.”²³

Augustine countered that GOD’s grace must precede faith by the Divine working within a man’s soul; ie without grace first, man has no power of free will to develop the faith in CHRIST as his Redeemer and the resulting salvation. Without GOD first imparting His grace into a man’s soul, Augustine maintained that there would be no freedom of the will to choose faith in CHRIST when a man heard Christian preaching. However, in a work in 427 AD, Augustine offered this compromise conclusion as summarized by J. Poele: “The efficacy of Divine grace impairs neither the freedom of

²¹ 7, “Pelagianism.” R. Scott Clark. <http://public.csusm.edu/guests/rsclark/Pelagius.htm>. Pages 3-4. One shudders to wonder, however, how many Protestant denominations would today be orthodox enough to condemn Pelagianism!

²² 8, “Semipelagianism.” J. Pohle. Catholic Encyclopedia. Pages 1-2. The author notes that the term “semipelagianism” was coined circa 1590 to 1600 AD in criticizing a reemergence of half Pelagian doctrines on grace in the works of a certain Molina. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13703a.htm>.

²³ 8, Ibid.

the human will nor the meritoriousness of good works, but that it is grace which causes the merits in us.”²⁴

VIII. PELAGIANISM IN THE WESTERN CHURCH

In "Thomas Cranmer" by Diarmaid MacCulloch, we find a summary of the controversy of the means of salvation - grace or works - which was a heated issue even in the days of Cranmer and Luther. The idea of one meriting salvation by good works was prevalent during the Middle Ages. One must marvel that such Pelagian-like doctrines are commonly held by many even in our own age: "On the one hand was the Lutheran picture of humanity fallen in the disobedience of Adam, helpless and totally under condemnation until given the grace of GOD through faith; on the other was the prevailing late medieval view of a Christian life in which the contrite human will was capable of cooperating with GOD towards an individual's salvation, by the performance of good works... From pure faith flowed the compulsion to do good works, but they were an effect and never a cause of that great transforming act of GOD." ²⁵

IX. IN DEFENSE OF PELAGIUS?

The Encyclopedia Britannica concludes its summary of Pelagius and his doctrines as follows: "Pelagius never crudely affirmed that man could be good without GOD... He never doubted that his system was anything other than Christian orthodoxy. He did not seek publicity and undoubtedly suffered through the excesses of his disciples. The weakness of his position lay precisely in the zeal with which he sought to refute... determinism and to rebuke the laxity of professing Christians. Pelagian admitted Divine grace in man's natural endowments; in the revelation of the Old and New Testaments; ...in the remission of sins in Christian baptism, whose necessity he affirmed for every age and condition of man." ²⁶

²⁴ 8, "Semipelagianism." J. Pohle. Catholic Encyclopedia. Page 2. The author's summary of Augustine's less extreme & more conciliatory comments on grace versus free will in "De gratia et libero arbitrio" <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13703a.htm>.

²⁵ 9, Thomas Cranmer. Diarmaid MacCulloch. Pages 209-210. The Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer is summarized in his theological essays for King Henry VIII on the matter of Martin Luther's quarrel with the Catholic Church and the Book of James.

²⁶ 3, Encyclopedia Britannica. Page 534.

Pelagian came into public conflict with St. Augustine for “rejecting the Augustinian view of the physical transmission of Adam’s sin to his descendants.” He did not fully appreciate “the weakening of human nature resulting from the Fall and of the complexity of the numerous conflicting impulses which constitute the human will.”²⁷ It seems The Encyclopedia Britannica understates the gravity of developing a theological system in which one chooses to do enough good works to merit eternal salvation. This is precisely what Pelagianism offers, making the work of CHRIST on The Cross unnecessary and of questionable effect. This is precisely what the Holy Scriptures say is not possible. This is precisely what St. Augustine fought to correct. This is precisely what the early Church fathers eventually declared to be heresy.

