

THE FLAW OF THE SINNER'S PRAYER IN THE CONTEXT OF ORIGINAL SIN

Please note that I have taken the initiative to edit or revise articles authored by the late Michael Desario. My aim is to clarify and simplify certain sections for the benefit of readers, ensuring that the content is more easily understandable.

Virtually every corner of the evangelical Christian community adheres to the belief that the pathway to forgiveness of sins and salvation lies in the act of praying a straightforward prayer to God, wherein one acknowledges their sinfulness and welcomes Jesus as their personal Savior. This conviction is so pervasive that contemporary churches gauge their achievements or shortcomings by the number of individuals they can convince to utter this prayer.

When a multitude responds to the invitation, they are declared as having attained salvation and forgiveness for their sins. They are subsequently welcomed into the church and instructed that God will eventually transform them, enabling them to lead a more righteous life than before. Even though sin continues to manifest itself (encompassing all forms such as fornication, molestation, adultery, and drunkenness), it gradually diminishes over time as individuals learn to manage their sinful behavior through the application of His grace.

In the Bible, the Procedure is simply: Repentance and Faith....Repentance Proven by Deeds and Faith Working by Love. But no one seems to care. They gauge everything off the formula and even those who tend to use the correct terminology (mentioning repentance and faith) still hold that Real Salvation can be had using the formals. (Otherwise, they would abandon them as false!)

This perspective also extends to their interpretation of revival. They gauge success by the size of the response, so anything that fills the platform with people is seen as a manifestation of God's work. Whether it involves music, worship teams, motivational speakers, or pure emotional fervor, it is perceived as God's Holy Spirit mobilizing the congregation. In this context, there's a noticeable absence of genuine sorrow for sin or individuals earnestly crying out to God for His mercy. Instead, the tears are often prompted by a gentle and persuasive message that reassures them of God's love and forgiveness, even in the face of their continued vile hearts.

Hence, after these gatherings, no one leaves with the intention of acknowledging and rectifying their wrongdoing or making amends for their sins. There's a lack of enthusiasm for doing what is right through faith, guided by love, to purify the heart. Success in the revival is measured by whether everyone prayed the prayer and left with a warm and comforting feeling about encountering God. The evangelist, elevated by the day's festivities, departs with the conviction that God has blessed the message and is active among the attendees. As a result, church attendance grows.

Accordingly, the System grinds on. Getting further and further from the Biblical standards. A new version of the old formula comes along once or twice a year, endorsed by the celebrity preachers of the day, and everyone jumps on board. The Christian market is flooded with new books, DVDs, tapes,

tracts and all kinds of other materials to inspire the latest resurgence of church membership and a flurry of activity. The local pastors are excited to introduce the fresh concepts into their churches and get a reaction from the people. But the new format is just another version of the old one. All are based on instantaneous salvation without a REAL Repentance and apart from Genuine faith.

Once more, there appears to be a collective indifference and a lack of effort in restoring biblical purity. While many hold their own opinions and some acknowledge the pressing issue that something is seriously amiss with the prevailing conversion standards in the churches, no significant changes occur, and the established formulas persist. It's worth noting that the concept of salvation has become disconnected from the idea of individuals genuinely turning away from sin.

The current system is undeniably a tangle of perplexing doctrines, human perspectives, and religious discourse, evident to even the most casual observer. However, has anyone ever earnestly contemplated the origins of these complexities and how we arrived at this perplexing situation? It is undoubtedly clear that these developments do not find their roots in the teachings of the Bible. Even an atheist reading the initial chapters of the Book of Acts would discern that there is no alignment between what transpires in today's churches and the biblical narrative.

However, how did we transition from the teachings of Christ such as "Repent, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus," "Endure to the end," "Count the cost," and "Strive to enter the narrow gate" to the simplified notion of "Confess your sinfulness and receive Jesus as your savior"? It's important to note that this latter formulation is not found anywhere in the pages of Scripture. Who decided to elevate this version of the Gospel, while dismissing the teachings directly quoted by Christ Himself? Furthermore, when did this shift occur, and what factors have led to the universal acceptance of this non-biblical approach, even in the face of potential eternal judgment, all built on such a fragile foundation?

