

Doctrine of Total Depravity

Born in Sin

1. The controversy over original sin, and free will, emerged in the early church because of a man named Pelagius (c. AD 360 -418).
2. Pelagius opposed the doctrine of predestination advocated by Augustine of Hippo, and asserted the freedom of the will.
3. A church council was called in AD 418 in Carthage to settle the dispute. The views of Pelagius were condemned as heretical.
4. Unfortunately, the Pelagian error did not go away.
5. According to tradition, Pelagius was born in Ireland. He became an earnest and zealous monk, who moved to Rome, the Eternal City.
6. In Rome, Pelagius was alarmed by the cavalier attitude he found among the clergy, and people.
7. He thought the people should be more righteous. In this, Pelagius had something in common with the original Pharisees who longed for moral reformation among the professing saints.
8. Pelagius had a zeal for godliness.
9. What prompted him to engage in a theological controversy with Augustine was a prayer he heard from the lips of the church leader.
10. Said Augustine, "O God, grant what thou commandedst, and command what thou dost desire."
11. Pelagius was alarmed with the first part of the prayer, "grant what thou commandedst."
12. The thinking of Pelagius was that if God commands something, surely He does not have to grant the power or ability to do what He has commanded.
13. Augustine was saying that God must grant him the gift of grace. Augustine was saying, "God give me the grace to be able to do what you have commanded."
14. Augustine believed man was unable to do the will of God until God first enabled him by grace.
15. In contrast, Pelagius argued that whatever God commands, imposes an obligation, and responsibility on man, an obligation, and responsibility he is able to obey, in and of himself.

16. Pelagius pointed out that God is just. Being just, God would never, and could never, command His creature to do something the creature is unable to do.
17. For God to command man to do something he is unable to do would be to impose an unjust command.
18. For God to punish man for not doing something it was impossible for him to do, that too would be unjust.
19. Pelagius rejected the idea that grace was necessary for man to do his duty.
20. Augustine responded by saying that man cannot respond to the commands of God because man is fallen. He needs grace to obey.
21. One of the effects of the Fall was the loss of moral power to obey the known will of God.
22. The Law of God does not change. Man was to be holy, even as God is holy. Man is to be perfect, even as God is perfect.
 - *Matthew 5:48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*
23. But with Adam's Fall, man entered into a state of corruption which makes it impossible for anyone to obey the Law of God perfectly.
24. Augustine argued for the reality of the Fall, and the reality of the consequences of the Fall upon Adam and his posterity.
25. Pelagius disputed Augustine's dire assessment of the Fall, and contended that while man was hurt in the Fall, his moral obligation to keep the Law of God remained intact, as well as man's ability to obey God's Law.
26. Pelagius did not deny Adam's sin. What he believed was that when Adam was created, he was created immutably good as to his nature.
27. According to Pelagius, Adam had the power to obey, or disobey. When Adam chose to sin, his sin did not change his nature.
28. Therefore, every descendent of Adam also has the power to obey, or disobey, because the nature of man is immutably good.
29. While Adam may have plunged himself into sin, he did not plunge his posterity into sin. Every person born is free to sin, or not to sin. Theoretically, if a person could be isolated from evil influences, they might choose to consistently conform to the Law of God. Every person becomes a sinner because they freely sin.
30. Augustine said, "No. A person sins because they are born into sin, and are a sinner by nature."

31. For Pelagius, man always has the ability to do good or evil. Sin affects him, but not at the core of his being.
32. Most people, when asked, agree with Pelagius, and would say that every person is basically good at the core. In his heart man has an abiding, immutable, goodness.
33. For Pelagius, there was nothing that was passed on to his descendants. There was nothing transferred, or imputed to anyone.
34. Pelagius went on to say that there was nothing wrong with grace. He believed that grace facilitates obedience, or righteousness.
35. With the help of grace, it is easier to live a life of moral perfection, and be obedient to the Moral Law of God. It helps. It facilitates the natural will of man, but it is not necessary.
36. This position was taken because if man does not have a basic capacity to obey God, then he would not be morally culpable.
37. Pelagius is arguing what the clay asked of the Potter. “Why hast thou made me thus?”
 - *Romans 9:20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*
38. The most astonishing position Pelagius took, was that not only can people live perfect lives, but many have lived a perfect life, without the benefit of grace.
39. Augustine rejected that idea of man’s sinlessness, and insisted that all of humanity was a mass of sin suited for perdition, or utter destruction.
 - *Romans 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*
 - *Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*
40. What is at stake with the teaching of Pelagius, is not only a proper understanding of the necessity of grace, but salvation itself.
41. If man can save himself by perfect obedience to the Moral Law of God, then the death of Christ was meaningless. Sinners do not need the imputed righteousness of Christ. His life becomes nothing more than a stellar example of perfection to follow.
42. Pelagius believed a person could be righteous, in and of themselves. People can have a self-righteousness that justifies.

- 43.** Augustine saw the teaching of Pelagius to be a wholesale assault upon the gospel which declares that man is a debtor to God. The debt of man is so great, he cannot pay what is owed the Lord.
- 44.** The appeal of Pelagius to many, was that it called individuals to moral accountability, and exalted man's free will, and enhanced human pride. It provided a theology basis for believing that man is basically good in the sight of God, despite the Fall. Indeed, the Fall of Adam did not affect his posterity, only himself. Feeling of guilt need not be experienced. A perfect life was possible.
- 45.** While Augustine championed biblical orthodoxy, the debate continued as to whether grace was necessary for salvation, or merely an aid in salvation.