

Systematic Theology for the Local Church
#78—Hamartiology—IV¹
Pelagianism: The Heresy That Won't Go Away
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Helpful for the studies in hamartiology are House, sections 50-52, and Reymond, 431-458.

Say the word Pelagianism to the average evangelical today and you will just get a puzzled look. And yet Pelagianism is as alive and well today as it has been since the Garden of Eden. Pelagianism is a heresy that never goes away, because it is rooted the deepest part of us. As Michael Horton says, “We are all Pelagians by nature.”² His quotation of Benjamin B. Warfield shows the heart of the issue.³

Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield considered Pelagianism “the rehabilitation of that heathen view of the world,” and concluded with characteristic clarity, “There are fundamentally only two doctrines of salvation: that salvation is from God, and that salvation is from ourselves. The former is the doctrine of common Christianity; the latter is the doctrine of universal heathenism.”

Pelagianism is a system of belief that at its heart glorifies human beings and asserts that we have the capacity to please God by ourselves.

Who was Pelagius?

Little is known about the man Pelagius. It seems likely that he was a British monk who lived in Rome for a long time. But whatever his origins were, he was well known in Rome, both for his asceticism and his oral persuasiveness. He lived in the fifth century AD, although the dates of his birth and death are not reliably known. “Pelagianism” is the system of belief named after Pelagius.

What did Pelagius believe?

Horton has an excellent summary of Pelagius’ beliefs and the setting of his work:⁴

First, this heresy originated with the first human couple, as we shall see soon. It was actually defined and labeled in the fifth century, when a British monk came to Rome. Immediately, Pelagius was deeply impressed with the immorality of this center of Christendom, and he set out to reform the morals of clergy and laity alike. This moral campaign required a great deal of energy and Pelagius found many supporters and admirers for his cause. The only thing that seemed to stand in his way was the emphasis that emanated particularly from the influential African bishop, Augustine. Augustine taught that human beings, because they are born in original sin, are incapable of saving themselves. Apart from God’s grace, it is impossible for a person to obey or even to seek God. Representing the entire race, Adam sinned against God. This resulted in the total corruption of every human being since, so that our very wills are in bondage to our sinful condition. Only God’s grace, which he bestows freely as he pleases upon his elect, is credited with the salvation of human beings.

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² “Pelagianism: The Religion of the Natural Man,” available at

<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/pelagiannatural.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

In sharp contrast, Pelagius was driven by moral concerns and his theology was calculated to provide the most fuel for moral and social improvement. Augustine's emphasis on human helplessness and divine grace would surely paralyze the pursuit of moral improvement, since people could sin with impunity, fatalistically concluding, "I couldn't help it; I'm a sinner." So Pelagius countered by rejecting original sin. According to Pelagius, Adam was merely a bad example, not the father of our sinful condition—we are sinners because we sin—rather than vice versa. Consequently, of course, the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, was a good example. Salvation is a matter chiefly of following Christ instead of Adam, rather than being transferred from the condemnation and corruption of Adam's race and placed "in Christ," clothed in his righteousness and made alive by his gracious gift. What men and women need is moral direction, not a new birth; therefore, Pelagius saw salvation in purely naturalistic terms—the progress of human nature from sinful behavior to holy behavior, by following the example of Christ.

In his Commentary on Romans, Pelagius thought of grace as God's revelation in the Old and New Testaments, which enlightens us and serves to promote our holiness by providing explicit instruction in godliness and many worthy examples to imitate. So human nature is not conceived in sin. After all, the will is not bound by the sinful condition and its affections; choices determine whether one will obey God, and thus be saved.

In 411, Paulinus of Milan came up with a list of six heretical points in the Pelagian message. (1) Adam was created mortal and would have died whether he had sinned or not; (2) the sin of Adam injured himself alone, not the whole human race; (3) newborn children are in the same state in which Adam was before his fall; (4) neither by the death and sin of Adam does the whole human race die, nor will it rise because of the resurrection of Christ; (5) the law as well as the gospel offers entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven; and (6) even before the coming of Christ, there were men wholly without sin. Further, Pelagius and his followers denied unconditional predestination.