Significant consequences hinge on addressing these questions with integrity and impartiality. The integrity of entire creeds, confessions, doctrinal statements, and the orthodoxy of vast denominations is in the balance. Acknowledging error in this context may feel like an all-encompassing surrender during wartime. The very essence of their existence rests upon these principles. History has witnessed individuals who have willingly made great sacrifices for causes of lesser magnitude than the ones we are urging them to scrutinize through these straightforward inquiries.

This conversation tends to bewilder many churchgoers because it delves into a realm so entrenched in ancient history that it becomes challenging to pinpoint a starting point. The majority are content with the belief that they maintain a connection to the Apostles and that their specific church denomination traces its origins back to Apostolic teachings. However, historical records indicate that virtually every evangelical denomination came into existence between the 1500s and 1800s, and none of them can claim direct roots in Apostolic Christianity, not even the highly esteemed Catholic Church.

So, why do the vast majority of people hold a contrary belief? These are straightforward historical truths that can be readily confirmed through research. They aren't subject to individual opinions or personal interpretations. However, to truly comprehend how these historical facts have shaped our

current state, it's essential to step outside the confines of one's beloved denominational affiliations and doctrinal foundations. Without doing so, it becomes nearly impossible to see beyond the debates among theologians and scholars.

Keep in mind that, regardless of your approach, there will always be opposing viewpoints in the discussion. It's essential to also consider who holds these perspectives and what motivates them. Trying to examine something objectively becomes exceedingly challenging when your mind is already set on a specific outcome. If you have strayed from the foundational principles of repentance and faith in their unadulterated form, as originally conveyed by Christ and the Apostles, there may be little of substantial value left in your preaching of the Gospel. We must start from this point or not at all; to engage in argumentation would amount to a betrayal of our faith.

Origins:

To set a foundational point to commence, let's establish a fundamental truth that we can all concur upon, if possible. During the early Apostolic era of the Christian Church, the preaching and the doctrine were untainted and truthful. They were passed down from Christ Himself and the Holy Prophets, then entrusted to a chosen group of individuals who documented a significant portion of what we now recognize as our New Testament Scripture. Unless we can collectively acknowledge that Christianity originated with the core principles of repentance, faith, and purity, our dialogue holds little value.

It's essential to grasp that the purpose of this article is not to provide an exhaustive account of Church history. While it will touch upon various historical facts, dates, and figures, it will do so solely in the context of our primary focus: the preaching of repentance and faith. I aim to demonstrate how the decline of this message in its purest form is the primary factor contributing to the significant departure from the faith we have witnessed throughout the centuries. By recognizing how deeply rooted this issue is in ancient times and its far-reaching impact on contemporary Gospel preaching, you may gain the ability to discern the distinction between the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error within your own congregations.

The directives were straightforward: venture into every corner of the world, proclaiming the message of repentance and faith, and baptizing in the name of Jesus! Right from the start, the HEART of the message revolved around TURNING away from sin toward God, experiencing a profound internal purification, and EMBRACING the guidance of the Master. It was a message characterized by its simplicity and power, undeniably originating from the divine.

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Luke 24:46-48

Nevertheless, following the death of the Apostles and their immediate followers, this Message became muddled, entangled with a blend of pagan philosophy, human viewpoints, and ceaseless speculations. What originally emerged in the first few decades of the first century AD, spreading rapidly throughout the ancient world and effecting a transformation from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God, gradually waned and eventually faded around 417 AD in Rome. During this period, a contentious

dispute emerged between a British convert named Pelagius and a Roman Catholic bishop named Augustine, centered on the topics of free will and infant baptism.

Pelagius was acutely aware of the Pagan Doctrine of the Manicheans, with their leader called Mani, which held that human nature was so corrupted that one's will had no capacity to obey God's commands. On the other hand, Augustine, who had embraced Christianity after being influenced by a blend of Gnostic and Manichean teachings (Manicheanism being a form of Gnosticism), did so around 386 AD. This conversion occurred shortly after Roman Emperor Theodosius I ordered the execution of all Manicheans and just before he declared Christianity as the sole recognized religion of the Roman Empire. Consequently, Augustine's conversion was more a matter of necessity than a result of a genuine conviction of truth.

