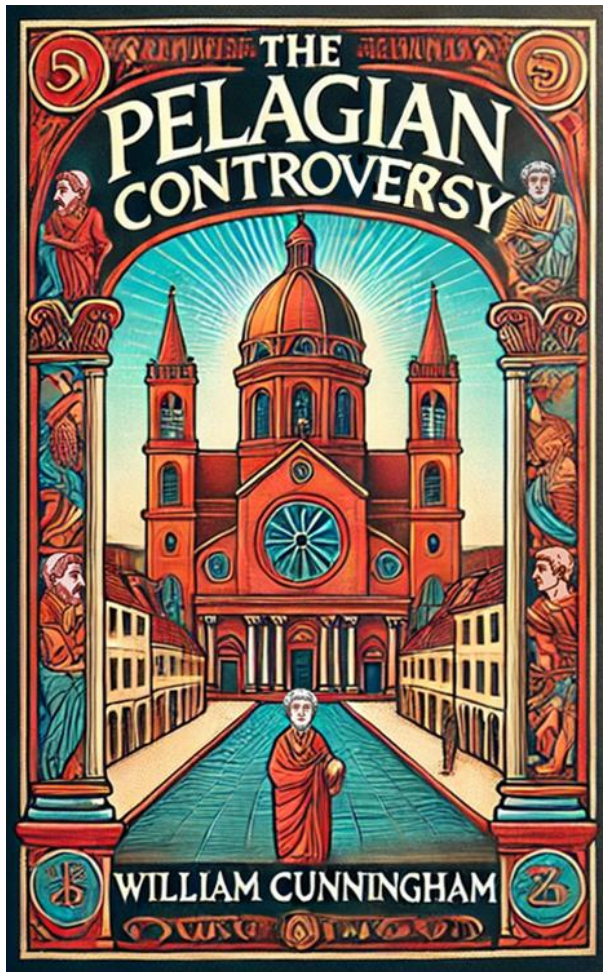


THE  
**PELAGIAN  
CONTROVERSY**



**WILLIAM CUNNINGHAM**



# The Pelagian Controversy

by William Cunningham

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## Introduction

The Pelagian controversy respects chiefly topics which are usually classed by continental writers under the head of Anthropology, or the doctrine of what man is, and of how he is influenced in those matters which concern his salvation. They stand connected with the views which Scripture unfolds to us of the actual state and condition of human nature, and, of course, of each man who possesses it, and of the kind and causes of those changes, if such there be, which are necessary to prepare men for the enjoyment of heaven. The discussion of these topics, indeed, runs up into the investigation of

the divine sovereignty and fore-ordination; but still the basis and starting-point may be said to be in the questions, What is man? his character and capacities? and what the nature and the source of those changes which must be produced upon him in order to prepare him for the enjoyment of God's presence? The Pelagian controversy thus includes all those most important and difficult topics which are usually discussed in works on systematic theology, under the heads, De peccato, De gratia, De vocatione, and De predestinatione. No subjects can surpass in intrinsic importance those which treat directly of God and Christ; but those we have now to advert to are not inferior in importance, being just as intimately connected with the salvation of men's souls, and therefore as truly necessary to be known, and known correctly, and as fundamental in their character. The history of the church seems to indicate that somehow the prosperity of vital personal religion is more closely connected with correct views of the points involved in the Pelagian controversy, than even with correct views upon the subject of the Trinity and of the person of Christ. There never, indeed, has been much appearance of true personal religion where the divinity of the Son of God has been denied; but there has been often a profession of sound doctrine upon this subject, long maintained, where there has been little real religion. Whereas, not only has there never been much real religion where there was not a profession of substantially sound doctrine in regard to the points involved in the Pelagian controversy, but also—and this is the point of contrast — the decay of true religion has always been accompanied by a large measure of error in doctrine upon these subjects; the action and reaction of the two upon each other being speedy and manifest. The apostate Church of Rome has preserved throughout an orthodox profession on the subject of the Trinity; but though precluded by her avowed principles from professing Pelagian doctrines, which have been frequently anathematized by popes and councils, she has always, in her

practical teaching, exhibited a large amount of Pelagian error, and may be said to have become formally liable to the charge of teaching Pelagianism, in consequence of the general adoption by the church of the famous Bull Unigenitus, against the Jansenists, published in the early part of last century.

There is one consideration which makes the Pelagian controversy somewhat more intricate and perplexing than the Trinitarian; and that is, that there is room for a greater diversity of sentiment, and a greater indefiniteness or latitude of statement, even among those who may, perhaps, be regarded as agreeing in the main substance of the doctrine, in the one case than in the other. Few persons who have been classed under the general designation of Pelagians— except Pelagius himself, and his immediate followers, Coelestius, and Julian, and modern Socinians and Rationalists— have denied altogether that man's nature suffered some moral taint or corruption from the fall, or that the gracious agency of God is in some way necessary in preparing men for heaven. When men go so far as to deny these things, the grounds of controversy are abundantly clear and definite: but there have been many who, without going nearly so far, and without therefore having opened up nearly so clear and definite a field for controversial discussion, have yet been charged, and justly, with greatly underrating the effects of the fall upon man's moral nature; and with superseding, to some extent at least, the agency of the Spirit in his conversion and sanctification. Pelagianism, in its original historical sense, is thus a pretty definite heresy, striking at the root of almost all that is most peculiar and distinctive in the system of revealed truth; but what has been called semi-Pelagianism — which may be regarded as describing, in general, views that make some approach to Pelagianism, but do not go quite so far— is of a much more vague and indefinite character. Pelagianism, and other words of a similar description, are often used

in theological literature with a considerable measure of vagueness, — not to describe the precise sentiments of him from whom the name is derived, but rather as a convenient, though of course somewhat loose, mode of indicating a general class of opinions, of which there may be no one very definite standard, and which may not have been fully developed by the original broacher of the doctrines, who has given name to the system, but only by those who have afterwards followed in the same general track. There has been, perhaps, more indefiniteness in the use of the word Pelagianism than in that of almost any other word of a similar kind; for this, among other reasons, that there has never been any distinct and separate community of professing Christians to which this designation has been generally attached as their ordinary distinctive appellation.

The Socinians, indeed, have fully adopted the views of the original Pelagians in regard to the character and capacities of man's moral nature, and the agency of divine grace; but these are not the features of Socinianism which have attracted the largest measure of public attention. Arminians have been commonly charged with holding Pelagian errors; and no doubt all Arminians hold some principles which were maintained by Pelagius and his followers, and opposed by Augustine and the church in general in his day; but then there have been some of the better class of Arminians, —especially Arminius and the Wesleyan Methodists, — who, however inconsistently, fully adopt Augustine's views upon what are usually regarded as the main distinctive features of the Pelagian system, — viz., the entire depravity of human nature, and the absolute necessity of the special gracious agency of God in the whole process of the conversion and sanctification of sinners, —and are thus much more orthodox upon these points than even the semi-Pelagians were. In ordinary usage, Pelagianism is commonly employed as a general designation of defective and erroneous views in regard to the extent

and consequences of human depravity, and of the necessity of special divine agency in conversion and sanctification; and it is obvious that there is room for considerable latitude in the extent to which the deviation from sound scriptural doctrine upon this point may be carried.

There are strong and powerful tendencies of various kinds that lead men to underrate the injurious effects of the fall upon their moral nature, and the consequent necessity of divine grace for their renovation; and on this account, Pelagian views, more or less fully developed, have prevailed very extensively in almost every age of the church. Generally, they have assumed somewhat of a philosophic dress, and have prevailed most among those who have thought themselves entitled to the character of rational Christians, and professed to be very zealous for the interests of morality and virtue. Sometimes, however, as we see in the Morisonianism of our own day, they have assumed a more apparently scriptural and sanctimonious garb, and have been accompanied with great professions of an eager desire for the conversion of sinners, and an anxious wish to remove every obstruction to men's coming to Christ, and laying hold of the offered blessings of the gospel. In this latter class of cases, there has usually been mixed up with the Pelagian error a larger amount of scriptural truth than has been maintained by the more rational and philosophical Pelagians, —so much of scriptural truth, indeed, as that God may have, to some extent, blessed the labours of these persons for the conversion of souls, —not of course because of the error they hold, but in spite of it, and because of the truth they hold along with it. But, in so far as this particular point is concerned, they, just as much as the other class, obscure the divine sovereignty in the salvation of sinners, and do what they can to rob God of the glory which He has declared that He will not give to another.

