

Four Views on the Role of Grace in Salvation

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Pelagianism

- History
 - Pelagius was a British monk at the end of the 4th Century who was offended by the loose morals of the clergy in Rome
 - Pelagius was disturbed by Augustine's prayer in his *Confessions*: "O God, grant what thou dost command and command what thou dost desire" (X, 31, 45)
 - Pelagius maintained that God's grace assists fallen man in redemption but is not necessary to attain salvation
 - Pelagius was excommunicated in 418 AD and Pelagianism was condemned by the church in the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD

- Six "doctrines" taught by Pelagius
 - That Adam would have died even if he had not sinned
 - That the sin of Adam injured himself alone, not the human race
 - That newborn children are in the same condition as Adam was before the Fall; corollary, that infants, though unbaptized, have eternal life
 - That the whole human race does not die because of Adam's death or sin, nor will it rise again because of Christ's resurrection
 - That the Old Testament Law, as well as the New Testament Gospel, gives entrance to heaven
 - That even before the coming of Christ there were men who were entirely without sin

- The keystone of Pelagianism is the idea of man's unconditional free will and his moral responsibility
 - In creating man God did not subject him, like other creatures, to the law of nature but gave him the unique privilege of accomplishing the divine will by his own choice
 - This possibility of freely choosing the good entails the possibility of choosing evil
 - According to Pelagius there are three features in human action: power (*posse*), will (*velle*), and the realization (*esse*); the first comes exclusively from God; the other two belong to man. Thus, as man acts, he merits praise or blame

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- The rest of Pelagianism flows from this central thought of freedom
 - First, it rejects the idea that man's will has any intrinsic bias in favor of wrongdoing as a result of the fall
 - Since each soul is created immediately by God, as Pelagius believed, then it cannot come into the world soiled by original sin transmitted from Adam
 - Before a person begins exercising his will, "there is only in him what God has created"
 - Second, Pelagius considers grace purely an external aid provided by God
 - He leaves no room for any special interior action of God upon the soul
 - By "grace" Pelagius really means free will itself or the revelation of God's law through reason, instructing us in what we should do and holding out to us eternal sanctions
 - Since this revelation has become obscured through evil customs, grace now includes the law of Moses and the teaching and example of Christ
- This view, which holds that fallen man is virtuous and able to earn salvation by doing good works, has always been considered heretical by the church because it rejects the necessity of faith and total dependence on Christ in salvation; though heretical, it has reappeared this century in many liberal churches

Semi-Pelagianism

- History
 - Semi-Pelagianism arose soon after Pelagianism as an attempt to reach a middle ground between the “extreme” views of Pelagius and Augustine
 - In 420-430, some monks in southern Gaul, led by Abbot John Cassian of St. Victor monastery in Marseilles joined in the controversy
 - They agreed with the condemnation of Pelagianism, but felt that Augustine was too severe in the assertion of the total bondage of the will, of the priority and irresistibility of grace, and of rigid predestination
 - Augustine fought against this new formulation, but died on August 29, 430
 - The Synod of Orange (529 AD) condemned semi-Pelagianism, but the teachings of Augustine were not fully accepted, and the principles of semi-Pelagianism lived on

- Teaching of Cassian and his associates
 - They agreed with Augustine as to the seriousness of sin, yet they regarded his doctrine of predestination as new, therefore in conflict with tradition and dangerous because it makes all human efforts superfluous
 - In opposition to Augustinianism, Cassian taught that though a sickness is inherited through Adam's sin, human free will has not been entirely obliterated
 - Man cannot be saved apart from God's grace; however, fallen man must cooperate and assent to God's grace before he will be saved; in other words, divine grace and human free will must work together in salvation
 - Inherent in this view is the belief that man, prior to any work of regeneration in the soul by God, has the power to accept and embrace God's grace
 - Salvation for semi-Pelagians is man's decision, not God's will
 - Semi-Pelagians would argue that the person who comes to faith cannot do so without God's grace, but that grace is not the determining factor in a person's coming to faith
 - The final distinction between believer and unbeliever is something in the believer
 - In opposition to the stark predestinarianism of Augustine, Cassian held to the doctrine of God's universal will to save, and that predestination is simply divine foreknowledge