It is worth noting that Pelagianism was condemned by more church councils than any other heresy in history. In 412, Pelagius's disciple Coelestius was excommunicated at the Synod of Carthage; the Councils of Carthage and Milevis condemned Pelagius' *De libero arbitrio*—On the Freedom of the Will; Pope Innocent I excommunicated both Pelagius and Coelestius, as did Pope Zosimus. Eastern emperor Theodosius II banished the Pelagians from the East as well in AD 430. The heresy was repeatedly condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Second Council of Orange in 529. In fact, the Council of Orange condemned even Semi-Pelagianism, which maintains that grace is necessary, but that the will is free by nature to choose whether to cooperate with the grace offered. The Council of Orange even condemned those who thought that salvation could be conferred by the saying of a prayer, affirming instead (with abundant biblical references) that God must awaken the sinner and grant the gift of faith before a person can even seek God.

Anything that falls short of acknowledging original sin, the bondage of the will, and the need for grace to even accept the gift of eternal life, much less to pursue righteousness, is considered by the whole church to be heresy. The heresy described here is called "Pelagianism."

Notice the emphasis in Pelagianism on the freedom of the will to please God. A person can choose to do what is right or choose to do evil. God creates people as having a will that is not biased toward evil. This is, of course, a rejection of original sin and total depravity.

What role does God play in salvation? Here is B. L. Shelley in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*:⁵

Pelagius considers grace purely an external aid provided by God. He leaves no room for any special interior action of God upon the soul. By “grace” Pelagius really means free will itself or the revelation of God’s law through reason, instructing us in what we should do and holding out to us eternal sanctions. Since this revelation has become obscured through evil customs, grace now includes the law of Moses and the teaching and example of Christ.

This grace is offered equally to all. God is no respecter of persons. By merit alone men advance in holiness. God’s predestination operates according to the quality of the lives God foresees men will lead.

Here is a simple definition of Pelagianism:

Pelagianism is a fifth-century error that rejects original sin, total depravity and the bondage of the will to sin.

What is Semi-Pelagianism?

Semi-Pelagianism arose as a compromise between Pelagianism and Augustinianism. In “Augustine and Pelagius” R. C. Sproul comments on this error:⁶

The difference between Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism is more a difference of degree than of kind. To be sure, on the surface there seems like there is a huge difference between the two, particularly with respect to original sin and to the sinner’s dependence upon grace. Pelagius categorically denied the doctrine of original sin, arguing that Adam’s sin affected Adam alone and that infants at birth are in the same state as Adam was before the Fall. Pelagius also argued that though grace may facilitate the achieving of righteousness, it is not necessary to that end. Also, he insisted that the constituent nature of humanity is not convertible; it is indestructively good.

Over against Pelagius, Semi-Pelagianism does have a doctrine of original sin whereby mankind is considered fallen. Consequently grace not only facilitates virtue, it is necessary for virtue to ensue. Man’s nature can be changed and has been changed by the Fall.

However, in Semi-Pelagianism there remains a moral ability within man that is unaffected by the Fall. We call this an “island of righteousness” by which the fallen sinner still has the inherent ability to incline or move himself to cooperate with God’s grace. Grace is necessary but not necessarily effective. Its effect always depends upon the sinner’s cooperation with it by virtue of the exercise of the will.

Notice that here man can still make the first move toward God. Semi-Pelagianism was condemned as heresy at the Second Synod of Orange in 529 AD. Sproul calls Semi-Pelagianism “simply a thinly veiled version of real Pelagianism at its core.”⁷ I agree.

Pelagianism in history

⁵ “Pelagius and Pelagianism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House 1987), 833-34.

⁶ Available at <http://www.livingwatercc.org/vararticles/Augustine%20and%20Pelagius%20-%20Sproul.PDF>

⁷ “The Pelagian Captivity of the Church,” available at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/sproul1.html>

Horton points out⁸ that Pelagianism is evident in such places as Adam and Eve's making their own covering, Cain's bringing his own sacrifice (based on his work), the Tower of Babel (attempting to reach God on one's own), Israel's trust in itself, the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and the work of the Judaizers in the apostolic age (self-salvation by keeping regulations). With regard to later history, Horton says:

Ever since the Enlightenment, the Protestant churches have been influenced by successive waves of rationalism and moralism that have made the Pelagian heresy attractive. It is fascinating, if frustrating, to read the great architects of modern liberalism as they triumphantly announce their project. They sound as if it were a new theological enterprise to say that human nature is basically good, history is marked by progress, that social and moral improvement will create happiness, peace, and justice. Really, it is merely a revival of that age-old religion of human nature. The rationalistic phase of liberalism saw religion not as a plan of salvation, but as a method of morality. The older views concerning human sinfulness and dependence on divine mercy were thought by modern theologians to stand in the way of the Enlightenment project of building a new world, a tower reaching to heaven, just as Pelagius viewed Augustinian teaching as impeding his project of moral reform.

Instead of defining Christianity in terms of an announcement of God's saving work in Jesus Christ, Schleiermacher and the liberal theologians redefined it as a "feeling." Ironically, the Arminian revivals shared with the Enlightenment a confidence in human ability. This Pelagian spirit pervaded the frontier revivals as much as the New England academy. Although poets such as William Henley might put it in more sophisticated language ("I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul"), evangelicals out on the frontier began adapting this triumph of Pelagianism to the wider culture.

Heavily influenced by the New Haven theology and the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney was nearly the nineteenth-century reincarnation of Pelagius. Finney denied original sin. "Moral depravity is sin itself, and not the cause of sin,"⁹ and he explicitly rejects original sin in his criticism of the Westminster Confession,¹⁰ referring to the notion of a sinful nature as "anti-scriptural and nonsensical dogma."¹¹ According to Finney, we are all born morally neutral, capable either of choosing good or evil. Finney argues throughout by employing the same arguments as the German rationalists, and yet because he was such a successful revivalist and "soul-winner," evangelicals call him their own. Finney held that our choices make us either good or sinful. Here Finney stands closer to the Pharisees than to Christ, who declared that the tree produced the fruit rather than vice versa. Finney's denial of the substitutionary atonement follows this denial of original sin. After all, according to Pelagius, if Adam can be said to be our agent of condemnation for no other reason than that we follow his poor example, then Christ is said to be our agent of redemption because we follow his good example. This is precisely what Finney argues: "Example is the highest moral influence that can be exerted. If the benevolence manifested in the atonement does not subdue the selfishness of sinners, their case is hopeless."¹² But how can there be a "benevolence manifested in the atonement" if the atonement does not atone? For those of us who need an atonement that not only subdues our selfishness, but covers the penalty for our selfishness, Finney's "gospel," like Pelagius's, is hardly good news.

⁸ Horton, *ibid.*

⁹ Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1976), 172.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹² *Ibid.*, 209.

Here is R.C. Sproul on Finney and modern evangelicalism:¹³

Modern Evangelicalism almost uniformly and universally teaches that in order for a person to be born again, he must first exercise faith. You have to choose to be born again. Isn't that what you hear? In a George Barna poll, more than seventy percent of "professing evangelical Christians" in America expressed the belief that man is basically good. And more than eighty percent articulated the view that God helps those who help themselves. These positions—or let me say it negatively—neither of these positions is semi-Pelagian. They're both Pelagian. To say that we're basically good is the Pelagian view. I would be willing to assume that in at least thirty percent of the people who are reading this issue, and probably more, if we really examine their thinking in depth, we would find hearts that are beating Pelagianism. We're overwhelmed with it. We're surrounded by it. We're immersed in it. We hear it every day. We hear it every day in the secular culture. And not only do we hear it every day in the secular culture, we hear it every day on Christian television and on Christian radio.

In the nineteenth century, there was a preacher who became very popular in America, who wrote a book on theology, coming out of his own training in law, in which he made no bones about his Pelagianism. He rejected not only Augustinianism, but he also rejected semi-Pelagianism and stood clearly on the subject of unvarnished Pelagianism, saying in no uncertain terms, without any ambiguity, that there was no Fall and that there is no such thing as original sin. This man went on to attack viciously the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and in addition to that, to repudiate as clearly and as loudly as he could the doctrine of justification by faith alone by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. This man's basic thesis was, we don't need the imputation of the righteousness of Christ because we have the capacity in and of ourselves to become righteous. His name: Charles Finney, one of America's most revered evangelists. Now, if Luther was correct in saying that *sola fide* is the article upon which the Church stands or falls, if what the reformers were saying is that justification by faith alone is an essential truth of Christianity, who also argued that the substitutionary atonement is an essential truth of Christianity; if they're correct in their assessment that those doctrines are essential truths of Christianity, the only conclusion we can come to is that Charles Finney was not a Christian. I read his writings and I say, "I don't see how any Christian person could write this." And yet, he is in the Hall of Fame of Evangelical Christianity in America. He is the patron saint of twentieth-century Evangelicalism. And he is not semi-Pelagian; he is unvarnished in his Pelagianism.