# I. Historical Statement

In formerly directing attention to the testimony of the primitive church, —i.e., the church of the three first centuries, —upon the subject of the doctrines of grace, we had occasion to show that it was of a somewhat dubious and uncertain kind; that these topics had not during that period been, at least in all their length and breadth, subjects of controversial discussion; and that in consequence, as is usually the case, there had been considerable vagueness and inaccuracy in the language sometimes employed regarding them. The discussions in which the early fathers were engaged had a tendency to lead them rather to magnify the power of man's free-will, since fatalism, or something like it, deeply pervaded the Oriental and Gnostic systems; and it is chiefly on what some of them have said in magnifying man's freewill, in opposition to fatalism, that those who have maintained that Pelagian views prevailed in the primitive church have taken their stand. Statements, however, upon this point do not afford the best or most certain test of men's views upon the subject of the doctrines of grace in general. Augustine certainly did not deny man's free-will altogether, and in every sense of the word; and the most zealous defenders of the doctrines of grace and of Calvinistic principles have admitted that there is a free-will, or free-agency, in some sense, which man has, and which is necessary to his being responsible for his transgressions of God's law. It is laid down in our own Confession, that 'God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined, to good or evil and it would not be easy to prove, in regard to the generality of the fathers of the first three centuries, that they believed, or really intended to declare, more in regard to the free-will of man, even when they were contending against fatalism, than may be fairly regarded as involved



in this position, especially as they have given us no reason to believe that they ever deliberately considered the distinctions which are of fundamental importance in regard to this whole question, —viz., between man's liberty of will before and after the fall, and between his free-agency in regard to things spiritual, and things merely civil and moral. It is very certain that they were not in general Pelagians, since they almost all held in some sense the doctrine of original sin, —i.e., believed -that man's moral nature was to some extent corrupted in consequence of the fall, and that all that was truly good in man was to be ascribed to God's special agency, and not to the exercise of his own powers and capacities. At the same time, it is plain that they had no very distinct conception of what these truths involved, especially in their connection with each other and the other departments of Christian doctrine, and did not always speak regarding them in a very definite or consistent way.

There does not appear to have been any very material change in the general strain of the teaching of the church upon this subject in the fourth century, from what it had been during the three preceding centuries. Chrysostom's works contain many statements to which the Pelagians, or at least the semi-Pelagians, appealed, and not without reason, in support of these doctrines; while Augustine, in defending the doctrines of grace, appealed sometimes to Ambrose, who had been the chief instrument in the hand of God of leading him to the knowledge of the truth, though there is good reason to doubt whether Ambrose's teaching upon these subjects was perfectly uniform and consistent. It was in the early part of the fifth century that the doctrines of grace were, for the first time, subjected to a full investigation, error being then more openly and explicitly taught, and truth being more satisfactorily defended and illustrated, developed, and systematized than ever before. It is this which stamps so special an importance upon the Pelagian controversy. It is this

which sheds so peculiar a glory around the name of Augustine, —a glory which attaches in the same degree to no man whom Christ gave to His church, from the age of the apostles till the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

We see in Augustine what has not unfrequently been noticed in men whom God has made signal blessings to His church, that even before his conversion he was subjected to a course of discipline and training that was not without its use, in preparing him for the work to which he was afterwards to be called: I refer especially to his having been for a good many years involved in the heresy of Manichaeism, —a fact which I have no doubt was overruled by God for preserving him from the danger to which men who are called upon to engage in arduous controversy upon difficult and perplexed subjects are so very liable, —that, viz., of leaning to an extreme opposite to that against which they may feel it to be their duty at the time to contend. Manichaeism may be regarded as, in some respects, an opposite extreme to Pelagianism, as the former implied a sort of fatalism, and the latter exalted unwarrantably the natural powers of man. It has, indeed, been alleged by Pelagians, both in ancient and in modern times, that Augustinianism, or Calvinism, —for they are in substance the same, —is tainted by some infusion of Manichaean error; and it has been asserted, that this is to be traced to Augustine retaining some leaven of his old Manichaean principles: but the general experience of mankind shows that this theory is most improbable, and proves that it is much more likely that a man who had, deliberately and from full conviction, renounced a system of error, pervaded throughout by one uniform and peculiar character, should, in place of retaining and cherishing any of its distinctive principles, be rather apt to run into the opposite extreme. Augustine, assuredly, did not run into the opposite extreme to Manichaeism— else he would not have made such strenuous opposition to Pelagianism; but

neither, in opposing Pelagianism, was he tempted to go to the opposite extreme of Manichaeism, as he might probably, —according to the tendencies which controversialists too often manifest, —have been led to do, had he not previously sounded the depths and subtleties of Manichaeism, and been led decidedly and deliberately to reject it. There would probably have been some better ground for the charge of Manichaeism, which has often, without foundation, been adduced against Augustine, had he not both embraced and renounced this heresy before he was called upon to engage in the Pelagian controversy; but as matters stand, it can be fully established that, in opposing the Pelagian heresy, he has avoided all tendency to run into the Manichaean extreme, and been enabled to keep, with wonderful accuracy, in regard to all the essential features of the controversy, the golden mean of scriptural truth.

The founders of Pelagianism— men who have had few followers in the extent to which they carried their views, except the Socinians and nationalists of modern times— were Pelagius, Coelestius, and Julian. The two former were monks, but, as was usually the case with monks at this period, they were laymen and not clergymen. Julian was Bishop of Eclanum, a small village in Italy, near Capua; for even in the fifth century many villages still had bishops. Pelagius was a native of Britain; and Coelestius, too, is supposed to have been a countryman of our own, though the evidence in regard to him is not very conclusive. Jerome, who was always remarkable for the virulence with which he assailed his opponents, never being able to see any good quality in them, speaks with the utmost contempt of Pelagius and Coelestius; but Augustine, who was, after his conversion, as highly exalted above the generality of the fathers of his age in the personal excellence of his character, as he was in ability and knowledge of divine truth, speaks very respectfully both of their

talent and of the general character which they had sustained. They seem to.

have broached their errors at Rome about the year 411, and to have afterwards visited Africa and the East. They met with no countenance in Africa, where Augustine's influence was very powerful, and their doctrines were condemned in several African councils, which were held most of them at Carthage. Pelagius met with more favour in the East, chiefly in consequence of the prevalence of Origen's views, which were akin in some respects to his own; and at a council held to examine his doctrines at Diospolis, or Lydda, in Palestine, he was acquitted of the charge of heresy, though there is reason to believe that this result was brought about chiefly by his concealing and explaining away his opinions, and by his renouncing and anathematizing some statements which had been made by Coelestius, and in which there is good ground to believe that Pelagius himself really concurred, though there was not at that time any evidence to bring them home to him. Innocent, Bishop of Rome, condemned the new doctrines; but Coelestius afterwards, by skill and cunning in explaining and glossing over his statements, managed to impose upon the ignorance and simplicity of his successor Zosimus, who publicly pronounced him orthodox, — a judgment, however, which he was afterwards induced to retract by the expostulations of Augustine and the African bishops. These different transactions have occasioned much difficulty to the defenders of Papal infallibility, who usually allege in cases of this sort, — as, for example, in that of Pope Liberius, who subscribed an Arian creed, and Pope Honorius, who advocated Monothelitism, and was anathematized in consequence as a heretic by the sixth oecumenical council, — that they never really believed the heresies which they taught, but only professed them, either from some misapprehension, or through the force of temptation, in order to

avoid persecution, which, it seems, are not inconsistent with their being fully qualified to be infallible guides and rulers of the Church. The Pelagian controversy was conducted chiefly in Africa and the West, and did not attract much attention in the East, where the bishops generally were engaged in discussing the errors broached by Apollinaris, Nestorius, and Eutyches. The third general council, held at Ephesus in 431, which condemned Nestorius, condemned also Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, though writing the history of the period, do not even mention it.

Pelagius, Coelestius, and Julian; and thus the church in general at this time may be said to have condemned Pelagianism, and to have sanctioned the views of Augustine, though it is deserving of remark, that, in the proceedings of the Council of Ephesus, there is merely a general condemnation of the doctrines taught by Pelagius, Coelestius, and Julian, without any formal declaration of the orthodox doctrine upon the subject in opposition to their errors, or even a statement of what the specific errors were which they had taught. Augustine laboured for about twenty years, with all the powers of his mind, and with unwearied zeal and assiduity, in opposition to the errors of Pelagius; writing many books upon the subject, most of which have come down to us, and exerting his influence in every other way to prevent the spread of heresy. The Lord was pleased to call him to his rest in the year 430, while he was engaged in writing a book against Julian, which has come down to us in an imperfect state, as he left it, and without affording him the satisfaction of witnessing the triumph of sound doctrine, and the condemnation of its opponents in the General Council of Ephesus.

Pelagius, and his immediate followers, Coelestius and Julian, taught openly and explicitly that man's moral character had received no injury from the fall, and that men were born now with as much

ability to do the will of God, and to discharge all the obligations incumbent upon them, as Adam; and, in consequence, they denied the necessity of divine grace, or of any special divine agency or influence upon men, unless it might be for the purpose of enabling them to do more easily that which, however, they were able to do, though less easily, without it, and which, in their estimation, was nothing less than attaining to perfection in holiness in this life. These doctrines are so palpably inconsistent, not only with many particular statements, but with the whole scope and substance of Scripture, that they did not gain much support in the church; and after the decision of the Council of Ephesus, they seem to have almost wholly disappeared.