Arminianism

- History
 - Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch pastor and theologian in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, a student of Theodore Beza, the successor of John Calvin
 - Arminius, who died in 1609, challenged Calvinist (Augustinian) theology
 - Arminius' followers, called Remonstrants, crafted a document called the "Five Articles of Remonstrance" (1610) outlining their views
 - The Prince of Nassau convened a council at Dordrecht called the Synod of Dort (1618) to refute the views of the Arminians
 - The Synod of Dort condemned Arminius and his followers as heretics, publishing a document with the five points of Calvinism to refute the five articles of remonstrance
- Arminianism is very similar, but not identical to semi-Pelagianism
 - While not denying the necessity of Grace for salvation, semi-Pelagianism maintains that the first steps towards the Christian life are ordinarily taken by the human will and that grace supervened only later
 - In contrast to semi-Pelagianism, Arminianism teaches the first steps of grace are taken by God
- Main Teachings of Arminius
 - **Depravity is (almost) total:** Arminius states "In this fallen state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost; and its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace"
 - **Atonement is intended for all:** Jesus' death was for all people, Jesus draws all people to Himself, and all people have opportunity for salvation through faith
 - **Jesus' death satisfies God's justice:** The penalty for the sins of the elect is paid in full through Jesus' work on the cross; thus Christ's atonement is intended for all, but requires faith to be effected
 - **Grace is resistible:** God takes initiative in the salvation process and His grace comes to all people; this grace (often called prevenient or pre-regenerating grace) acts on all people to convict them of the Gospel, draw them strongly towards salvation, and enable the possibility of sincere faith
 - **Man has free will to respond or resist:** Free will is limited by God's sovereignty, but God sovereignly allows all men the choice to accept the Gospel of Jesus through faith, simultaneously allowing all men to resist
 - **Election is conditional:** God alone determines who will be saved and his determination is that all who believe Jesus through faith will be justified
 - **God predestines the elect to a glorious future:** Predestination is not the predetermination of who will believe, but rather the predetermination of the believer's future inheritance
 - **Eternal security is also conditional:** All believers have full assurance of salvation with the condition that they remain in Christ; faith and perseverance are thus conditioned

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Augustinianism (Calvinism)

- History
 - Augustine (354-430) was the bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa
 - He is considered the greatest theologian of the first 1000 years of the church
 - His most famous works are *The Confessions* and *The City of God*
 - He fought against Manicheanism, Pelagianism, and Donatism
 - John Calvin (1509-1564) was a French Protestant and leader of the Reformation in Geneva
 - He is the father of “Calvinism” or Reformed Theology
 - His seminal work is *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
 - He is perhaps the greatest theologian of the second 1000 years of the church
- Augustinian/Calvinistic View of Salvation
 - Man is totally dependent upon the grace of God even for his initial response to the Gospel
 - The determining factor of faith is God's grace, not man's decision
 - If God has determined that a person should come to faith, God will give that person the grace to do so
 - That person still has the responsibility to put his faith in Christ, but God gives him the ability to make that decision
 - If two people hear the Gospel and one comes to faith, it is not because that person had some innate ability to have faith, but it is because God effectually called that person to faith; whereas, He did not give the other person such faith
 - According to Augustinianism, the man who is regenerated by God's grace will come to faith (see Eph. 2:8)
- “Five Points of Calvinism”
 - **Total Depravity** (Total Inability)
 - As a consequence of the fall of humanity into sin, every person born into the world is enslaved to the service of sin
 - People are not by nature inclined to love God with their whole heart, mind, or strength, but rather all are inclined to serve their own interests over those of their neighbor and to reject the rule of God
 - Thus, all people by their own faculties are morally unable to choose to follow God and be saved because they are unwilling to do so out of the necessity of their own natures
 - **Unconditional Election**
 - God choice from eternity of those whom He will bring to Himself is not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, it is unconditionally grounded in God's mercy alone

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- **Limited Atonement** (Particular Redemption, Definite Atonement)
 - Jesus' substitutionary atonement was definite and certain in its design and accomplishment
 - The doctrine is driven by the concept of the sovereignty of God in salvation and the nature of the atonement
 - The atonement is a penal substitution (that is, Jesus was punished in the place of sinners), and since it would be unjust for God to pay the penalty for some people's sins and then still condemn them for those sins, all those whose sins were atoned for must necessarily be saved
 - Moreover, since God knows precisely who the elect are and since only the elect will be saved, Christ atonement is not for sins in general, but only for those of the elect
- **Irresistible Grace** (Efficacious Grace)
 - The saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom He has determined to save (that is, the elect) and, in God's timing, overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith
 - When God sovereignly purposes to save someone, that individual certainly will be saved
- **Perseverance of the Saints** (Preservation of the Saints)
 - Since God is sovereign and His will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else, those whom God has called into communion with himself will continue in faith until the end
 - Those who apparently fall away either never had true faith to begin with or will return