Augustine emerged as a significant figure in ancient Rome, boasting expertise in Latin literature and possessing knowledge of both Pagan beliefs and practices. Born to a Roman Pagan father and a Catholic mother, he received an education steeped in Pagan philosophy, studying the works of Cicero and Plato in his youth. His life was marked by a proclivity for sexual indulgence, which evolved into a lifelong obsession with lust. In his early twenties, he pursued a career in ancient philosophies while teaching grammar.

In 383, Augustine relocated to Rome, where he mingled with what he considered the most brilliant minds of his era. Through his Manichean associates, he secured the esteemed position of a rhetoric professor in Milan when he reached the age of thirty.

Despite his political connections and scholarly reputation, Augustine continued to dabble in Pagan philosophies and engage in relationships with women as opportunities presented themselves. While his supposed conversion to Christianity is highly celebrated in Christian literature, it was primarily a matter of convenience during a period of political turmoil in the Roman Empire. His subsequent influence played a significant role in the distortion of Bible Doctrine, a trend that persists to the present day.

The Early Church consisted of a network of home-based congregations established by traveling evangelists in the ancient world, lasting until approximately 325 AD. When the New Testament mentions the Church in places like Corinth or Rome, it is referring to these house churches (Acts 2:46, Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 15:19, Col 4:15, Phil 1:2). Persecution was widespread under various Roman Emperors from Nero to Domitian, spanning from 54 to 96 AD. By the end of the first century, all the Apostles had passed away, leaving the churches in the care of their immediate disciples.

According to the writings of these disciples, such as Polycarp, Clement, Ignatius, Barnabas, and others, they diligently preserved the message of repentance and faith, vigorously opposing the influx of false doctrines from the Roman Empire. However, the forces of corruption actively sought to hinder their progress. As the second century unfolded, most of these disciples either met their demise or disappeared from the scene. Rome gradually asserted itself as the center of religious influence, and bishops began vying for power.

In 189 AD, an African bishop named Victor assumed ecclesiastical authority and became the bishop of Rome. He immediately began diverging from Apostolic teachings. One of his deviations pertained to

the controversy surrounding the observance of Easter. While the churches followed the Gospel of John, celebrating Easter on the 14th of the Jewish month of Nisan (coinciding with the Jewish Passover), Victor insisted on shifting it to the following week, aligned with the Roman calendar. The dispute escalated to the point where Victor excommunicated anyone adhering to the teachings of the Apostle John and his disciple Polycarp. Additionally, he transitioned the reading of the Mass in Roman Churches from Greek to Latin and authored theological works in Latin. He retained power until 199 AD, solidifying a Pope-like authority in Rome.

Thus, the spirit of error firmly rooted itself in the early church well into the second century AD. The debates shifted the focus away from repentance and faith and revolved around interpretations, manuscripts, and speculative doctrines concerning God. During this period, the second generation of Pre-Nicene fathers introduced numerous heresies into the church. The disputes persisted as the church increasingly resembled ecclesiastical hierarchies led by individuals hungry for power and influence, rather than a dynamic evangelistic movement preaching Christ to the lost world (source: "The Early Church" by Henry Chadwick).

Setting the Stage:

The purported conversion of Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity in the early 3rd Century represents a significant turning point in the history of the Church. Constantine, the son of Constantius Chlorus, a former high-ranking military figure in Rome who became the Junior Emperor of the Western empire in 293 under Diocletian, the Senior Emperor, played a crucial role in shaping the events of his time. As a member of the aristocracy and educated in classical philosophies, Constantine received a fine Roman education. He embarked on a military career early on and earned a stellar reputation as a soldier in the Roman army. During his time in the Roman courts, he witnessed the Great Persecution against Christians that erupted in 303 under Diocletian.

In 306, Constantine's father fell ill and passed away abruptly, appointing Constantine as his successor, contrary to Diocletian's wishes. Despite initial opposition, Constantine consolidated his power in the West and expanded the empire's borders in Britain, Gaul, and Germania. He also launched construction projects and issued more tolerant decrees toward Christians. Constantine continued his military campaigns in the West, while political rivals attempted to undermine his authority.