Pelagius and his immediate followers do not seem to have called in question the doctrine of the Trinity, or any of the scriptural doctrines more immediately connected with it; and yet it is very manifest that modern Socinians and Rationalists are the only consistent Pelagians. When men reject what Pelagius rejected, they are bound in consistency to reject everything that is peculiar and distinctive in the Christian system as a remedial scheme. Upon Pelagian principles, there is no occasion for, and really no meaning in, a Saviour, an atonement, a Holy Spirit. No evil has befallen our race, and there is no occasion for a remedy, especially for such a remedy as the Bible has been generally regarded as unfolding. Augustine, through God's blessing, put down this unscriptural, inconsistent, and cowardly scheme of heresy; and it was not revived until after the Reformation, when it appeared in the bolder and more consistent form of Socinianism. There are, however, as we have said, powerful tendencies in human nature, leading men to over-estimate their own moral powers and capacities, and to think lightly of the necessity and importance of divine grace, —of God's special agency; and while, on the one hand, Pelagius' views met with little countenance,

Augustine's, on the other, met with a good deal of opposition. An intermediate scheme was devised, which has passed under the name of semi-Pelagianism, and which, whether bearing that name or not, has almost always prevailed to a considerable extent in the professedly Christian church, especially when true piety was in a feeble or declining condition; and has comprehended men of very different characters, and been held in conjunction with other doctrines, approaching more or less nearly to the scriptural standard. Semi-Pelagianism, from its very nature, bears a character of great indefiniteness. It admits original sin in some sense; i.e., it admits that man's moral nature is more or less corrupted in consequence of the fall, and that special divine assistance was more or less necessary, in order to the attainment of those things which accompany salvation. These intermediate and indefinite views, resembling very much the doctrines which have been held generally by Arminians in modern times, were broached during Augustine's lifetime, and thus afforded him an opportunity of directing against them the same great definite scriptural doctrines which he had wielded with so much ability and success against Pelagianism. The contest was carried on after his death, on the side of truth, by Prosper and Fulgentius; but though semi-Pelagianism was never formally approved of by the church, and was very explicitly and formally condemned by a Provincial Council of France, the second Council of Orange, Concilium Arausicanum, in 529, it prevailed practically to a considerable extent till the period of the Reformation.

Augustine has had the peculiar honour assigned to him, by the great Head of the church, of having been the first to develop, in a systematic order, and in their right connection with each other, the great doctrines taught in the word of God concerning man's lost and ruined condition by nature; the gracious agency of God in the conversion and sanctification of sinners; and the true cause or source

of all the effects thus produced, wherever they are produced, in His own sovereign good pleasure and eternal purpose, — having mercy on whom He would have mercy, and having compassion on whom He would have compassion; and he was thus enabled to render most important services to the cause of truth and righteousness in all succeeding generations. There is indeed much reason to believe that no inconsiderable portion of the piety that existed in the church from the time when he flourished till the Reformation, —a period of above one thousand years, —was instrumentally connected, more or less directly, with his influence and writings. We may apply the same statement to almost everything like piety that has ever been found in connection with the Church of Rome, including what is certainly to the eye of a Christian by far the brightest spot in the history of that apostate communion, —viz., the Port-Royalists, and the other Jansenists of France in the seventeenth century.

Augustine, indeed, eminently as he was furnished by the great Head of the Church both with gifts and graces for defending and promoting divine truth, is not by any means an infallible judge, to whom we can securely trust. God has never given to any uninspired man or body of men, to rise thoroughly and in all respects above the reach of the circumstances in which they have been placed, and the influences to which they have been subjected; and Augustine was certainly involved to a considerable extent in some of the corrupt and erroneous views and practices which in his time were already prevailing widely in the church. There are, it must be admitted, some of the corruptions of Popery, the germs of which at least, though not fully developed, are to be found in his writings. But the great defect with which he is chargeable is, that he seems to have had no very clear or accurate views of the great doctrine of justification by faith. He did not accurately understand the meaning of justification as a forensic or judicial term, as distinguished from sanctification; and he



seems to have to some extent confounded them together, as the Church of Rome still does. It could not be, indeed, that a man of Augustine's undoubted and eminent piety, and with so deep a sense as he had of human depravity and of God's sovereignty in determining man's character and condition, could have been resting upon any works or merits of his own for salvation, and therefore he must practically and in heart have been resting upon Christ alone; and this general statement must have been true of many others besides him in the early and middle ages, who had obscure or erroneous views upon this subject. But he had certainly not attained to any such knowledge of God's word in regard to this matter, as would have enabled him to give a very accurate or consistent exposition of the reason or ground of his hope. I formerly had occasion to explain, that at a very early period in the history of the church, the scriptural doctrine of justification became obscured and lost sight of, and was never again revived in all its fulness and purity until the Lord raised up Luther as His instrument in effecting that important result. The early fathers soon began to talk in an unscriptural and mystical way about the objects and effects of the sacraments; and at length they came to talk of baptism as if it not only signified and represented, but actually conferred, and conferred invariably, both the forgiveness of sins and the renovation of men's moral natures. Augustine knew too much of the word of God, and of the scheme of divine truth, to go thoroughly into such views as these; but he certainly had such notions of the nature and effects of baptism, and of its connection with the forgiveness of sins, as to lead him to some extent to overlook and throw into the background, if not to pervert, the scriptural doctrine of justification by faith alone. The subject of baptism entered largely into his controversy with the Pelagians, —he adducing the baptism of infants for the remission of sins as a proof of original sin, and they regarding it, like the modern Socinians, merely as the appointed rite or ceremony of outward

admission into the communion of the visible church; and though he was right in the main in the use and application he made of baptism in opposition to the Pelagian denial of original sin, yet he showed very strikingly how much he was perverted by erroneous and exaggerated views of the nature, objects, and importance of external ordinances, by broadly and unequivocally laying down the doctrine that all infants dying unbaptized are consigned to everlasting misery, —a doctrine which is still generally taught in the Church of Rome. The Pelagian controversy, as conducted in Augustine's time, embraced a great variety of topics, —taking in, indeed, more or less fully nearly all the leading doctrines of Christianity, except the Trinity and the atonement; and these were not comprehended, just because the original Pelagians had not the boldness and consistency of modern Socinians in following out or developing their own principles. Forbes, in his *Instructiones Historiae-Theologicae*, has enumerated twenty-six topics which were controverted between Augustine and his opponents; but they are all reducible, as to their main features, to a few general heads, —such as Original Sin, and Free-will; Grace, or Divine Agency in the conversion and sanctification of sinners; Predestination, and the Perseverance of Saints, —and under these heads we propose very briefly to advert to them.

Let me again remark, before proceeding to advert to these topics, that the permanent value of the labours and writings of Augustine in the Pelagian controversy, lies not mainly or chiefly in his having exposed, and through God's blessing put down, Pelagianism in the gross form in which it was at first propounded, and in which it is now held by Socinians and Rationalists, but in his having brought out the clear and definite doctrines of God's word, so as at one and the same time to refute and exclude not only Pelagianism, but also what has been designated semi-Pelagianism; and thus to furnish an antidote

to all the numerous attempts which have since been made to exalt unduly the power of man in spiritual things, without wholly superseding the necessity of divine grace, and in this way to share the glory of the salvation of sinners between the saved and the Saviour. This consideration obviously suggests, that in the brief and imperfect notice which alone we can give of this important controversy, we must confine ourselves chiefly to the statement of those great scriptural truths which Augustine so fully unfolded and so ably defended, and which strike at the root of all the errors which have been held upon these subjects, either in ancient or in modern times, and whether in a grosser or in a more mitigated form.

## **II. Depravity— Original Sin**

That branch of Christian doctrine, which is now frequently called Anthropology, proposes to answer the question, What is man in his moral and spiritual character and capacities; in his relations to God and to eternity? So far as the question respects merely the actual features and constituent elements of man's moral nature, there is no incompetency or impropriety in men looking into their own hearts, and surveying their own lives, in order to obtain materials for answering it; but, as God knows what is in men better than they do themselves, it is also quite reasonable that they should receive with implicit submission whatever He may have been pleased to reveal to them in His word regarding it. The question then is, What does God in His word make known to us with respect to men's actual moral character, and spiritual relations and capacities? This, like every other question in Christian theology, taking the word in its widest sense, should be answered by an exact investigation of the true meaning of the various statements of God's word which bear upon it.