What are the implications of Pelagianism?

Horton has a good summary of the effects of Pelagianism on the Body of Christ today:¹⁴

From Finney and the Arminian revivalists, evangelicalism inherited as great a debt to Pelagianism as modern liberalism received from the Enlightenment version directly. When evangelists appeal to the unbeliever as though it was his choice that determines his destiny, they are not only operating on Arminian assumptions, but Pelagian assumptions that are rejected even by the official position of the Roman Catholic Church as a denial of grace. Whenever it is maintained that an unbeliever is capable by nature of choosing God, or that men and women are capable of not sinning or of reaching a state of moral perfection, that's Pelagianism. Finney even preached a sermon titled, "Sinners Bound To Change Their Own Hearts." When preachers attack those who insist that the human problem is sinfulness and the wickedness of the human heart—that's Pelagianism. When one hears the argument, whether from the Enlightenment (Kant's "ought

¹³ "Pelagian Captivity"

¹⁴ Horton, *ibid.*

implies can”), or from Wesley, Finney, or modern teachers, that “God would never have commanded the impossible,”¹⁵ they are echoing the very words of Pelagius. Those who deny that faith is the gift of God are not merely Arminians or Semi-Pelagians, but Pelagians. Even the Council of Trent (condemning the reformers) anathematized such a denial as Pelagianism.

When evangelicals and fundamentalists assume that infants are pure until they reach an “age of accountability,” or that sin is something outside—in the world or in the sinful environment or in sinful company that corrupts the individual—they are practicing Pelagians. . . . And that which in our circles today is often considered “Arminianism” is really Pelagianism.

Notice that Horton says that Semi-Pelagianism is really just a form of Pelagianism. Why? Because both say that a person is able to reach out to God, to take the first step toward God. The issue of the order of faith and regeneration is important here. If one says that faith precedes regeneration and is the first step in salvation, then he is Pelagian, asserting that one has the ability to believe without getting a new nature by regeneration. His old nature is not so damaged that it keeps a person from responding to the Gospel. But recall that original sin, total depravity and total inability mean that every part of a person has been so damaged that he *cannot and will not* reach out to God.

Now I know from my own experience as a student at Dallas Seminary that the faculty there teaches that faith precedes regeneration. The faculty and the great majority of its graduates call themselves Calvinists, apparently because they have a supposedly strong view of the sovereignty of God in the universe and salvation. Perhaps most Christians think that if a person has a strong view of the sovereignty of God he is a Calvinist. But under Horton’s view they are Pelagians and not Calvinists. And I agree with him. I think that believing in the complete inability of a person to turn to God in any way is essential to being a Calvinist. Why? Because if a person has the ability to turn to God on his own, then God is not sovereign in salvation—ultimately the individual makes the choice.

Of course, in the final analysis it does not matter whether a person is rightly or wrongly classified as a Calvinist. What is important is that a person is biblical. When I stand before Jesus at his judgment seat, I will want to be evaluated on how much my life conformed to Scripture, not on whether or not I was a good Calvinist. Nevertheless, to the extent that Calvinism is biblical (and in some places it is not), I am happy to be called a Calvinist (with regard to the doctrines of salvatio). However, today many people are claiming for themselves a description (“Calvinist”) that is invalid and confusing. They call themselves Calvinists but are really Pelagians. I would be gracious and say that they are confused or poorly taught.