The turning point came in 312 when Constantine faced a rebellion led by his rival Maxentius, who attacked Constantine's weakened eastern flank due to troop deployments along the Rhine to counter the Franks. Unable to withdraw his main army from the Rhine, Constantine gathered his praetorian and Imperial Horse Guard, along with other troops, and marched them across the Alps into Italy to confront Maxentius's larger force. Constantine outsmarted Maxentius's heavy cavalry, leading them into a trap and defeating them. He then swiftly advanced through Northern Italy, culminating in the Battle of Milvian Bridge.

Presuming with arrogance that Constantine's army was no match for his larger forces, Maxentius boldly left the safety of his fortifications in Rome and confronted them in the field. According to the legend, Constantine beseeched a deity for a sign that would ensure victory over the enemy. Allegedly, he instructed his soldiers to adorn their shields with the symbol of the Labarum, a Greek emblem representing Christ. Shortly before the battle, they purportedly witnessed a radiant cross in the sky,

accompanied by the words, 'In this Sign you will Conquer.' Historical accounts affirm that Constantine emerged victorious in this pivotal battle, strengthening his rule and attributing his triumph to the Christian God. Notably, it's worth mentioning that Constantine, who had previously been a devotee of the sun god Sol invictus, may have prayed to this deity. He reported seeing a cross-like shape above the sun and hearing the words, "By this, conquer." The Labarum was a military standard bearing the initials of Jesus Christ. It's also noteworthy that, in Constantine's perception, the new Christian God fused with Sol invictus into a single deity, a common syncretic concept in Roman belief, given that Sol himself was a composite deity formed from various sun gods. (Source: Online Wikipedia)

How does all of this relate to Repentance and faith? It is paramount when you consider that, during this juncture in Church history, Christianity transitioned from its clandestine origins to the grandeur of Rome's cathedrals, assuming a priestly semblance of newfound authority. Constantine's initiatives commenced promptly with the Edict of Milan in 313, putting an end to all persecutions and restoring confiscated property to Christians. Subsequently, he embarked on ambitious construction endeavors, including the renowned Church of the Holy.

He also played an active role in what he perceived as combating heresy, a path that swiftly led to the notable Council of Nicaea in 325. This gathering, which saw the participation of more than 220 Bishops, primarily of Greek origin, commenced in May of 325 and extended into June. This event marked the initial stages of the decline in the prominence of the preaching of pure Repentance and faith within what was taking shape as the ecclesiastical SYSTEM.

The Council addressed a range of issues, including the Arian question, an ancient heresy, as well as matters related to the celebration of the Passover, the Meletian schism (another heresy), and the nature of the Father and Son, which constituted an early discussion of the concept of the Trinity (a topic closely linked to the Arian question). Additionally, the Council deliberated on the matter of baptisms administered by heretics and during times of persecution. This involved questions about whether individuals who had denied Jesus during periods of persecution should be allowed to maintain positions of authority in the church, and whether baptisms performed by them or by heretics should be considered valid or necessitate repetition. The Council ultimately adopted a Creed and implemented measures governing the establishment of authority within the churches.

Nothing they deliberated or conversed about bore any relevance to redirecting the focus of the Gospel toward the Message of Repentance and faith. The Creed primarily outlined their understanding of God, while their decrees centered on matters of ordination, Holy Communion, and the conduct of Mass readings. Consequently, the Catholic church was officially established, steadily accruing more authority over the Empire over time. In 337, Constantine's demise left a power vacuum among his surviving offspring, who subsequently engaged in a ruthless struggle for supremacy, mirroring their father's actions. Constantine had, in 326, executed his legitimate heir, Crispus, purportedly for his alleged immorality, though other motives may have factored in. The influence of Constantine on Church history cannot be downplayed, as it paved the way for the demise of the Gospel Message as preached by the Apostles, by instituting a System capable of quashing any opposition to its dominion.

The Turning Point:

In the year 354, Augustine came into the world. By this time, the Christian System had firmly taken root in Rome, complete with Bishops and a Pope who wielded substantial influence and authority over the churches. Augustine found himself in an ideal position of power, from which he could profoundly propagate his interpretation of Christian Doctrine. From 413 to 427, he penned an extensive apologia known as the 'City of God,' wherein he advocated for the concept of a just war, the idea of the church as a militant force on Earth, and the dual nature of humanity. Drawing upon his Manichean background, he perceived human nature as inherently corrupt while regarding the soul as inherently pure. Consequently, he posited an ongoing struggle between good and evil, darkness and light. This formed the foundation of his doctrine of original sin, asserting that Adam's transgression tainted human nature, rendering it incapable of obedience to God.