It is surely abundantly evident in general, that the representation given us in Scripture of the actual moral character and spiritual capacities of men, as they come into the world, and grow up in it, —of their relation to God, and of the tendency of all this, in its bearing upon their eternal destiny, —is not such as is fitted to lead us to entertain any very exalted conceptions of our own worth and our own powers. The word of God surely represents men— all men— as not only actual transgressors of God's laws, and therefore justly liable to all the consequences of transgression, whatever these may be, but as having also a decided bias or proneness to transgress God's law as an actual feature of their moral nature, from which they cannot by their own strength emancipate themselves, and which renders necessary some special interposition of God, if they are ever to be delivered from it. Those who are, from whatever cause, averse to receive this view of the actual moral character and condition of man, have been accustomed, besides attempting to explain away the statements of Scripture, in which it seems to be very plainly taught, to have recourse to Â» the considerations universally conceded, that man did not possess this moral character when he came forth at first from the hand of his Creator— that this was not the character of our first parents when they were created; and then to assert that there is no evidence that man's character has been changed— that our moral character and capacities are different from what those of Adam were. Their opponents, though wishing to rest mainly, in the first instance, —as the proper ground of their cause, —upon the direct Scripture proof of universal native moral corruption, have no objection to follow them in that direction; being confident that the scriptural representation of the effects of Adam's first sin upon himself and upon his posterity, —the scriptural evidence that in connection with Adam's first sin, and in some way as a consequence of it, an important moral deterioration has been introduced into the human race, —only corroborates and illustrates the views they have been led

to take of the import of those scriptural statements which speak directly and immediately of the actual character of all men as they come into the world, and are found there. That Adam sinned against God— that thereby he not only incurred the guilt of transgression, but became deteriorated in his own moral character, and that, in consequence, all his posterity have also become to some extent deteriorated in their moral character and capacities, so that they do not now, in fact, bring with them into the world a moral character, a capacity of obeying God's law, equal to what Adam originally possessed, or to what, so far as we know, they would have had had he not fallen— has been, as a general position, admitted by almost all who have professed to believe in the authority of the sacred Scriptures, except the original Pelagians and the modern Socinians. We need not dwell upon this, but proceed to advert to what is the whole truth upon this subject, as set forth in Scripture and maintained by Augustine.

In considering what is man's actual moral character and capacity, we are investigating a matter of fact; we are seeking, directly and primarily, an answer to the question, What man, in these respects, is? And we are not called upon, in the first instance, to take into account any questions that may be raised as to the origin or source, the cause or rationale, of what may be found to attach to men, or to be truly predicable of them all in their present actual condition. We might be able to ascertain, with accuracy and precision, what is the actual moral condition and capacity of men, even though we were unable to give any very definite account or explanation of how this state of things had been brought about; and it is desirable that, in seeking to understand this whole subject, and to estimate the amount and validity of the evidence bearing upon it, we should distinguish between these two questions. The difficulties attaching to an investigation of the origin and the reason of the actual

ungodliness and depravity of human nature, have been perhaps too much allowed to affect the proof and the impression of its actual existence as a feature of men's moral condition.

There is distinct and abundant scriptural evidence, bearing directly and immediately upon the question of what man is, and is capable of doing in a moral point of view, independently of any information given us in Scripture concerning the origin or cause of the sad realities of the case. Were men really convinced, upon scriptural grounds, that they do all, in point of fact, bring with them to the world hearts which, when estimated in the light of God's law and of our obligations, are indeed deceitful above all things and desperately wicked— that in us, i.e., in our flesh or natural character, there dwelleth no good thing— that until men become the subjects of renewing and sanctifying grace, the imaginations of the thoughts of their hearts are only evil and that continually, —they would feel that they are not called upon in right reason to attach, in the first instance, so much weight, as is often done, to the determination of the questions that may be started as to the manner and circumstances in which this condition of things may have been brought about, and the way in which it is to be explained and vindicated. It would then stand very much upon the same footing as many other things, the existence and reality of which are established by competent and satisfactory evidence appropriate to the case, but the causes or reasons of which are involved in darkness and difficulty; whereas it is too much the practice, in discussing this subject, to burden the consideration of the great primary question, What is the true character of man's moral nature, as a matter of fact, or an actual feature of what man is? with all the additional difficulties attaching to the questions of how he came to be so ungodly and depraved as he appears to be, and of how the fact that he comes into the world possessed of such a moral character, can be

vindicated from the charge of making God the author of sin, and destroying man's responsibility. The questions as to the original moral character of our first parents, —the effects of their first sin upon their own moral character, —the identity of the moral character which all men now have, with that which became theirs after they had sinned, —and the connection between their moral character, as fallen, and that of their posterity;— all these questions stand to the question, of what is now the actual moral character of men, merely in the position of explanations of the actual fact or state of the case, —accounts of the way in which it originated, and may be defended. And it is of some importance, in order to rightly appreciating the evidence— the *rationes decidendi*— that this distinction should be kept in view.

With respect to the subject of guilt, as distinguished from depravity, the bearing of the first sin of Adam has a somewhat closer and more direct connection with the actual condition of man; for, according to the general doctrine of orthodox Calvinistic divines, the guilt of Adam's first sin, imputed to his posterity, is directly a part of the guilt which actually attaches to them, and forms a constituent element of one important feature of their actual condition, —viz., their guilt, their *reatus*, their just liability to punishment, including of course, from the nature of the case, the grounds on which that liability rests. But, as we have already explained, neither guilt, in its proper sense (*reatus*), on the one hand, nor justification in its proper sense, as simply deliverance from guilt or liability to punishment, and acceptance, on the other, entered directly into the original Pelagian controversy, as it was managed in the time of Augustine. It was ungodliness or depravity, and its bearing upon men's actual capacity to do the will of God, and to discharge their obligations, that was then mainly discussed; and it is with that, therefore, at present that we have chiefly to do. The bearing of the first sin of Adam upon

his posterity, and generally the connection subsisting between him and his descendants, was indeed discussed between Augustine and his opponents; but, in accordance with the distinction which we have just explained, it was not directly, as if the guilt of his first sin was a portion of the guilt actually attaching to them, but only indirectly, in so far as his first sin and its immediate consequences afforded some explanation of the origin or ground of the deep-seated and pervading depravity or ungodliness, which Scripture and experience unite in proclaiming to be an actual feature of the moral character of all men.

Augustine was enabled to see and unfold, with a very considerable measure of clearness and accuracy, the great truth which has since been more fully developed and illustrated in defence of Calvinistic principles, —viz., that Adam was constituted by God the representative and federal head of his posterity, so that his trial or probation was virtually and in God's estimation, according to the wise and just constitution or arrangement which He had made, —and which certainly, to say the least, cannot be proved to have been unjust or unfavourable to his posterity, —the trial or probation of the human race; and that thus the transgression of Adam became, in a legal and judicial sense, and without any injustice to them, theirs, so that they were justly involved in its proper consequences. If it be indeed the actual fact that men come into the world with ungodly and depraved natures, which certainly and invariably, until they are changed, produce transgressions and shortcomings of God's law—actual violations of moral obligations— then, assuredly, the principle that Adam was constituted, and thereafter was held and regarded by God, as the representative and federal head of his posterity, so that they sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression, is the only one that has ever been propounded which makes even an approach towards affording an explanation of this important fact, —viz., that men do come into the world with their whole moral nature



corrupted, and thoroughly perverted, so far as God and His law are concerned. If men are not satisfied with this explanation, so far as it goes, it is their business to devise or suggest a better. But, in place of impartially considering this explanation, which the statements of Scripture plainly enough indicate, and in place of attempting to give any other more satisfactory explanation of a fact which appears in itself to be well established, the more common process is to deny the fact altogether, or to explain it away, —i.e., either to deny that men bring with them into the world an ungodly and depraved moral nature, or to represent the ungodliness and depravity, which may be admitted in some sense to attach to it, to be insufficient to affect materially their relation to God, and, without divine interposition, their future destiny; and to be thus scarcely important enough to stand much in need of explanation, as not presenting any very serious difficulty either in speculation or in reality.

All this contributes to illustrate the observation we have made, as to the propriety and importance of first of all ascertaining, if possible, how the actual matter of fact stands, that men who are opposed to orthodox views may be deprived of the unfair advantage of shuffling between the fact and its cause, —the thing itself, and its origin or reason. Let the question be distinctly put, and let it be fairly investigated, until, if possible, a deliberate and decided conclusion is come to: Do men, or do they not, bring with them into the world ungodly and depraved natures? And if they do, have we any practical test or standard of the strength, efficacy, and consequences of this ungodliness or depravity, which actually, and in fact, attaches to them as a feature of their moral character? When the matter of fact is once ascertained, it will then be proper to consider, if it seem necessary, both, on the one hand, how it originated and how it may be explained; and, on the other, to what conclusions, theoretical and practical, it may lead. When the matter is viewed in this light— when

the question is thus considered by itself, and in the light of its direct and appropriate evidence— there seems to be no very great difficulty in coming to a decided determination regarding it.