I am convinced that most evangelicals today are Semi-Pelagian and therefore Pelagian. There is really no middle ground. Either salvation is completely God’s work or it is not. If a person believes that it is not, then he is Pelagian. Here is R. C. Sproul on Pelagianism and Christianity today:¹⁶

One thing is clear: that you can be purely Pelagian and be completely welcome in the evangelical movement today. It’s not simply that the camel sticks his nose into the tent; he doesn’t just come in the tent—he kicks the owner of the tent out. Modern Evangelicalism today looks with suspicion at Reformed theology, which has become sort of the third-class citizen of Evangelicalism. Now you say, “Wait a minute, R. C. Let’s not tar everybody with the extreme brush of Pelagianism, because, after all, Billy Graham and the rest of these people are saying there was a Fall; you’ve got to have grace; there is such a thing as original sin; and semi-Pelagians do not agree with Pelagius’ facile and sanguine view of unfallen human nature.” And that’s true. No question about it. But it’s that little island of righteousness where man still has the ability, in and of himself, to

¹⁵ B. R. Rees, ed., *The Letters of Pelagius and His Followers* (Woodbridge, England: The Boydell Press, 1991), 169.

¹⁶ “Pelagian Captivity”

turn, to change, to incline, to dispose, to embrace the offer of grace that reveals why historically semi-Pelagianism is not called semi-Augustinianism, but semi-Pelagianism.

I heard an evangelist use two analogies to describe what happens in our redemption. He said sin has such a strong hold on us, a stranglehold, that it's like a person who can't swim, who falls overboard in a raging sea, and he's going under for the third time and only the tops of his fingers are still above the water; and unless someone intervenes to rescue him, he has no hope of survival, his death is certain. And unless God throws him a life preserver, he can't possibly be rescued. And not only must God throw him a life preserver in the general vicinity of where he is, but that life preserver has to hit him right where his fingers are still extended out of the water, and hit him so that he can grasp hold of it. It has to be perfectly pitched. But still that man will drown unless he takes his fingers and curls them around the life preserver and God will rescue him. But unless that tiny little human action is done, he will surely perish.

The other analogy is this: A man is desperately ill, sick unto death, lying in his hospital bed with a disease that is fatal. There is no way he can be cured unless somebody from outside comes up with a cure, a medicine that will take care of this fatal disease. And God has the cure and walks into the room with the medicine. But the man is so weak he can't even help himself to the medicine; God has to pour it on the spoon. The man is so sick he's almost comatose. He can't even open his mouth, and God has to lean over and open up his mouth for him. God has to bring the spoon to the man's lips, but the man still has to swallow it.

Now, if we're going to use analogies, let's be accurate. The man isn't going under for the third time; he is stone cold dead at the bottom of the ocean. That's where you once were when you were dead in sin and trespasses and walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air. And while you were *dead* hath God quickened you together with Christ. God dove to the bottom of the sea and took that drowned corpse and breathed into it the breath of his life and raised you from the dead. And it's not that you were dying in a hospital bed of a certain illness, but rather, when you were born you were born D.O.A. That's what the Bible says: that we are morally stillborn.

Do we have a will? Yes, of course we have a will. Calvin said, if you mean by a free will a faculty of choosing by which you have the power within yourself to choose what you desire, then we all have free will. If you mean by free will the ability for fallen human beings to incline themselves and exercise that will to choose the things of God without the prior monergistic work of regeneration then, said Calvin, *free will* is far too grandiose a term to apply to a human being.

The semi-Pelagian doctrine of *free will* prevalent in the evangelical world today is a pagan view that denies the captivity of the human heart to sin. It underestimates the stranglehold that sin has upon us.

None of us wants to see things as bad as they really are. The biblical doctrine of human corruption is grim. We don't hear the Apostle Paul say, "You know, it's sad that we have such a thing as sin in the world; nobody's perfect. But be of good cheer. We're basically good." Do you see that even a cursory reading of Scripture denies this?