X. ST. AUGUSTINE ON SIN & ITS REMEDY IN SCRIPTURE

Let us resort to three Bible verse case studies with Bible commentaries which clearly supports St. Augustine's views of human sin and its remedy: PSALM 14:1-3, ROMANS 3:23-25 and EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

First to the foolishness of the atheist, which David records for us in PSALM 14:1-3: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no GOD. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand, and seek GOD. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one!”²⁸

Matthew Henry offers on this passage the following: First, sin is the chronic disease of the human heart. Second, The atheist wishes in his heart that there is no GOD, but does not dare speak it. Third, this shows the atheist's contempt for the honour of GOD. Fourth, this is a disgrace and debasement on man's nature. Fifth, sin infects the entire race of mankind. Sixth, GOD finds none among men without sin. Seventh, Any good found in mankind is due to GOD's grace working in men.²⁹

Wycliffe gives us further insight into PSALMS 14:1-3: The fool who claims to believe that there is no GOD is totally depraved. He is "not a theoretical atheist but a

²⁷ 3, Encyclopedia Britannica. Page 534.

²⁸ 2, KJV, PSALM 14:1-3.

²⁹ 10, Matthew Henry's Commentary, PSLAM 14, Verses 1-3. Page 761

practical atheist, who lives as if there were no GOD... GOD does not enter into his thinking. The words corrupt, abominable and filthy all point to the depravity of such an individual..."³⁰ Here GOD declares that there is "no man that doeth good;" that they are all "corrupt;" that all of man's works are "abominable;" that no man does good. So the works of man - no matter how righteous and upright we may see them to be - are in The LORD's eyes of no value. Thus, there is no work of man capable of earning or deserving eternal salvation; it is a gift of GOD given freely to man in CHRIST. And so again we see Pelagianism is contrary to Scripture and is to be rejected as heresy.

Secondly we have Saint Paul's Words in ROMANS 3:23-25, confessing that all men are sinners: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of GOD; Being justified freely by grace through the redemption that is in CHRIST JESUS: Whom GOD hath set forth to be propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of GOD."³¹ Matthew Henry comments here the following: First, man does not attain to righteousness before GOD by good works. Second, The grace of GOD via JESUS CHRIST is received in faith as a free gift. Third, [repentant] sinners are not justified then by good works, but by faith in GOD's grace. Fourth, GOD stops the mouths of those sinning with His judgment and the mouths of those justified with His grace so that no man may boast before The Almighty. Fifth, All men come short of the glory of GOD and are sinners in GOD's sight. Sixth, The Old Testament Law gives men knowledge of sin and not justification, convicting us of our sinful depravity. Seventh, The grace of GOD in JESUS CHRIST offered to all men freely is neither earned nor deserved by mankind; it is GOD's intervention to restore a relationship between Himself and fallen man.³²

Scofield comments on the nature of sin in mankind and its sole remedy in CHRIST based on ROMANS 3 the following: "'His righteousness' here is GOD's consistency with His Own Law and holiness in freely justifying a sinner who believes in CHRIST... Justification originates in grace (ROMANS 2:24; TITUS 3:4,5); is through the redemptive and propitiatory work of CHRIST, Who has vindicated The Law (ROMANS 3:24-25, 5.9); is by faith, not works (ROMANS 3:28-30; 4:5; 5:1;

³⁰ 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, PSALM 14 - Judgment for Denying GOD. Page 500.

³¹ 2, KJV, ROMANS 3:23-25.

³² 10, Matthew Henry's Commentary, ROMANS 3, Verses 19-31. Page 2200-2201.

GALATIANS 2:16; 3:8;8:24); and may be defined as the judicial act of GOD whereby He justly declares righteous one who believes on JESUS CHRIST..."³³

Scofield comments well here with Scripture that GOD justifies penitent sinners in CHRIST "freely," which means it is a Divine gift. The sinner in CHRIST is blessed with redemption from damnation "by faith, not works." The grace of GOD works the process of salvation in the faithful of CHRIST, securing the election, regeneration and sanctification of those who accept The Son of GOD as their Savior. No human works or merit can earn this salvation. So again we see Pelagianism is contrary to Scripture and is to be rejected as heresy.