There are surely many sufficiently plain statements in Scripture which assure us that men have all by nature, —i.e., as they actually come into the world, and until some important change is effected upon them, —a bias, proneness, or tendency to disregard God, to neglect the duties which He has imposed upon them, and to break His laws. Experience, or an actual survey of the history and condition of the human race, fully confirms this doctrine of Scripture, and shows that this tendency is universal, —extending to all men, —and is so strong and powerful as never in any instance to be overcome by the unaided efforts of men themselves, or by any combination of external circumstances; or, to adopt the language of Jonathan Edwards, in his great work on Original Sin, 'that all mankind constantly in all ages, without fail in any one instance, run into moral evil' and 'that, consequently, all mankind are under the influence of a prevailing effectual tendency in their nature to sin and wickedness.' There are, indeed, many men who do not seem to be at all aware of this tendency to sin as a feature in their character, and not a few even who openly deny it, and appeal to their own consciousness to disprove it. This, however, is no sufficient argument against the reality and universality of the alleged tendency; for it may be, and the Scripture plainly enough indicates that it is, one feature or result of this very tendency itself, and of its immediate consequences, to render men blind and insensible to its own existence. Many men, who once disbelieved and opposed this doctrine, have come to be firmly persuaded of its truth; while none who ever really and intelligently believed it, have ever been brought to reject it; and there are few men whose consciousness, if allowed full and fair scope, and subjected to a skilful cross-examination upon some materials which

the word of God furnishes, would not be brought to render some testimony, more or less explicit, to its truth. In the very nature of this doctrine, or rather of the fact which it announces, it is very manifest that men are imperatively called upon to ascertain whether it be true, and to be familiar with the grounds on which their conviction of its truth is based. And when this conviction is once reached, then is the proper time to investigate both its origin and its results— its causes and its consequences— taking care, however, that neither the difficulties and perplexities that may attend an investigation of its origin or cause, nor the alarming consequences that may flow from it, when practically applied and followed out, shall be allowed to shake the conviction in regard to the actual matter of fact, —this feature of man's moral character, which has been satisfactorily established by competent and appropriate evidence.

Now the Scripture, as we have mentioned, does give us some explanation concerning its origin and source, though certainly not such as to remove every difficulty, and to render the subject in its principles perfectly level to our comprehension; and the substance of what the Scripture makes known to us upon this point was much more fully and accurately brought out by Augustine in his controversy with the Pelagians, than ever it had been before, and has been already briefly explained. No other reasonable explanation of the fact has ever been given, —we might say, has ever been attempted. Men have attempted to explain the fact of the universal prevalence of actual sin among mankind, without referring it to a proneness or tendency to sin, which men now bring with them into the world, and which constitutes an actual feature in their moral character; but for this proneness or tendency itself operating universally and certainly, when once admitted or found to be an actual reality, no other explanation has ever been proposed. Some men, indeed, have stopped short with the fact itself, received upon

scriptural authority, without seeking, or even admitting, any explanation of its origin or cause; in other words, they have held the fact of the actual and entire corruption and depravity of human nature, without receiving or taking into account the federal headship of our first parent— the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity— or its derivation in any proper sense from Adam and his first transgression. This raises the question, whether or not the Scripture gives any countenance to the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity; and whether, if it does, this principle does anything towards explaining the fact of the universal corruption and depravity of human nature. Augustine maintained and proved that Adam's sin involved all his posterity in this moral corruption and depravity, and did so, because it was held or reckoned as theirs; although, as has been already explained, he did not apply the imputation of Adam's first sin in the twofold aspect in which it has been commonly presented by Calvinistic divines, —as the ground at once of a portion of the guilt or reatus which attaches to them, and as, at the same time, affording some explanation of their universal actual moral depravity, —but only in the latter of these aspects. God did not create man with this prevailing proneness or tendency to sin. It must have been in some way the result of transgression or disobedience. The only act of disobedience or transgression to which it can be ascribed, or with which it can be supposed to be penally connected— and the connection must have been of a penal character — is that of our first parents; and the only way in which that transgression could operate upon us, so as to affect our moral character, is by its being imputed to us, or held and accounted as ours. This, again, receives its explanation from the principle that God constituted Adam the representative or federal head of mankind, so that his trial was actually, and in a judicial sense, the trial of the human race, —and his fall and sin the fall and sin of all his posterity.

Had nothing further been revealed to us in Scripture than the mere fact that all men have, and bring with them into the world, ungodly and depraved natures, it would have been our duty to have received this upon God's authority, though He might have given us no explanation whatever of it, and though we might have been utterly unable to devise any; and even as matters stand, our first and most important duty in regard to this subject is just to ascertain whether this be so, in point of fact, or not. But the Scripture does plainly trace the fact which it asserts of the universal corruption and depravity of man's nature, to our connection with Adam, and to the first sin of our first parent, and does contain plain enough indications that this connection is based upon a constitution, arrangement, or covenant, which God made, —which is in itself perfectly equitable, —and in virtue of which Adam's trial or probation was to be the trial or probation of the whole human race. This is information given us in Scripture, in addition to the making known the mere fact of the universal prevalence of actual ungodliness and depravity as a feature of human nature, and is to be received and submitted to simply as being revealed; while, at the same time, there is no great difficulty in seeing that this additional information does throw some light upon the important fact with which it is connected, or does contribute something towards explaining it. The subject is, indeed, still a mysterious one, and we have no right to expect that we should fully comprehend it; but the statements which we have briefly explained, can, we think, be all established, with more or less clearness or certainty, from the word of God. They exhaust the information which is given us there upon the different points involved in this matter, and they form a compact and intelligible scheme, which unfolds the whole subject in such a way that each part corroborates and illustrates the other.

The difficulties connected with what seems to be taught in Scripture, as to the bearing of Adam's first sin upon his own moral character, and that of all his descendants, and with the alleged imputation of that sin to his posterity, should not in reason affect our investigation of the question, as to what the actual moral character of mankind is, or the decision to which we may come regarding it. The view of the origin and cause of the moral depravity of man's nature, which is plainly intimated in Scripture, does assuredly not make the great fact itself more incredible or improbable, or weaken the force of the evidence on which it rests. And it is only when the fact is fully established, that men are warranted to investigate into its origin or cause. It is then only that they will be likely to enter upon this investigation with a due measure of impartiality and diligence; and when due impartiality and diligence are employed, men not only will not find, in difficulties that may be connected with the scriptural representation of the origin and cause of this great fact, any ground for doubting the reality of the fact itself, established upon its own proper evidence; but they will see that the scriptural explanation of the fact, though it may not remove every difficulty, does tend in no inconsiderable degree to throw light upon it, —that, when the whole of what the Scripture teaches upon the subject is viewed in combination, it is all fitly framed together, and that the different branches of the great general doctrine upon this point afford mutual strength and support to each other.

So much for the retrospect, or looking back from the fact established, or assumed to be so, of the moral corruption or depravity of human nature, to its source or cause. Let us now briefly advert to the prospect, or looking forward to the consequences that result from it. In the Pelagian controversy, as understood in Augustine's time, the consequences of the fall were viewed chiefly, not in their connection with guilt, as rendering necessary, if men were to be saved, some

provision for securing pardon and acceptance; but in their connection with depravity, as rendering necessary some provision for changing men's natures, and as in some measure determining the nature and character of the provision that was needful. And here the principal and primary question amounts in substance to this: Is this corruption or depravity, attaching to all men as an actual feature of the moral nature which they bring with them into this world, total or partial?

If it be only partial, then man still has by nature something about him that is really good, in the proper sense of the word, —something that is really in accordance with the requirements of God's law, that enables him to do something in the way of really discharging the obligations which he upon him as a creature of God, and of effecting, or at least aiding to effect, by his own strength and efforts, his own entire deliverance from its influence. If, on ' the other hand, the corruption or depravity which attaches to man's moral nature be total, then it follows that the positions now referred to are wholly unfounded, and that statements directly the reverse may justly be made with regard to men's qualities and capacities, so far as concerns their relation to God and His laws, their fitness to discharge the obligations which he upon them, and their ability to exert themselves any real influence upon their deliverance from depravity, and their meetness for heaven.