Here is an excellent graphical summary of Pelagianism by Charles R. Biggs (note the error [perhaps a typo] regarding Augustine's view of our sinfulness):¹⁷

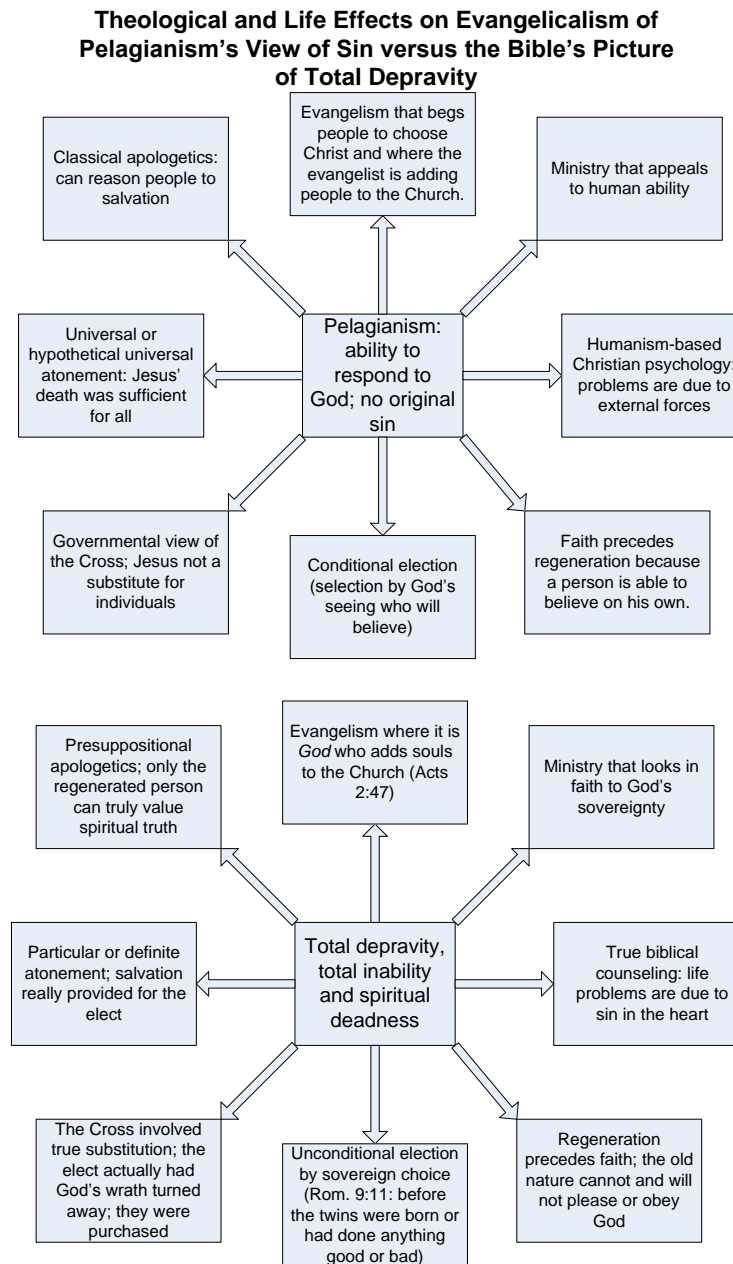
¹⁷ See <http://www.aplacefortruth.org/creeds6.htm>

Comparisons

	Pelagius	Augustine
Effect of Fall	Only Adam affected	All humanity affected
Original sin	No	Yes
Hereditary sin	No	Yes
Humans at birth	Born neutral	Born with fallen nature
Man's will	Free	Enslaved to sin
Fact of universal sin	Due to bad examples	Due to man's innate sinfulness: <i>[non] posse non-peccare</i>
Turning to God in salvation	Is possible independent of God's grace	Only possible through God's grace

The effects of Pelagianism on theology and life

These graphics should help us to see the wide-reaching effect that the error of Pelagianism can have on the theology and ministry of evangelicals (I ignore liberal theology at this point). I also assume that some who claim to be evangelicals but are actually Pelagians are saved. Some may not be.



Conclusion:

R. C. Sproul provides a fitting conclusion to this study:¹⁸

Modern Evangelicalism sprung from the Reformation whose roots were planted by Augustine. But today the Reformational and Augustinian view of grace is all but eclipsed in Evangelicalism. Where Luther triumphed in the sixteenth century, subsequent generations gave the nod to Erasmus.