Thirdly we again turn to Saint Paul's Words, which reveal the proper biblical balance of GOD's grace and the good works which He calls us His saints to in our salvation in EPHESIANS 2:8-10, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works, which GOD hath before ordained that we should walk in them."³⁴

Matthew Henry points out these doctrines from this passage: First, our faith and salvation in JESUS CHRIST are not the results of our natural abilities, powers, attributes, works or merits. Second, we thus have no cause to glory in ourselves, but should glory in The Lord Who redeemed us. Third, GOD Himself is the author of this new birth in us as a result of His love and mercy towards men in grace. Fourth, the faith and salvation wrought in those who confess CHRIST as their Saviour is the free gift of GOD to those who submit their free will to Him. Fifth, GOD supplies that Divine assistance to all who seek His grace.

Matthew Henry continues: Sixth, GOD's grace in the regenerated soul produces a new life - a living soul - and restores the relationship with GOD. Seventh, because GOD The Father has raised up CHRIST from the dead and enthroned Him in Heaven, so too are saved sinners lifted up with CHRIST. Eighth, it is the design of GOD that all truly repentant sinners in CHRIST - becoming His Saints - be restored to Him as new works in both this life and in eternity. Ninth, as a result of our regeneration in CHRIST, our good

³³ 12, Authorized King James Version Bible - Scofield Study Bible. Dr. Scofield's notes on "a propitiatory sacrifice; His righteousness; Justification, Summary." Page 1195.

³⁴ 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

works follow and are prepared for us to accomplish. Tenth, we thus walk in good works with GOD's blessing, a new knowledge of His Will and the help of The Holy Spirit.³⁵

Wycliffe offers these observations on EPHESIANS 2:8-10: "For by grace are ye saved. That is, you have been saved. GOD's grace is the source of our salvation. Through faith... And that not of yourselves... [It is] the gift of GOD... Not of works. This is the negative complement of the preceding statement... Works in the Scripture are the product of fruit of salvation, not the cause of it. Lest any man should boast... [We saints are] created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works..."³⁶

We may conclude that salvation in CHRIST is a gift from GOD by His grace and not earned by any good works we may do. Our good works are the result of our salvation in CHRIST, but are not the cause of our receipt of Divine grace. Thus no saint can boast of his new life in CHRIST as earned or deserved in any way. But yet the good works which are the proof and fulfillment of a true and living faith in The Lord are set for us before the foundations of the world were laid down by the very hand of GOD! And as our faith grows, so do our good works in CHRIST, which reinforce and enlarge our faith, which in turn blossoms forth in greater good works for GOD, The Church and our fellow man! Therefore we may reject Pelagianism's simplistic misunderstanding of the connection between Divine grace and good works in the Christian life as contrary to Scripture.

XI. THREE MAJOR DOCTRINAL CONTROVERSIES EMERGE

So we see clearly at least three major doctrinal controversies between Pelagius and his followers verses St. Augustine: First, there is the controversy over Original Sin. Second, there is a controversy over free will verses predestination. Third, there is the controversy of salvation and righteousness through good works under The Law verses the free gift of unmerited Divine forgiveness in our Lord JESUS CHRIST. I submit that the common issue in all these matters is the question of GOD's grace in man's salvation, which will become clearer as we examine these three major issues of doctrinal controversies.

³⁵ 10, Matthew Henry's Commentary, EPHESIANS 2, Verses 4-10. Pages 2309-2310.

³⁶ 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, EPHESIANS 2:8-10. Pages 1306-1307.

First to the controversy over Original Sin. David records in PSALM 51:5: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”³⁷ This is a confession to GOD by David of his sinfulness from the moment of his conception in his mother’s womb. Here David admits that all men are by nature sinners.³⁸ Indeed, all mankind are partakers of the heritage of Adam’s Fall into sin. Even from birth - even from conception - the psalmist observes that we all carry the burden of sin with us into this earthly world. If this were not so, David would not have written These Words by the unerring inspiration of The HOLY SPIRIT.

