

Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

Is Grace Irresistible?

Pelagianism, Augustinianism, Semi-Pelagianism

1. At the Synod of Jerusalem in 415 AD, Pelagius (born c. 354, Britain – died c. 418, Palestine), a monk and theologian, was condemned for his emphasis on the primacy of human effort in spiritual salvation.

Special Note.

Arriving in Rome, c. 380, Pelagius, though not a priest, became a highly regarded spiritual director for both clergy and laymen. The rigorous asceticism of his adherents acted as a reproach to the spiritual sloth of many Roman Christians, whose moral standards greatly distressed him. He blamed Rome's moral laxity on the doctrine of divine grace that he heard a bishop cite from the Confessions of Saint Augustine, who in his prayer for continence beseeched God to grant whatever grace the divine will determined. Pelagius attacked this teaching on the grounds that it imperiled the entire moral law, and soon gained a considerable following at Rome. Henceforth his closest collaborator was a lawyer, named Celestius.

After the fall of Rome to the Visigoth chieftain Alaric in 410, Pelagius and Celestius went to Africa. There they encountered the hostile criticism of Augustine, who published several denunciatory letters concerning their doctrine, particularly Pelagius' insistence on man's basically good moral nature, and on man's own responsibility for voluntarily choosing Christian asceticism for his spiritual advancement.

Pelagius left for Palestine c. 412. There, although accused of heresy at the synod of Jerusalem in 415, he succeeded in clearing himself, and avoiding censure. In response to further attacks from Augustine, and the Latin biblical scholar Jerome, Pelagius wrote *De libero arbitrio* ("On Free Will") in 416, which resulted in the condemnation of his teaching by two African councils. In 417 Pope Innocent I endorsed the condemnations, and excommunicated Pelagius and Celestius. Innocent's successor, Zosimus, at first pronounced him innocent on the basis of Pelagius' *Libellus fidei* ("Brief Statement of Faith"), but after renewed investigation at the council of Carthage in 418, Zosimus confirmed the council's nine canons condemning Pelagius. Nothing more is known of Pelagius after this date (Pelagius: Christian Theologian, The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica).

2. The influence of Pelagius resurfaced after his death in the form of semi-Pelagianism.
3. One leader of the movement was John Cassian (c. 360 – 435 AD), a Christian monk and theologian. He is noted for bringing the ideas and practices of Christian monasticism to the early Medieval West.
4. Cassian objected to Augustine's (November 13, 354 – August 28 430 AD) view of predestination. He advocated the universality of God's grace, and the moral accountability of man, based on a vestige of ability to obey the Law of God, or not.

5. Cassian argued that with free will, no one could be held accountable for sin.
6. He insisted that salvation necessarily includes both free human consent in grace, and the gradual rehabilitation in grace of the faculty of free choice
7. Realizing the seriousness of Pelagianism, to any degree, Augustine attacked those teachings that robbed God of His sovereignty, and exalted the free will of man, making him autonomous.
8. At the heart of Pelagianism is a rejection of The Fall, and the consequences of it.
9. Augustine understood correctly that if The Fall of Man is rejected, than individuals do not need to be redeemed.
10. Historically, the Church considered Pelagianism to be unchristian, and antichristian. It was a debate between the Church, and an alien doctrine.
11. At the heart of Semi-Pelagianism, is the exaltation of the free will of man.
12. Historically, the Church came to consider Semi-Pelagianism to be a debate among sincere believers. It is certainly the classical debate between Calvinism and Arminianism.
 - John Calvin (July 10, 1509 – May 27, 1564), a French theologian and pastor.
 - Jacobus Arminius (October 10, 1560 – October 19, 1609), a Dutch theologian and professor in theology at the University of Leiden, Holland.
13. There are different views between Calvinists and Arminians concerning The Fall, freedom of the will, and divine election.
14. In the debate between Cassian and Augustine, each had an emphasis.
15. John Cassian wanted to emphasize man's moral responsibility, and the universal love of God.
 - *John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*
16. Augustine wanted to emphasize man's moral accountability, but not the universal love of God, believing that God had a right to make vessels unto honor, and vessels unto dishonor. God's grace is selective.
 - *Romans 9:13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.*
 - *Romans 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*

17. Election is according to the purpose of God.

- *Romans 9:10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; 11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) 12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.*

18. God does not show justice to one group, and is unjust to another group. Rather, since both groups are fallen, God is free to show mercy, or to extract justice.