Modern evangelicals repudiate unvarnished Pelagianism and frequently Semi-Pelagianism as well. It is insisted that grace is necessary for salvation and that man is fallen. The will is acknowledged to be severely weakened even to the point of being “99 percent” dependent upon grace for its liberation. But that one percent of unaffected moral ability or spiritual power which becomes the decisive difference between salvation and perdition is the link that preserves the chain to Pelagius. We have not broken free from the Pelagian captivity of the church.

That one percent is the “little something” Luther sought to demolish because it removes the sola from sola gratia and ultimately the sola from sola fide. The irony may be that though modern Evangelicalism loudly and repeatedly denounces Humanism as the mortal enemy of Christianity, it entertains a Humanistic view of man and of the will at its deepest core.

We need an Augustine or a Luther to speak to us anew lest the light of God’s grace be not only over-shadowed but be obliterated in our time.

¹⁸ “Augustine and Pelagius”

Questions for Further Study

1. Be able to give the definition of Pelagianism.
2. What are the differences between Pelagianism and Augustinianism?
3. What is the difference between Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism?
4. How can Semi-Pelagianism still be Pelagianism? What are the implications of this?
5. Can a Calvinist believe that faith brings regeneration? Why or why not?

Running compilation of key definitions

1. Systematic theology: The organized presentation of all that the Bible teaches about God and His works.
2. Exegesis: The actual practice of studying or interpreting a document or other message to determine its meaning.
3. Context: Context in a document or utterance is the surroundings of a portion of a word, a word, or a group of words.
4. Bibliology: The doctrinal study of the nature of the Bible.
5. Biblical authority: The quality inherent in Scripture by virtue of which human beings are completely answerable to its content.
6. Revelation: The information about Himself given by God to human beings.
7. General revelation: God's disclosure of Himself, available directly to everyone, given through means other than dreams, visions, direct words and Christ Himself.
8. Special revelation: The disclosure of information from God that is not available directly to all human beings.
9. Inspiration: A term applied to the Bible denoting that it is the product of God's creative activity, figuratively breathed out from Him (2 Tim. 3:16); applies to the process of recording Scripture, not specifically to the people involved; actually, *expiration* would be a better term to reflect the concept of 2 Tim. 3:16; the result is *inerrancy*.
10. Textual criticism: The science and art of attempting to discover the original text of a literary work for which the original document does not exist. It is especially important for biblical studies, and the foundational endeavor to all subsequent investigation of the Scriptures.
11. Canon: Transliterated from a Greek Word meaning 'standard'; as used of the Bible, it refers to books authenticated as possessing divine origin and therefore authoritative; the Jewish canon consists of thirty-nine books, the Protestant of sixty-six and the Catholic of eighty (including apocryphal books).
12. Inerrancy is a term applied to the Bible, although not specifically found in it; it denotes that the Bible, as originally written, possessed no humanly induced deviations from the message God intended to be recorded and that it is true in every respect; 2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 2:19.
13. Infallibility: Although some assert that this term has a different meaning from inerrancy, the two terms are, for purposes of biblical study, synonymous; the Bible is infallible because inerrant, and inerrant because infallible.
14. Illumination is the teaching ministry of the Spirit of God that imparts understanding of the message of Scripture to the believer; not to be confused with inspiration, which in the Bible is used of the work of God in giving Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); 1 Jn. 2:20; Jn. 16:13.
15. Spirituality: God is not physical, but immaterial, incorporeal, invisible and alive.
16. Self-existence/Aseity: God exists independently of anything else. He is self-existent.
17. Immensity: God is infinite in relation to space.
18. Eternality: God is infinite with regard to time.
19. Simplicity: God is not a plurality and cannot be looked at as divisible into parts.
20. Pure actuality: There is nothing about God that is potential. He is not unfinished in any way.
21. Necessity: God is uncaused and exists because he must exist.
22. Immutability: God is unchanging and unchangeable.
23. Impassibility: God is incapable of being changed or disturbed by what he experiences and is incapable of suffering.
24. Transcendence: God and the world are distinct; he is not part of the world, and the world is not part of him.
25. Immanence: God is present in the world.
26. Infinity: There are no limits to God's person and his perfections.
27. Omnipotence: God can do whatever he wills.
28. Omniscience: God knows everything there is to know.
29. Omnipresence: God is present everywhere in his creation