Here is a passage from his confessions:

"I still held the belief that we are not the ones committing sins, but rather some other entity within us. I took solace in the notion that I bore no guilt and, when I erred, I avoided admitting it... I chose to exonerate myself and point fingers at this enigmatic presence residing within me, though not a part of me. In reality, it was all a reflection of my own self, and my own irreverence had set me against myself. My transgression became even more intractable because I failed to recognize my own sinful nature."
(Confessions, Book V, Section 10)

Nonetheless, Augustine faced a significant challenge in the form of a devout believer hailing from Britain, named Pelagius. Pelagius was acutely attuned to the impact of Manicheanism on Christian doctrine, particularly in relation to the nature of sin.

Pelagius held the belief, in alignment with the early Apostles and their followers, that humans are born innocent, possessing complete freedom to choose between right and wrong. During his travels to Rome, he became troubled upon hearing Augustine's doctrine, which suggested that although God commanded obedience, He must also bestow upon humans the capability to obey! Witnessing the laxity among professed Christians within the Empire, Pelagius was profoundly troubled by the notion that such teachings might be providing people with a justification for their sinful actions.

First and foremost, Augustine's inability to read Greek meant that he had to depend on Jerome's Latin translations. Jerome, a Roman theologian known for his aggressive critiques of adversaries, provided the Latin versions. These translations served as the foundation for the Latin Vulgate, which remained the Bible of the Catholic Church for approximately 1500 years until the King James Version in English was produced in 1611 (which continued to be used until the 20th century). As a result, much of Augustine's comprehension of the Scriptures was shaped by this Latin influence and writings that proposed the idea that the Apostle Paul, in Romans 5, was conveying the concept of the transmission of sin, with Adam's sin being passed down from parents to children.

This deeply perturbed Pelagius. In his commentary on Romans, he argued against the notion that Paul was teaching the hereditary transmission of sin passed down from Adam through the reproductive process. Instead, Pelagius contended that sin was a deliberate choice, and once made, it corrupted one's desires, leading to further wrongdoing. He viewed the doctrine of original sin as a problematic concession to the Manicheans, as it introduced the idea that infants were born inherently corrupt and

required baptism for salvation. While Pelagius did acknowledge that humans were born with a need for redemption, he firmly affirmed their capacity to obey God and repent of their sins.

To this day, Pelagius is often mischaracterized by his critics as denying the necessity of God's grace, suggesting that humans can save themselves through obedience to God. However, it is crucial to emphasize that he never claimed that humans could "save themselves" entirely. Rather, he asserted that humans possessed the full capability to obey God and abstain from sin. He also maintained that grace, as described in Titus 2:11-14, was divine assistance from God, enabling individuals to lead a godly life in Christ and exercise self-control in the present age.

Pelagius said:

“God Justifies by faith apart from works of the law. But in this the Apostle is speaking of circumcision and Jewish ritual, not exempting man from the Works of Righteousness whereby his faith is made perfect!” (James 2:22-24) (Pelagius Commentary on Romans, Theodore Debruyn)

For Pelagius, salvation required both belief and action, with a strong emphasis on human effort rather than relying on God to act on one's behalf. Augustine, on the other hand, had already asserted in his theology that due to humanity's inherent corrupt nature, individuals could not obey on their own. This marked the beginning of a controversy that would profoundly influence the course of Christian doctrine through modern times. The year 412 witnessed a swift development when one of Pelagius' followers, Celestius, faced formal censure at a synod in Carthage.

Nevertheless, Pelagian teachings continued to maintain their influence through published writings circulating within the Empire, stirring debate among proponents of Augustine's theology. In response, Augustine published his own writings and even composed a "polite" letter to Pelagius. However, the debate continued to intensify. When Pelagius openly criticized Jerome's commentary on Ephesians, the tide began to turn against him. He faced increasingly vehement attacks from Jerome and his disciples, who asserted across the region that Pelagius denied the concept of original sin and the necessity of God's grace for humanity.