Our Confession of Faith says, —and the word of God fully proves it, —that in virtue of this corruption or depravity, which attaches to all men by nature, they are 'dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body,' and that they are 'thereby utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.' This, and nothing less, Scripture and experience concur in showing to be the real import and amount of

the corruption which, in fact, attaches to man's moral nature; and while the direct and immediate result of this truth, proved or admitted, is, that men should, in the belief of it, be fully aware of, and should constantly realize, their own utter worthlessness and helplessness in regard to all spiritual and eternal things, and cherish a frame of mind and heart corresponding to this awful reality, which either now attaches, or did once attach, to every one of them, —its more general and extended importance, both theoretically and practically, is to be seen in its bearing upon the question of what is the nature, character, and source of the provision that may be adequate and needful for removing it. It is here, of course, that the subject of original sin and human depravity connects with that of divine grace, or the special gracious agency of God, in converting and sanctifying men, —a subject which formed, perhaps, the most prominent topic of discussion in the controversy between Augustine and the Pelagians. Here, too, comes in the important and difficult subject of free-will; about the precise mode of stating, defending, and applying which, there has been considerable diversity of sentiment, even among those who in the main agreed in the whole substance of what they believed regarding the moral nature and spiritual capacity of fallen man. Indeed, the subject of the freedom or bondage, the liberty or servitude, of the human will, — i.e., of the will of men as they are, as they come into the world, with a corrupt and depraved moral nature, —may be regarded as forming, in some sense, the connecting link between the doctrine of original sin, and that of God's grace in the conversion of sinners. The doctrine of man's total depravity implies, or immediately leads to, that of the actual servitude or bondage of the human will. And this, again, when once proved, would be sufficient of itself to establish the doctrine of God's special gracious agency as the ultimate source, and only real cause of, all that is truly good in man, even although this latter doctrine had not been so clearly and fully established by the express declarations



of Scripture. It is in this connection, and in this connection alone, that the servitude or bondage of the human will was asserted by Augustine, and what is much more important, is asserted in our Confession of Faith. The Confession, after laying down the general principle about the natural liberty of the will of man already quoted, and asserting that ' man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God, but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it,' proceeds in these words: 'Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.'

I cannot enter upon any detailed discussion of this subject, though I will afterwards return to it; but I would just remark, that I am by no means satisfied that any other doctrine of necessity— any other view of the bondage or servitude of the human will— than that which represents it as implied in, or deduced from, the moral depravity which attaches to all men, as an actual feature of their character, can be fully established, either from Scripture or reason. The actual inability of men to will or to do what is really good, —and this is the only necessity under which they are that is of any material practical importance, —seems in Scripture to be always connected with, or deduced from, not their mere position as the creatures of God's hand, and the subjects of His moral government, —although, of course, they are in these characters wholly subject at all times, and in all circumstances, to His guidance and control, —not any general laws which He has impressed upon His intelligent creatures, or upon the human mind as such, or on its power of volition, or other faculties or operations; but it seems to be connected with, or deduced from, that thorough ungodliness, or entire moral corruption, which

attaches to the nature of man, as fallen. That the ungodliness or corruption which attaches to man's nature, as fallen, does produce or imply a bondage or servitude of the will, by which men are, in fact, 'unable by their own strength to convert themselves, or to prepare themselves thereunto,' is evident in the nature of the case, and is clearly taught in Scripture. That any other kind or species of servitude, or necessity, attaches to the human will, is not by any means so certain. The only ground on which it can be alleged to rest is a metaphysical speculation, which, whether true or false, ought to be carefully distinguished from truths actually taught in Scripture; and which, while not itself positively sanctioned by Scripture, cannot, I think, be shown to be indispensably necessary for the exposition, illustration, or defence of any of those great doctrines, the belief of which is required in the word of God, and the knowledge of which is necessary in order to an accurate acquaintance with the way of salvation.

### **III. Conversion— Sovereign and Efficacious Grace**

The controversy between Augustine and his opponents turned, as we have said, to a large extent, upon the nature and import, the necessity, grounds, and results of that grace of God, which, in some sense, was universally admitted to be manifested in preparing men for heaven. That a certain character, and a certain mode of acting, in obedience to God's law, were in fact necessary, in order to men's attaining final happiness, and that men were in some sense indebted to God's grace or favour for realizing this, was universally conceded. It was conceded by Pelagius and his immediate followers, and it is

conceded by modern Socinians; but then the explanation which these parties gave of this grace of God, which they professed to admit, made grace to be no grace, and practically made men, and not God, the authors of their own salvation, which the Socinians, consistently enough, guarantee at length to all men. With the original Pelagians and the modern Socinians, the grace of God, by which men are, in this life, led to that mode of acting which, in fact, stands connected with their welfare in the next, —(for even Socinians commonly admit some punishment of wicked men in the future world, though they regard it as only temporary), —consists in these two things: First, the powers and capacities with which He has endowed man's nature, and which are possessed by all men as they come into the world, along with that general assistance which He gives in His ordinary providence, in upholding and aiding them in their own exercise and improvement of these powers and capacities; and, secondly, in the revelation which He has given them to guide and direct them, and in the providential circumstances in which He may have placed them. This view of the grace of God, of course, assumes the non-existence of any such moral corruption attaching to men, as implies any inability on their part, in any sense, to obey the will of God, or to do what He requires of them; and, in accordance with this view of what man is and can do, ascribes to him a power of doing by his own strength, and without any special, supernatural, divine assistance, all that is necessary for his ultimate welfare. This view is too flatly contradictory to the plain statements of Scripture, and especially to what we are told there concerning the agency of the Holy Ghost, to have been ever very generally admitted by men who professed to receive the Bible as the word of God; and, accordingly, there has been a pretty general recognition of the necessity, in addition to whatever powers or capacities God may have given to men, and whatever aids or facilities of an external or objective kind He may have afforded them, of a subjective work upon them through special

supernatural agency; and the question, whether particular individuals or bodies of men were involved more or less in the errors of semi-Pelagianism, or taught the true doctrine of Scripture, is, in part, to be determined by the views which they have maintained concerning the nature, character, and results of this special supernatural agency of God, in fitting men for the enjoyment of His own presence.

Even the original Pelagians admitted the existence of supernatural gracious influences exerted by God upon men; but then they denied that they were necessary in order to the production of any of those things which accompany salvation, and held that when bestowed they merely enabled men to attain them more easily than they could have done without them; while they also explicitly taught that men merited them, or received them as the meritorious reward of their previous improvement of their own natural powers. An assertion of the necessity of a supernatural gracious work of God upon men's moral nature, in order to the production of what is, in point of fact, indispensable to their salvation, has been usually regarded as necessary to entitle men to the designation of semi-Pelagians, —a designation which comprehends all who, while admitting the necessity of a supernatural work of God, come short of the full scriptural views of the grounds of this necessity, and of the source, character, and results of the work itself. The original Pelagian system upon this point is intelligible and definite, and so is the scriptural system of Augustine; while any intermediate view, whether it may or may not be what can, with historical correctness, be called semi-Pelagianism, is marked by obscurity and confusion. Leaving out of view the proper Pelagian or Socinian doctrine upon this subject, and confining our attention to the scriptural system of Augustine on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to those confused and indefinite notions which fall short of it, though not to such an extent as the

doctrines of the Pelagians and the Socinians, we would remark that it is conceded upon both sides: First, that before men are admitted into heaven they must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lead thereafter a life of new obedience; and, secondly, that men have a moral nature so far tainted by depravity, that this indispensable process cannot in any instance be carried through without a supernatural gracious work of God's Spirit upon them.

These two propositions embody most important and fundamental truths, clearly and fully taught in Scripture, and essential to a right comprehension of the way of salvation. Men who deny them may be justly regarded as refusing to submit to the authority of God's word, and as rejecting the counsel of God against themselves; while, on the other hand, men who honestly and intelligently receive them, though coming short of the whole scriptural truth in expounding and applying them, may be regarded as maintaining all that is fundamental upon this subject; by which I mean, —in accordance with the common Protestant doctrine of fundamentals as brought out in the controversy with the Church of Rome, —that some men who have held nothing more than this have afforded satisfactory evidence that they themselves were born again of the word of God, and have been honoured as the instruments of converting others through the preaching of the gospel. But while this is true, and ought not to be forgotten, it is of at least equal importance to observe, that many who have professed to receive these two propositions in the general terms in which we have stated them, have given too good ground to believe that this professed reception of them was decidedly defective either in integrity or in intelligence, —have so explained them, or rather explained them away, as to deprive them of all real meaning and efficacy, and practically to establish the power of man to save himself, and to prepare for heaven, upon the ruins of the free grace of God, which is manifested just as fully in the sanctification as

in the justification of sinners. And hence the importance and necessity of clearly and definitely understanding what is the scriptural truth upon these subjects, lest we should be deceived by vague and indefinite plausibilities, which seem to establish the grace of God, while they in fact destroy it. Defective and erroneous views upon this subject are usually connected with defective and erroneous views in regard to the totality of the moral corruption which attaches to men by nature, and of their consequent inability to do anything that is really spiritually good. It is manifest that any error or defect in men's views upon this subject will naturally and necessarily lead to erroneous and defective views of the nature, character, and results of that gracious work of God, by which man is led to will and to do what is good and well-pleasing in His sight.