We see the same confession by Saint Paul in I CORINTHIANS 15:22: “For as in Adam all die, even so in CHRIST shall all be made alive.”³⁹ Note the “in Adam all die” refers to all mankind, but the “in CHRIST shall all be made alive” refers to only those saints who are saved in CHRIST. Here then St. Paul writes that in Adam’s Original Sin, all of mankind are partakers in inherited sin. However, all who are saved in our Lord JESUS CHRIST are renewed in a life forgiven of sins by GOD The Father and a resurrection from death as CHRIST rose from the dead.⁴⁰

Secondly, we have the controversy of man’s free will in choosing to accept or reject salvation in CHRIST versus the predestination of all souls to either election or damnation by the decree of The Almighty. We turn here to the words of Joshua in JOSHUA 24:14-15: “Now therefore fear The LORD, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth... choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve The LORD.”⁴¹

Joshua - in his final days - sees the danger ever looming over the ancient Israelites now in the Promised Land of becoming compromised by and embracing the idolatry and related sins of the heathens still in and around the nation. He commands the people to “fear The LORD” and “serve Him” truly and completely. He challenges the people to “choose you this day whom you will serve!” He offers the example of his household choosing to serve and worship GOD alone - no matter what others may do.⁴² Likewise

³⁷ 2, KJV, PSALM 51:5.

³⁸ 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, PSALM 51:3-6. Page 514.

³⁹ 2, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 15:22.

⁴⁰ 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, I CORINTHIANS 15:21-22. Page 1256.

⁴¹ 2, KJV, JOSHUA 24:14-15.

⁴² 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, JOSHUA 23:1-24:33. Pages 228-230. Entry titled

we today living in the time of The Church on earth should hear such a challenge and choose to serve and worship GOD alone - no matter what others may do.

Saint Peter likewise introduces himself as “an apostle of JESUS CHRIST” to his audience in I PETER 1:1-2 who is “Elect according to the foreknowledge of GOD The Father, through sanctification of The Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of JESUS CHRIST...”⁴³ The Apostle Peter here reconciles the foreknowledge of GOD as to who will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit with the choice of man to be under obedience of The Cross to continually receive the forgiveness of their sins in our Lord JESUS CHRIST. We must keep in mind that GOD - Who alone is all knowing, all present, all seeing and all wise - sees the past, present and future of the universe at all places simultaneously. So, although man has the free will to choose to worship or not worship GOD, He knows what our choices will be. Thus are the sovereignty of GOD and the free will of man preserved.⁴⁴

Third, we have the controversy of salvation and righteousness through good works under The Law verses the free gift of unmerited Divine forgiveness in our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Saint Paul writes in GALATIANS 2:16, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of The Law, but by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, even we have believed in JESUS CHRIST, that we might be justified by the faith of CHRIST, and not by the works of The Law...”⁴⁵

Here St. Paul corrects the Apostle Peter in that between Jew and Gentile there is no special preference before GOD. The Old Testament itself makes clear that The Law does not make one righteous in its keeping. David cries out to GOD in PSALMS 143:1-2, “O LORD, give ear to my supplications... And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.”⁴⁶ Further, to be justified before GOD is to be vindicated of any judgment of sin. In the death and resurrection of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, those who have faith in CHRIST as their Savior are released from the conviction of sin by The Law and are then vindicated before GOD.⁴⁷ So the plain doctrine is that a sinner is justified as a saint before GOD, not by good works dictated by The Law, but by faith in CHRIST Who pays the price for one’s sins. This alone leads

“Final Summons to Covenant-loyalty in the Promised Land.”

⁴³ 2, KJV, I PETER 1:1-2.

⁴⁴ 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, I PETER 1:1-5. Page 1444. “Salutation.”

one to vindication of one's sins before GOD.

