

Bible Study # 15

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“Faith Alone” Controversy

Heresies Within the Early Church

- Judaizers – one had to be a Jew to be a Christian
- Gnostics – secret knowledge
- Dualism – two gods: one good, one bad
- Montanism – the end of the world is imminent
- Manicheism – two equal gods run everything
- Arianism – Jesus was not divine
- Apollinarianism – Jesus had an incomplete human nature
- Nestorianism – Mary was not the mother of God

Heresies Within the Early Church(Cont)

- Donatism – the validity of the sacraments depends on the holiness of the minister of the sacrament
- **Pelagianism** – salvation could be achieved solely by upright moral behavior which was possible for every human being, even without grace
- **Semi-Pelagianism** – human nature had a certain claim on the grace of coming to believe and the grace of final perseverance (thus these graces were not entirely gratuitous, but rather in a sense “owed” by God to man)

Time Frame and Players

- Edict of Milan (313) Christians freed from persecution
- St. Augustine (354-430) – Great Theologian
- Pelagius (354-418) Father of Pelagianism
- John Cassian (360-435) Father of Semi- Pelagianism
- St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 –1274) Great Theologian
- **John Wycliffe (1331-1384)** Declared heretic
- **John Hus (1369-1415)** Declared heretic
- **Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)** Declared heretic
 - Luther's Revolt (1517-1521)
 - Luther completes translating the Bible into German (1534)

Definitions

- **Righteousness:**
 - The quality of being **morally right or justified**
 - The state of moral **perfection** required by God **to enter heaven**
 - In OT it was **one who obeyed the Torah** (Phil 3:6)
- **Justification:**
 - To **set something right**, or to declare **righteous**
 - To be made righteous, just, **holy and acceptable to God** – from a state of sin to a state of grace
- **Grace** – The **free gift of God** (Greek – favor or gift) which requires a repentant faith, sorrow for sin, a sincere desire for change
- **Repentant Faith** – A **faith that leads to justification** and includes hope in God's mercy
 - Comes via actual grace which enables us to turn in contrition toward God's mercy – it is the sacramental aspect of justification

Definitions (Cont)

- **Justifying Faith** - According to Paul:
 - That **faith** of the convert **that leads to Baptism**
 - How a man is brought **from sin to salvation**
- **Works of the Law**— According to Paul
 - The Mosaic Law (Torah) and circumcision
 - No one can earn or merit the free gift of **grace by obedience to the Torah**
 - **None of the tenants of the Torah**, apart from the grace of Christ, **can bring about justification** of the sinner

Definitions (Cont)

- **Justification** - According to Paul
 - One is initially justified in Christ at the critical moment when God makes the believer righteous by an infusion of his Spirit and life

Pelagius and Pelagianism

- Pelagius (354-418)
 - British monk
 - Bible teacher and commentator in Rome
 - Took exception to some of St. Augustine's teachings
 - Blamed them for lax moral climate in Roman Christians
 - Fled to N. Africa during the Goths attack on Rome (410)
 - Had attracted several disciples

Pelagius and Pelagianism (Cont)

- North African bishop condemned Pelagius
- In 412 he went to Palestine where the Eastern clergy was more sympathetic
- Died in Egypt in 418
- His teachings were condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 (along with Nestorian)

Teachings of Pelagius

- Denied original sin as inherited from Adam
 - Each person is born as a new free agent with the same powers of choice and responsibility as Adam
- Denied original guilt received from Adam's sin
 - Called into question the necessity for infant baptism since there was nothing an infant needed to be baptized for
- Affirmed the ability of men to be free from sin
 - Denied the necessity of God's working in order to accomplish freedom from sin
 - The power is within each of us, even if God helps

St Augustine's Response

- After presenting a defense against Donatism, St. Augustine mounted a 20 year attack on the errors of Pelagius in which
 - He concentrated on the truth of Adam's Fall and its consequences, and the transmission of sin to his descendants
 - Saw that each human inherits the guilt of sin from his parents, and it all comes from Adam
 - He believed that as Adam led his seed into condemnation and death, so Christ died for his people and imparted righteousness to them