When those who admit in general the necessity of a gracious work of God's Spirit upon men, in order to their repenting and believing the gospel, have yet erroneous and defective views upon the subject of divine grace, they usually manifest this by magnifying the power or influence of the truth or word of God, —by underrating the difficulty of repenting and believing, —by ascribing to men some remains of moral power for effecting these results, and some real and proper activity in the work of turning to God, —and by representing the work of God's Spirit as consisting chiefly, if not exclusively, in helping to impress the truth upon men's minds, or, more generally, rendering some aid or assistance to the original powers of man, and to the efforts which he makes. It is by such notions as these, though often very obscurely developed, insinuated rather than asserted, and sometimes mixed up with much that seems sound and scriptural, that the true doctrine of the gracious work of God in the conversion of sinners has been often undermined and altogether overthrown. These men have, more or less distinctly, confounded the word or the truth— which is merely the dead instrument— with the Spirit, who is

the real agent, or efficient cause of the whole process. They have restricted the gracious work of the Spirit to the illumination of men's understandings through the instrumentality of the truth, as if their will did not require to be renewed, and as if all that was needful was that men should be aided intellectually to perceive what was their true state and condition by nature, and what provision had been made for their salvation in Christ, and then they would certainly repent and believe as a matter of course, without needing specially to have the enmity of their hearts to God and His truth subdued. They have represented the gracious work of the Spirit chiefly, if not exclusively, as co-operating with men, and aiding them in the work for which they have some natural capacity, though not enough to produce of themselves the necessary result, as if there was little or no need of preventing or prevenient grace, or grace going before, in order that man may work or act at all in believing and turning to God. These men are usually very anxious to represent faith in Jesus Christ as to some extent the work of men's own powers, the result of their own principles; and Augustine admits that he had some difficulty in satisfying himself for a time that faith was really and properly the gift of God, and was wrought in men by the operation of His Spirit, though this doctrine is very plainly and explicitly taught in Scripture. Much pains have been taken to explain how natural and easy saving faith is, to reduce it to great simplicity, to bring it down as it were to the level of the lowest capacity, —sometimes with better and more worthy motives, but sometimes also, we fear, in order to diminish, if not to exclude, the necessity of a supernatural preventing work of God's Spirit in producing it. And then, as repentance and conversion, as well as the whole process of sanctification, are beyond all doubt inseparably connected with the belief of the gospel, the way is thus paved for ascribing to man himself some share in the work of his deliverance from depravity, and his preparation for heaven.

One of the most subtle forms of the various attempts which have been made to obscure the work of God's Spirit in this matter, is that which represents faith as being antecedent— in the order of nature at least, though not of time— to the introduction or implantation of spiritual life into the soul of man, dead in sins and trespasses. This notion is founded upon these two grounds: first, upon a misapprehension of the full import of the scriptural doctrine, that man is dead in sin, —as if this death in sin, while implying a moral inability directly to love God, and to give true spiritual obedience to His law, did not equally imply a moral inability to apprehend aright divine truth, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and, secondly, upon a misapplication or perversion of the scriptural principle, that men are born again of the word of God through the belief of the truth, —as if this, while no doubt implying that the truth has been effectually brought to bear upon the mind before the process of being born again has been completed, so that the man is in the full exercise of new spiritual life, implied, moreover, that this efficacious operation of the truth must precede, in the order of nature, the whole work by which the Spirit originates the process of vivification; and the object and tendency of this notion, based upon these two grounds, are to produce the impression that men, through believing, are able to do something towards making themselves, or at least towards becoming, spiritually alive, and thereby superseding to some extent the necessity of a supernatural work of God's Spirit in a point of primary and vital importance, intimately connected with the salvation of men. Man is dead in sin; the making him alive, the restoring him to life, is represented in Scripture as, in every part of the process, from its commencement to its conclusion, the work of God's Spirit. The instrumentality of the truth or the word is, indeed, employed in the process; but in the nature of the case, and in accordance with what is clearly taught in Scripture, there must, antecedently— at least in the order of nature, though not of time— to



the truth being so brought to bear upon men's minds as to produce instrumentally any of its appropriate effects, be a work of God's Spirit, whereby spiritual life is implanted, and a capacity of perceiving and submitting to the truth, which had been hitherto rejected, is communicated, —a capacity which, indeed, previously existed, so far as concerns the mere intellectual framework of man's mental constitution— the mere psychological faculties which he possesses as being still a man, though fallen— but which was practically useless because of the entire bondage or servitude of his will, which required to be renewed, and could be renewed only by the immediate agency of God's Spirit. The doctrine of God's word upon this subject is fully maintained only when man is really regarded as being in his natural condition, morally dead to all that is really good, and when the first implantation of spiritual life, and all that results from it, including faith as well as repentance, turning to God and embracing the Lord Jesus Christ, is honestly, and without reserve or equivocation, traced to the supernatural agency of God's Spirit as its only efficient cause.

One other important point connected with this subject, which, from the time of Augustine till the present day, has been largely discussed, is what has been called the efficacy, or invincibility, or irresistibility of grace. Pelagians and semi-Pelagians have all united in denying the irresistibility of grace, and have virtually maintained— for it really comes to this in substance— that whatever power the Holy Spirit may put forth upon men in order to convert and renew them, it is in their power to resist it all, and to escape, so to speak, unconverted and unrenewed; while Augustine maintained that the grace of God, the power of the Spirit in the Elect, always prevailed or overcame, and certainly took effect, whatever resistance men might make to it. This doctrine has been held in substance ever since by orthodox divines, though there has been some difference of opinion among

them as to what were the terms in which the substance of the scriptural views upon the subject could be most fitly and accurately expressed.

Augustine, in asserting the invincibility or irresistibility of grace, did not mean, —and those who in subsequent times have embraced his general system of doctrine as scriptural, did not intend to convey the idea, —that man was compelled to do that which was good, or that he was forced to repent and believe against his will, whether he would or not, as the doctrine is commonly misrepresented; but merely that he was certainly and effectually made willing, by the renovation of his will through the power of God, whenever that power was put forth in a measure sufficient or adequate to produce the result. Augustine, and those who have adopted his system, did not mean to deny that men may, in some sense and to some extent, resist the Spirit, the possibility of which is clearly indicated in Scripture; inasmuch as they have most commonly held that, to use the language of our Confession, 'persons who are not elected, and who finally perish, may have some common operations of the Spirit,' which, of course, they resist and throw off. The truth is, that this doctrine of the certain efficacy or irresistibility of grace is closely and necessarily connected with the doctrine of God's purposes or decrees, —the great doctrine of predestination or election, which constitutes an essential part of the Pelagian controversy; and, indeed, it may be regarded as forming the connecting link between the doctrine of converting and renewing grace, as the true cause of all that is good in man, and that of personal election to everlasting life, as the source to which God's effectual operation in working faith in men, and thereby uniting them to Christ, is to be traced. It is the Spirit of God whose supernatural agency restores men to life, and effects in them all that is indeed spiritually good. Whenever this agency is put forth in strength sufficient to effect the object of converting a sinner and

uniting him to Christ by faith, it certainly does effect it, just because God had resolved to effect it, and has in consequence put forth the power necessary for doing so. What God does in time, He from eternity decreed to do, because in the Infinite Mind there is no succession of time, —all things are at once and eternally present to it. When God exercises power, He is carrying into effect an eternal purpose; when He converts a sinner, He is executing a decree which He formed before the world began— before all ages.

The main questions connected with this important subject are these — First, Is God, when He sends forth His almighty Spirit, — when He converts a sinner and unites him to Christ, —influenced, in doing so, by a regard to anything existing in the man, by which He is distinguished from others, or by anything present in him? or is He influenced solely by His own purpose, previously formed, — formed from eternity, —of converting and saving that man? And, secondly, Does this general principle of an eternal purpose to save some men and to pass by the others, or to leave them in their natural condition of guilt and depravity, apply to and regulate God's dealings with all the individuals of the human race? It is admitted by most of the opponents of predestination, properly so called, that God foresees from eternity whatsoever comes to pass; and that since He has foreseen all events, even those which embody the eternal fate of His intelligent creatures, and thus had them present to His mind, He may be said in a certain sense to have foreordained or foreappointed them; so that the question virtually and practically comes to this— Does God predestinate men to eternal life because He foresees that they will exercise faith and repentance? or does He foresee this because He has, of His own good pleasure, chosen them to faith and repentance, and resolved to bestow these gifts upon them in order that they may be saved in the way which He has appointed? If faith and repentance are men's acts, in such a sense that they can exercise

them by their own unaided efforts, without God's agency, and can abstain from exercising them, whatever influence He may exert upon them; in other words, if the preventing and invincible grace of God be not the real source and efficient cause of all that is good in men, then the former view may be true, and election to life may rest upon the ground of faith and repentance foreseen; but if not, then the latter view must be true, and it must be certain that God has, of His own good pleasure, of His own sovereign purpose, elected some men to everlasting life, and in the mere execution of this purpose, has, in His own good time, given them, or wrought in them, faith and repentance.