XII. THE QUESTION OF GOD'S GRACE IN MAN'S SALVATION

Now we are ready to reconsider our opening verse of EPHESIANS 2:8-10, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works, which GOD hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”⁴⁸ Saint Paul writes that GOD's grace is granted to repentant sinners - not on account of any good works - but on account of faith. in our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Grace is a gift from our loving Father in Heaven that, although no man deserves because of his merit, yet The LORD must give to men in order that we have the saving faith in CHRIST necessary to save our souls.⁴⁹

Thus, in being saved by grace on account of faith, we see that good works are the result of the faith of a converted sinner, and not the merit by which GOD bestows salvation upon our souls. In Heaven, as all the saints of GOD will one day stand before His holy throne, there will be no one boasting of his merit to have received GOD's grace. Rather, all will be joyfully and humbly thankful for the Divine love that cherished us so much that the very Son of GOD paid the price for our sins at The Cross, thus saving us by Divine grace!⁵⁰

XIII. DIVINE GRACE ACTING IN BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Noah Webster, in his 1828 Dictionary of the English Language, gives us this insight on the nature of GOD's grace, it being “... the free unmerited love and favor of GOD, the spring and source of all the benefits men receive from Him. And if by grace, then it is no more of works...[ROMANS 11].” Divine Grace is “Favorable influence of GOD; Divine influence or the influence of The Spirit, in renewing the heart and

⁴⁵ 2, KJV, GALATIANS 2:16.

⁴⁶ 2, KJV, PSALM 143:1-2.

⁴⁷ 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, GALATIANS 2:15-18. Pages 1289-1290.

⁴⁸ 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

⁴⁹ 11, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, EPHESIANS 2:8-10. Page 1306. The question of salvation via good works or Divine grace is clearly answered in these these Bible verses.

⁵⁰ 11, Ibid.

restraining from sin. My grace is sufficient for thee... [II CORINTHIANS 12].” It is “The application of CHRIST's righteousness to the sinner. Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound... [ROMANS 5].” Divine Grace is “A state of reconciliation to GOD... [ROMANS 5].” It is “Eternal life; final salvation...”⁵¹

The love and favor of GOD – Divine Grace - is not received by men not based on their works. Rather, the “application of CHRIST’s righteousness” is applied to the penitent sinner freely and without any merit on the part of men. Nelson's Bible Dictionary offers further insight into the nature of GOD's grace: Firstly, Divine grace is that “favor or kindness shown without regard to the worth or merit of the one who receives it and in spite of what the same person deserves... [For as Moses writes in EXODUS 34:6,] The LORD GOD is merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth...”⁵² “In the Old Testament, the supreme example of grace was the redemption of the Hebrew people from Egypt and their establishment in the Promised Land... This did not happen because of any merit on Israel's part, but in spite of their unrighteousness.... [DEUTERONOMY 9:5-6] Grace is only enjoyed within The Covenant [with GOD] - the gift is given by GOD, and the gift is received by man through repentance and faith... [AMOS 5:15].”⁵³

One can not help but notice how, through out the Old Testament, the ancient Israelites were constantly falling away from worship of GOD Almighty and into pagan idolatry. The people would fall away; resulting circumstances and Divine chastisement would follow; the people would suffer and pray to GOD for forgiveness and help; GOD would intervene and all would be well again; the people then become complacent in their worship of GOD; again the people would fall into pagan idolatry. Over and over this pattern would be repeated.

So ancient Israel received GOD’s grace certainly not on their merit, but rather because GOD in His love made them His people. Thus is Pelagianism struck down by the Old Testament: “The grace of GOD was supremely revealed and given in the Person and work of JESUS CHRIST... By His death and resurrection, JESUS restored the

⁵¹ 1, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language. Noah Webster. Entry for “grace,” #2,3,4,5,9. Page GRA-GRA-GRA. Pages are not numbered.

⁵² 13, Nelson's Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible. Entry for “grace.” Page443-444.

⁵³ 13, Ibid.

broken fellowship between GOD and His people, both Jew and Gentile. The only way of salvation for any person is through the grace of the Lord JESUS CHRIST... [ACTS 15:11].”⁵⁴ This is the same theme of Grace which “...is especially prominent in the letters of the apostle Paul. He sets Grace radically over against The Law and the works of The Law... [ROMANS 3:24,28.]. Salvation is not something that can be earned or merited: it can be received only as a gift of Grace... [ROMANS 4:4].”⁵⁵

So too in the New Testament we see the clear means of salvation, which is through “the grace of GOD revealed in JESUS CHRIST” as applied to penitent sinners to save their eternal souls from everlasting damnation. Such a Divine gift is not received based on any merits or works of the penitent man; salvation through grace is a gift of GOD. And yet our good works will be as crowns upon our heads before The Eternal One’s throne of grace!