30. Holiness: God is morally pure and separated from all moral evil and sin.
31. Goodness: A quality that describes or includes his love, benevolence, mercy and grace
32. Truth: God's person, actions, knowledge and revelations correspond to reality
33. Love: God's continual communication of himself to his creatures.
34. Benevolence: God's goodness toward his creatures.
35. Mercy: God's goodness toward those who are helpless.
36. Grace: God's goodness toward sinners.
37. Glory: The greatness of God's perfections.
38. Trinity: There is only one true God, existing as a single Being comprised of three Persons who are equal in every way, yet distinct in their tasks and relations to humanity.
39. God's decree: The decree of God is his plan for the universe that includes all things and is certain to come to pass.
40. Providence: God's care for and upholding of his creation.
41. Sovereignty: God's control over his universe.
42. Christology: The study of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
43. Incarnation: The joining of deity and humanity in one person forever. The word is based on the Latin word for flesh: the Lord Jesus Christ is God joined with human flesh.
44. Pre-existence: Used of the Son, it means that he existed before Bethlehem.
45. Theophany: An appearance of God.
46. Christophany: An appearance of Christ.
47. Priesthood: The system that God established to remedy the problem of alienation between a holy God and sinful human beings.
48. Son of God: A name for Jesus that describes his deity and his approval by the Father at the resurrection.
49. Son of Man: A messianic name for Jesus that emphasizes his humanity backed by deity and his role of taking humans to God through suffering and humiliation.
50. Messiah: A transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one'; used of the expected national deliverer of Israel; the linguistic equivalent of Greek *christos*, 'Christ'.
51. Efficacious grace: Efficacious grace is the working of God in an individual that cannot be thwarted and that leads that person to faith in Christ. It is also described as effective calling and irresistible grace.
52. Regeneration: Regeneration is the unseen and unfelt work of the Holy Spirit that overcomes depravity and brings spiritual life and the capacity to please God and exercise faith.
53. Spirit baptism is the nonphysical act of the Spirit of God that places a believer in the Body of Christ and makes him a partaker, along with all other believers, of the work and merits of Christ; should be distinguished from filling, sealing, and indwelling; cannot be felt or noticed, and hence must be appropriated by faith; there is no warrant in Scripture for assuming a second act of God for power, a 'baptism,' after salvation.
54. Sealing is a guarantee that the believer will persevere in Christ all the way to entrance into heaven, when God completes his work of purchasing the individual. It begins at the moment of salvation when the Father places the Holy Spirit in the believer for permanent indwelling. It is unseen and unfelt and should result in praise and obedience to the Spirit.
55. Indwelling is the spiritual presence of the Holy Spirit in every individual who has placed personal trust in Christ as Savior. Described in Jn. 14:17, this is the basis of His other ministries to the believer, such as sealing, anointing and filling and establishes the believer as a part of the spiritual temple that God is building today.
56. The filling of the Spirit is 1) A constant characteristic of a believer's life that consists of regular control by the Spirit that produces Christlikeness through Scripture; 2) A special enablement at particular times for service during the first century.
57. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability for service.

58. A cessationist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are not present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
59. A continualist (with regard to spiritual gifts) is a person who holds that the miraculous gifts are present in the Church today as part of God's plan.
60. An angel is an individual, personal spirit being originally created by God to assist him in his plan for saving the elect.
61. The cosmos is Satan's organized spiritual system, in rebellion against God.
62. A demon is a fallen angel that is free to assist in carrying out Satan's plan of opposition to God.
63. Biblical anthropology is the study of what the Bible teaches about the nature and purpose of human beings.
64. Hamartiology is the study of sin and its consequences.
65. Sin is anything that is unlike God himself.
66. Personal sin is what occurs when we do something that is unlike what God would do.
67. Inherited sin is the pollution we have from our first parents, the inward bent toward sin. This is sometimes called the sinful nature or the sin nature.
68. Original sin means that all human beings have been affected by the fall.
69. Total depravity describes the extent of the result of our possessing a sinful nature—every part of a person is affected by sin.
70. Total inability means that in his unregenerate state no one is able to do anything that pleases God or seek God or turn to him in response to the Gospel.
71. Pelagianism is a fifth-century error that rejects original sin, total depravity and the bondage of the will to sin.