It is not disputed that God usually gives men spiritual blessings—taking that expression in its widest sense—in a certain order, one being in some sense determined by what has preceded it; but the question is, whether the commencement of spiritual life wrought by God, and the whole series of spiritual blessings conferred by Him, viewed collectively and in the mass, can be really traced to any other cause or source than just this eternal purpose, founded on the counsel of His own will, to save some men, and His actually executing this purpose in time, in accordance with the provisions of the scheme which He has established for the salvation of sinners. There is really no medium between an election to life, resting as its foundation upon the faith, repentance, and holiness of individuals foreseen, —which is really no election, but a mere act of recognition, —and a choice or selection of individuals originating in the good pleasure of God, without any other cause known to, or knowable by, us, —a choice or selection followed up in due time, as its certain and necessary result, by the actual bestowal by God upon the individuals elected of all that is necessary for securing their salvation. The latter of these views, we think, it can be proved, is clearly taught in Scripture; and though it no doubt involves much that is mysterious

and inexplicable— much that may either call forth presumptuous objections, or profitably exercise men's faith and humility, —yet it certainly accords most fully with the actual phenomena of the moral and spiritual world, and it surely presents -God in His true character and real position as the rightful and omnipotent governor of the world, the arbiter of the eternal destinies of His intelligent creatures. The former view— the only one which can be taken if that of unconditional election be rejected, —besides that it is inconsistent with the statements of Scripture, which plainly supports the opposite doctrine, is liable to the fatal and unanswerable objection, that it leaves everything bearing upon the character and eternal condition of all the individuals of our race undetermined, and, indeed, uninfluenced, by their Creator and Governor, and virtually beyond His control; and degrades Him to the condition of a mere spectator, who only sees what is going on among His creatures, or foresees what is to take place without Himself determining it, or exerting any real efficiency in the production of it, and who must be guided by what He thus sees or foresees in all His dealings with them. There is really no medium between these two positions. God either really governs the world, and determines the character and destinies of His intelligent creatures; or else these creatures are practically independent of Him, the absolute regulators of their own conduct, and the omnipotent arbiters of their own destinies. And it is surely much more becoming our condition and capacities, even though there was less clear scriptural evidence upon the subject than there is, to lean to the side of maintaining fully the divine supremacy, —of relying implicitly upon the divine justice, holiness, and faithfulness, —and resolving all difficulties, which we cannot solve, into our own ignorance and incapacity; than to that of replying against God, —arraigning the principles of His moral administration, —and practically excluding Him from the government of the most

important department of the world which He has created, and ever sustains.

## **IV. Perseverance of the Saints**

Another topic of primary importance, which was treated of fully and formally by Augustine in his controversy with the Pelagians, is what is commonly called the perseverance of the saints;— or the doctrine that men who have once been really enabled to believe in Jesus Christ, and have been born again of the word of God, do never totally and finally fall away from a state of grace, but are certainly enabled to persevere, and are preserved unto eternal salvation.

This doctrine of perseverance is manifestly a necessary part of the general scheme of Christian doctrine, which Augustine did so much to expound and defend; and what is still more important, — for it is not very safe for men to place much reliance upon their own mere perception of the logical connection of doctrines in regard to divine things, —it is, we are persuaded, clearly taught in the statements of Scripture. If the doctrines to which we have already adverted are, indeed, contained in the word of God, the men of whom it is asserted that they will certainly persevere and be saved, are placed in this condition, —viz., that God has from eternity chosen them to everlasting life; and that in the execution of this purpose or decree, He has given them faith and repentance, He has united them to Christ, and renewed their natures. All this, which could be effected by no power but His own, He has done, and done for the express purpose of saving them with an eternal salvation. Of men so placed—treated by God in such a way for such a purpose— it may surely be

asserted with perfect confidence, that He will certainly enable them to persevere, and will thereby secure their eternal welfare. Had God formed no definite purpose of mercy in regard to individuals of our fallen race, we could not have been certain that any would have been saved. Were men able to convert themselves, and to prepare for heaven, in the exercise of their own natural powers and capacities, while it is possible that they might succeed, it is equally possible of any of them, apart from God's electing purpose, that they might fall off and ultimately fail. Were divine grace exerted in such away and in such a measure, that it was still in the power of any man, in the exercise of his own natural and inherent capacities, to resist it, or to remain unaffected by it, then neither God nor man could speak with anything like certainty in any case of the ultimate result; whereas the very different and opposite state of things, in regard to all these important subjects, which the word of God unfolds to us, and which we have already explained in treating of the subjects of efficacious grace and predestination, makes the final perseverance of all who are thus placed and treated, not only practicable, but ascertainable and certain.

The connection which subsists among these different doctrines, — original and total depravity; converting, efficacious, or invincible grace; eternal election, and final perseverance, —the relation in which they all stand to each other, —the full, compact, and comprehensive view which, in combination, they exhibit of the leading departments and whole substance of divine revelation, of what God has unfolded to us concerning Himself and concerning our race, concerning His plans and operations, and our capacities and destinies, —all this greatly confirms their truth and reality, as it exhibits them all as affording to each other mutual strength and support.

It is right, however, to mention, that in regard to the subject of perseverance there is a certain amount of error and apparent inconsistency to be found in Augustine's works. He held, decidedly and consistently, that all who are predestinated, or elected to everlasting life, are certainly and infallibly enabled to persevere, and do all in fact attain to salvation; but he sometimes writes, as if he thought that men who had been the subjects of converting and renewing grace might fall away and finally perish.

He held, indeed, that this falling away was of itself a conclusive proof that they had not been elected, and so far he was perfectly orthodox and consistent; but he does not seem to have been quite so certain that, though not elected, and therefore finally perishing, some men might not have been brought for a time by God's grace under the influence of sanctified principles or real holiness, — and yet totally and finally fall away. This notion was inconsistent with the general principles of his system, and is certainly not sanctioned or required by anything contained in Scripture. The Scripture, by what it tells us of the deceitfulness of the heart, and of sin, of the impossibility of men knowing with anything like absolute certainty the true state of the 'character of other', — by reserving the power of searching the heart to God alone, — and by sanctioning the principle obviously involved in the declaration of the apostle, 'They went out from us, because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us,'— affords us abundant materials for explaining or accounting for all anomalous cases, all apparent instances of apostasy. And it is not, after all, quite certain that Augustine's statements upon this subject necessarily imply more than that cases of apostasy occurred in individuals who, so far as man can judge, had fairly entered upon the path that leads to heaven, — a position which no one disputes.



If his error really was more serious than this, it is not very difficult to see what tempted him to adopt it: it was the notion which was held in a gross and utterly anti-evangelical form by many of the fathers, and from the taint of which Augustine was not altogether free, of making baptism stand in some measure both for justification and regeneration. A man who rightly understands the nature of justification as a judicial or forensic act, and the true connection both of justification and regeneration with faith in Jesus Christ, by which we are united to Him, and who along with this believes in personal election to life, will not easily fall into the error which Augustine seems in some measure to have imbibed. The man who has thoroughly clear and scriptural views of what is involved in the change that takes place, both as respects men's state and character, when they are united by faith to Christ, will not readily believe that any in whom this change has been effected by God, will be allowed to fall away and to perish, even though he should not have very clear and distinct views— which, however, Augustine had— upon the subject of personal election. Augustine's error and inconsistency, or rather perhaps his obscurity and confusion, upon this point, is thus clearly enough traceable to what has been called the sacramental principle, as implying an exaggerated sense of the necessity and efficacy of outward ordinances, —from which scarcely any of the fathers, except those who had personally associated with the apostles, are altogether free, and which still continues to be one of Satan's chief contrivances for perverting the gospel of the grace of God, and ruining the souls of men.

We may mention, as a sort of set-off to this defect or error of Augustine's, that Arminius and his immediate followers before the Synod of Dort, while rejecting the other leading doctrines of the Augustinian or Calvinistic system, did not venture at first to deny the doctrine of perseverance, but professed for a time that they had not

fully made up their mind regarding it. In the Conference at the Hague— *Collatio Hagiensis*— held in the year 1611, after the death of Arminius, the Remonstrants, or Arminians, after stating fully the provisions made in the gospel for enabling believers to grow in knowledge and in grace, proceed to say: 'Sed an illi ipsi negligentia sua, principium illud, quo sustentantur in Christo, deserere non possint, et presentem mundum iterum amplecti, a sancta doctrina ipsis semel tradita deficere, conscientiae naufragium facere, a gratia excidere; penitus ex sacra Scriptura esset expendendum, antequam illud cum plena animi tranquillitate et plerophoria docere possimus. Before the Synod of Dort in 1618, however, they had made up their mind on this question, and decidedly rejected the doctrine of perseverance. Something similar to this occurred in the case of John Wesley, whose theological views were almost wholly identical with those of Arminius. In the earlier part of his life, in 1743, he was, he says, 'inclined to believe that there is a state attainable in this life from which a man cannot finally fall.' But this doctrine he was afterwards led to renounce.

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