XIV. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to understand the doctrines known within so-called "Pelagianism" and why the early Church eventually found them to be heresy. The merit of salvation by good works through the free will of man in Pelagianism has been noted. The traditional orthodox Christian doctrines championed by St. Augustine in opposition to Pelagius and his disciples have been presented, namely that salvation is a Divine gift by the grace of GOD appropriated via faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST. Yet the continued controversies within the early Church over the means of salvation reveal the contentious struggles by Churchmen who were convinced of their own righteous orthodoxy on both sides of these debates.

The objectionable doctrines of Pelagianism recognized as heresy by the early Church were summarized as follows: "1. Even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died. 2. Adam's sin harmed only himself, not the human race. 3. Children just born are in the same state as Adam before his fall. 4. The whole human race neither dies through Adam's sin or death, nor rises again through the resurrection of CHRIST. 5. The Mosaic Law is as good a guide to heaven as the Gospel. 6. Even before the advent of CHRIST

⁵⁴ 13, Nelson's Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible. Entry for “grace.” Page443-444.

⁵⁵ 13, Ibid.

there were men who were without sin." ⁵⁶

Three specific Bible verse case studies were considered which clearly support St. Augustine's views of human sin and its remedy. PSALMS 13:1-3 reveal GOD's perspective that there is no man righteous and free of sin in his fallen state. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." ROMANS 3:23-25 reveal that all men "have sinned, and come short of the glory of GOD." Indeed, man is only "justified freely by [Divine] grace through the redemption that is in CHRIST JESUS." EPHESIANS 2:8-10 clearly reveal that "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD." Salvation is then "not of works, lest any man should boast." Thus Pelagianism is clearly refuted by Holy Scripture and St. Augustine is vindicated in his thesis that salvation is by grace of GOD and not by good works, but that good works follow with faith – reinforcing one another – both flowing by the Divine Grace in the redeemed.

Noted were three major controversies that emerged within the early Church over Pelagianism: 1) the controversy over original sin; 2) the controversy over free will verses predestination; 3) the controversy of salvation and righteousness through good works. Using Holy Scripture and Bible commentaries, it has been shown that: 1) All men are sinners before GOD as a result of Adam's original sin, but that our Lord JESUS CHRIST offers deliverance from that unhappy state; 2) Although man retains his free will to choose eternal damnation or salvation, still GOD's sovereignty gives Him all knowledge of the choices of men past, present and future; 3) Good works are not the cause of righteousness and salvation, but are rather the results of righteousness and salvation, the means being Divine grace as a free gift of GOD appropriated by faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

This Divine grace was operative in the Old Testament by GOD's deliverance of the ancient Israelites from bondage in Egypt and in recurrent deliverance of the nation of Israel from troubles and trials many times over. This Divine grace is operative in the New Testament by the undeserved love of GOD The Father towards all repentant sinners who by faith appropriate the free gift of eternal salvation offered in our Lord JESUS

⁵⁶ 5, "Pelagius and Pelagianism." Joseph Pohle. Catholic Encyclopedia. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11604a.htm>. Page 3. These 6 Pelagian theses may be from a lost work of Celestius entitled "Contra traducem peccati" that was submitted by a Deacon Paulinus of Milan to a Bishop Aurelius in order to disqualify Celestius from becoming a Church official in Carthage on account of his heretical doctrines.

CHRIST. Indeed, Divine grace was considered as the underlying key issue to be considered. As we have noted, GOD's Grace is His free and unmerited love and favor bestowed upon us His saints. It renews our hearts, restrains us from sin and molds us into the saving faith and confirming works to which we are called in CHRIST.

Therefore we may join with Saint Paul and Augustine in embracing what is declared to us by The HOLY SPIRIT and The faithful Church in EPHESIANS 2:8-10, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD. Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works, which GOD hath before ordained that we should walk in them!"⁵⁷ In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost.
AMEN.

⁵⁷ 2, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

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