Pelagius was not interested in fostering a bitter controversy; his primary concern was to preach the truth and promote a life of holiness in Christ. In an attempt to resolve the disputes, he voluntarily appeared before two Synods, one in Jerusalem and another in Palestine, and received declarations of orthodoxy from both of them. However, Augustine was not satisfied with this outcome; he aimed to silence Pelagius' teachings definitively. Consequently, he convened his own councils, condemned Pelagius, gained the support of African Bishops, and presented the matter to Pope Innocent in Rome. The Pope, unless they renounced their doctrines, excommunicated Pelagius and his disciples. (Pelagius was not allowed to confront either of these councils or address the charges against him.)

Unfortunately, Pope Innocent passed away shortly after this incident, and he was succeeded by Pope Zosimus. In response, Celestius decided to bring the matter before the new Pope and defend Pelagius's teachings. He assured the Pope that they indeed upheld infant baptism but made it clear that they believed in the freedom and independence of human will, capable of obeying God. Celestius left a book with the new Pope explaining the concept of free will and humanity's responsibility to repent. This book greatly impressed the Pope, as did the high moral standards of the followers of Pelagius. He even

addressed the African Bishops, telling them that they had reacted based on biased accounts of Pelagius. However, the African Bishops vehemently opposed this stance and attempted to pressure the Pope to take a stronger stance against Pelagius.

Augustine then utilized his connections to engage the Emperor directly in the conflict, pressuring the Pope. An Imperial decree was officially issued in Rome in April of 418, denouncing Pelagius' teachings as a threat to peace. As the Emperor's influence grew, the Pope found himself compelled to take action and issued his own formal condemnation of Pelagius. Subsequently, Pelagius and his followers fled from Rome to the East and eventually disappeared from the historical record in a mysterious manner, along with their teachings.

Augustine emerged victorious in this struggle, effectively silencing opposition and paving the way for the Catholic Church, tainted by corruption, to dictate orthodoxy for the next 1000 years. At this juncture in history (418 AD), the Message of Repentance and faith had been officially rendered null and void by Augustine's doctrines of Original sin, Election, Predestination, and his conception of God. It is undeniably evident that these doctrines had their roots in his earlier pagan teachings. History demonstrates that Augustine's conversion to Christianity was more of a pragmatic necessity, as he never truly abandoned his prior pagan ideals. He was willing to employ any means to defeat and silence his adversaries, even advocating for just war, which ultimately played a role in leading the Catholic Church into the disastrous Crusades and the brutality of the Inquisitions.

A misguided perception of God and a distorted comprehension of salvation by faith make authentic redemption unattainable. When individuals are led to Christ while still entrenched in their sins, and they lack the capacity for heartfelt obedience, repentance devolves into a mere acknowledgment of sinfulness, devoid of any actual forsaking or cessation of wrongdoing.

Catholic doctrine throughout the ages has rested upon this fallacy, and even though the Protestant Reformation rejected the myriad rituals and liturgical practices, it firmly embraced the Augustinian concept of Original Sin. Consequently, genuine repentance remains highly improbable on both fronts.

There were occasional challenges to Augustine's doctrines within the Roman Empire, but none of significant consequence or lasting impact. Dissenters were swiftly refuted by Augustine and compelled to flee or risk imprisonment, or even death. As Augustine championed his doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace, grounded in the belief that humans are incapable of obeying God, a capable bishop named Julian of Eclanum valiantly opposed him.

However, Augustine's political connections and prestigious standing made him impervious to challenge. To this day, anyone who dared to oppose him is often labeled a Pelagian heretic.

Who are the Real Heretics?

This legacy, passed down through the ages, has given rise to a formidable system of error that maintains control to this day. Many mistakenly believe that the Great Reformation, which liberated us from the dark ages of Catholic domination, restored the pure gospel message of repentance and faith to the world. However, it fell short of returning the church to its Apostolic origins.

In reality, it primarily led to the creation of more factions and divisions within the church, perpetuating Augustine's flawed notion of original sin. If the Reformers had forsaken these ideas instead of elaborating on them and expanding their influence, perhaps their efforts would have had a more enduring impact on society. Yet, as history attests, they even persecuted those who challenged the belief that humanity is inherently depraved and fully capable of obeying God through their free and independent will.