- *Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. 17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.*

19. Some people get justice, and some get mercy. Augustine rejected the universality of salvation, based upon Biblical texts. It is God's executive privilege to manifest the depths of His mercy and grace.

20. A sense of unfairness is immediately raised when the sovereignty of God is asserted.

21. The idea is widely held that if a person is gracious to one, they should be gracious to all. If God shows mercy to one, He is obligated to show mercy to all.

22. That is not a Biblical view of God. That is a man centered view of God. It is a human emotion, and thought, extrapolated to God. Such a view robs God of His autonomy and His sovereignty.

23. God is never obligated to be gracious to one, let alone all. Otherwise, grace is no longer grace.

24. The issue of Semi-Pelagianism focused on the doctrine of free will, and original sin, as it related to the sovereignty of God.

25. Cassian argued that Augustine's view of God stifled evangelism, and moral accountability. The result is fatalism. "If predestination is true, why evangelize?"

26. The Biblical answer is, "Because the Lord commanded us to." God has promised that His Word will not return void.

- *Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*
 - *Isaiah 55:11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.*
- 27.** God has ordained, not only who shall be saved, but the means by which souls are to be saved, and that is through the preaching of the gospel.
- *Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*
- 28.** Christians are to go to all the nations, proclaiming the gospel, with confidence, that, the Word of God will be effective, and souls will be saved.
- 29.** Charles Spurgeon said, that, like Rowland Hill, if God marked the backs of the elect with a piece of chalk, he would preach only to them. Since God has not done that, the gospel is to be universally proclaimed, according to divine commandment.
- 30.** The effect of the gospel does not rest upon a person's ability, or goodness, or brilliance, but upon God's grace. Salvation is based upon God bringing home the harvest.
- *1 Corinthians 3:6 I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*
- 31.** Cassian, and his followers, also thought that Augustine's view was an overkill. It was too strong.
- 32.** Indeed, a distinction can be made between Pelagius and Cassian, or between Pelagianism and Sem-Pelagianism.
- 33.** Pelagius taught that The Fall had no effect upon the human race. Adam's Fall affected Adam, and only Adam. There was no transmission of guilt. His sin was not imputed to his descendants. There was no loss of power, or ability, in his posterity to freely choose, or not choose God. There was no real Fall to humanity. Grace may help, but it is in no way necessary.

34. Semi-Pelagianism teaches there was a Fall. Men have become corrupt, by choice, and by nature. Individuals are born in a state of corruption, and the will of man has been severely weakened. The will of man has been so weakened that nobody, in and of themselves, can be righteous, or saved, apart from grace. Man needs grace. However, man is not so dead that he has no ability, in his fallen nature, to respond to the gospel.
35. Augustine noticed that Pelagianism, and Semi-Pelagianism, did not go far enough in comprehending the plight of man. The will of man was not left intact after the Fall, nor was it merely damaged. It was destroyed, and is currently depraved.
- *Genesis 6:5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*
 - *Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.*
36. Where Pelagianism, and Sem-Pelagianism unite, is in the idea that God desires to save everyone.
37. Attention is drawn to the words of Peter in his second epistle.
- *2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*
38. Pelagianism, and Sem-Pelagianism, believes in the possibility of salvation for all. In the final analysis, salvation depends upon the degree of co-operation an individual gives to the prevenient (preceding) grace of God. God will offer salvation to everyone. He will assist everyone. But, some will say yes to God, and some will say no to God, on the basis of their weak will, not their dead will. Then, on that basis, they will be saved.
39. The Bible teaches that when God's grace comes to individuals, it is immediately, and consistently rejected, and for this reason.