St Augustine's Response

- Discussed in depth the corruption of man's nature, and the consequent lack of freedom of the will to choose God, exercise faith, or generally perform any act that moves towards restoration to God
- Although free to act, man still makes his choices which are determined by his corrupt nature and his inability to choose God
- Concluded with the acceptance of the doctrine of the "free grace of God"
 - God must save freely and sovereignly, since we are unable to choose him
 - God's grace grants everything, so election cannot be based on foreseen future merits

St Augustine's Response

- Even faith itself is the gift of God to his elect
- God's grace and predestination cannot be separated
- None of the elect could finally fall away, but that God would bring all his people to himself

St Augustine's Response (Cont)

- Augustine never stopped believing in
 - The necessity of baptism for salvation and baptism for infants is not to be denied
 - The confusion of justification with sanctification
 - Justification was the infusion of righteousness rather than the legal declaration of a sinner's righteous state before God
- A general high view of the institutional Church

Semi-Pelagianism

- John Cassian developed a middle view between Pelagius and Augustine which said that:
 - Man's nature and will was sick, but not dead, in sin
 - Man was able to choose God
 - God gives cooperating grace to enable a person to complete the process of becoming a Christian (thus, faith is not truly a gift from God)
 - Man has the freedom to resist the grace of God (thus his grace is not irresistible)
 - God wills all men to be saved

St. Augustine's Response to Semi-Pelagianism

- From the beginning of faith, the first tiny steps of faith, even the thinking and willing to believe are “gifts from God”
- Perseverance, like the beginning of faith, is a gift from God and is granted infallibly to the elect

Conclusion to these Heresies

The **Council of Orange** condemned semi-Pelagianism
Luther revived the doctrines of St. Augustin but
Lutheranism became more-or-less Semi-Pelagianism

John Wycliffe (1331-1384)

- An English scholastic philosopher, theologian, Biblical translator, reformer, and seminary professor at Oxford
- Proposed three doctrines that were recognized as subversive
 - The private interpretation of the Bible as the best guide for a moral life as opposed to the Church's emphasis on good works and reception of the Sacrament as important to salvation
 - Attacked the privileged status of the clergy and luxury and pomp of local parishes and their ceremonies

John Wycliffe (1331-1384)

- Advocated for translation of the Bible into the vernacular
- Called the Pope “an abiding heretic”
- Died of a stroke 1384
- Condemned as a heretic at the Council of Constance (1414-1418)

John Wycliffe (1331-1384)

- His followers (known as Lollards) advocated his views on Predestination, Iconoclasm, and Caesaropapism, (combining the power of secular government with the religious power) and attacked the Sacraments, Requiem Masses, Transubstantiation, monasticism, and the existence of the Papacy

John Hus (1369-1415)

- Czech priest, philosopher, early Christian reformer and Master at Charles University in Prague
- After John Wycliffe, Hus is considered the first Church reformer
- For 12 years he fought corruption in the Church
 - He held that the Pope was the vicar of Christ but not as an article of faith
 - The church was built on personal faith as demonstrated by St. Peter's confession
 - The Pope had no universal jurisdiction over the Church

John Hus (1369-1415)

- All necessary truths of Christianity are found in Scripture
- His positions contained most of the essential elements of the Protestant revolt that would come a century later
- In 1414 he was arrested and accused of
 - Denying transubstantiation
 - Declared that the Church should not possess property
 - A priest cannot be forbidden to preach by any Church authority
- Was declared a heretic at the Council of Constance and ordered to repudiate these errors
 - He refused to recant and was burned at the stake

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546)

- Augustinian Priest
- Professor of moral philosophy
- Doctor of theology
- Bible Scholar who lectured extensively on the Bible
- Excommunicated by the Pope Leo X as a Heretic in 1520
- Condemned as an outlaw by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1521