Special Note.

The nature of man is such that it can only act consistently with its nature. It cannot act differently. In fact, the will of man is dead in trespasses and sin. Those who are dead must first be made alive in order to exercise their will.

- *Jeremiah 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.*
 - *Ephesians 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;*
40. In today's society, Pelagianism is the view of the secular culture. Semi-Pelagianism is the dominate view within the church.

41. The Augustinian view can be found among Reformed churches.
42. The issue between classical Augustinism, and Semi-Pelagianism, is the issue between monergism, and synergism, with respect to regeneration, or the quickening of the soul from spiritual death to spiritual life.
43. The term monergism (mon, one; erg, a unit of work [energy], one working), in theology, means that in a monergism system of salvation, only one person is working. There is a unilateral, single action by one. God works unilaterally to effect, or cause a person's salvation.

Special Note.

Augustine taught that the liberation of the soul from the power, pollution, and bondage of sin, is by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. Salvation is an act of God's sovereign, secret, selective, grace. In the initial state of salvation, the soul is passive, being dead in trespasses and sin. God, and God alone, raises the soul from the dead, to life. *Soli Deo Gloria*. Though man might have free will, he does not have liberty to be something contrary to his nature. He has freedom to act consistent with his nature. But there is no moral ability to say, "Yes" to God's grace.

- *Ephesians 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sin.*
- *Ephesians 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.*

44. Synergism (syn, with; [synagogue] erg, work, with working, co-working, cooperation), refers theologically to two or more units working together. Specifically man works with God's grace to effect, or bring about salvation.
45. Modern preaching, and teaching, in the church presents a synergistic gospel.

Special Note.

The evangelist D. L. Moody would say, in essence, "God has cast His vote for the sinner. Satan has cast his vote against the sinner. The sinner gets to cast the deciding vote. The sinner gets to break the comic tie for the soul." A person in their fallen condition chooses to either accept God's grace, or reject God's grace. The presentation of the gospel is God's grace. The acceptance or rejection of God's grace, is dependent upon the free will of man.

46. Whether or not salvation is based upon monergism, God acting upon the soul, or synergism, the sinner co-operating with God in effecting his own salvation, is based upon the doctrine of predestination.
47. Predestination is a biblical word and concept.
- *Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

- *Romans 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*
 - *Ephesians 1:11 In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*
48. Predestination is a divine initiative, and the prerogative of God. God is the one who predestinates.
49. The word used by Paul is, *proorizo* (pro-or-id'-zo), to limit in advance, i.e. [figurative] predetermine.
50. Predestination refers to the divine choice of individuals to be the children of God, and therefore heirs of heaven.
51. In contrast to Augustine's view of predestination, Cassian had a view that was based upon foreknowledge.
52. According to Cassian, God knew from all eternity He would offer saving grace to everyone. The desire of God was that everyone would co-operate with His grace. He knew in advance who would co-operate, and who would not.
53. Based on His foreknowledge, God looked down the corridors of time to see who would, and who would not accept His grace. On the basis of that foreknowledge, God predetermined the elect. In the final analysis, the sinner casts the final vote on whether or not there is personal redemption.
- *1 Peter 1:2 Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*
54. A main concern, for those of a Reformed persuasion, is that this position has God being ignorant of future events, until He comes into knowledge of which way the free will of man chooses.
55. According to this rationale, God did not know that His own Son would be rejected, and crucified, until He came into that knowledge by looking down the corridors of time.
- *Acts 2:23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*
56. Cassian, and Semi-Pelagianism, were condemned as heretical at the Council of Orange in 529 AD.

57. Ironically, the Roman Catholic Church condemned Pelagianism, it condemned Sem-Pelagianism, and then, when Luther came, it condemned Augustinism. No one has ever accused Christians of being consistent!