Upon closer examination of the historical record, one finds that Pelagius was in complete agreement with the early Church fathers. The concept of original sin did not emerge until some time in the 4th century and certainly was not taught by the Apostle Paul in Romans Chapter Five. The question arises: who are the genuine heretics? The evidence strongly suggests that it is the modern churches that STILL uphold Augustine's doctrines.

Justin Martyr, (100-165) Said:

“Every created being is so constituted as to be capable of vice and virtue. For he can do nothing praiseworthy, if he had not the power of turning either way.” And “unless we suppose man has the power to choose the good and refuse the evil, no one can be accountable for any action whatever.” (A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Tertullian (160-225) said:

“No reward can be justly bestowed, no punishment can be justly inflicted, upon him who is good or bad by necessity, and not by his own choice. (A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Origen (185-254) said,

“The soul does not incline to either part out of necessity, for then neither vice nor virtue could be ascribed to it; nor would its choice of virtue deserve reward; nor its declination to vice punishment.” Again, “How could God require that of man which he [man] had not power to offer Him? (A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Clement of Alexandria (150-216) said, “

Neither promises nor apprehensions, rewards, no punishments are just if the soul has not the power of choosing and abstaining; if evil is involuntary. (A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Justin Martyr said,

“The human race...from Adam had fallen under the power of death and the guile of the serpent. Each one had committed personal transgression.” (c.160, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 271, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Irenaeus said,

“By means of our first parents, we were all brought into bondage by being made subject to death.” (c.180, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 271, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Justin Martyr said,

“In the beginning, He made the human race with the power of thought and of choosing truth and doing right, so that all men are without excuse before God.” (c.160, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 271, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Justin Martyr said,

“Let some suppose, from what has been said by us, that we say that whatever occurs happens by a fatal necessity, because it is foretold as known beforehand, this too we explain. We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and good rewards, are rendered according to the merit of each man’s actions. Now, if this is not so, but all things happen by fate, then neither is anything at all in our own power. For if it is predetermined that this man will be good, and this other man will be evil, neither is the first one meritorious nor the latter man to be blamed. And again, unless the human race has the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions.” (c.160, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 271, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Justin Martyr said,

“I have proved in what has been said that those who were foreknown to be unrighteous, whether men or angels, are not made wicked by God’s fault. Rather, each man is what he will appear to be through his own fault.” (c.160, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Tatian said,

“We were not created to die. Rather, we die by our own fault. Our free will has destroyed us. We who were free have become slaves. We have been sold through sin. Nothing evil has been created by God. We ourselves have manifested wickedness. But we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it.” (c.160, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Melito said,

“There is, therefore, nothing to hinder you from changing your evil manner to life, because you are a free man.” (c.170, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Theophilus said, “If, on the other hand, he would turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he would himself be the cause of death to himself. For God made man free, and with power of himself.” (c.180, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Irenaeus said,

“But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect similar to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself his own cause that sometimes he becomes wheat, and

sometimes chaff.” (c.180, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 286, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Irenaeus said,

“‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds’...And ‘Why call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?’...All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man...For it is in man’s power to disobey God and to forfeit what is good.” (c.180, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Clement of Alexandria said,

“We...have believed and are saved by voluntary choice.” (c.195, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Clement of Alexandria said,

“Each one of us who sins with his own free will, chooses punishment. So the blame lies with him who chooses. God is without blame.” (c.195, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Clement of Alexandria said,

“To obey or not is in our own power, provided we do not have the excuse of ignorance.” (c.195, A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs by David Bercot, p. 287, published by Hendrickson Publishers)

Tertullian said,

“I find, then, that man was constituted free by God. He was master of his own will and power...For a law would not be imposed upon one who did not have it in his power to render that obedience which is due to law. Nor again, would the penalty of death be threatened against sin, if a contempt of the law were impossible to man in the liberty of his will...Man is free, with a will either for obedience or resistance.

Many of these quoted disciples had direct associations with the Apostles themselves. One might reasonably expect that if the Apostles had indeed taught the concept of original sin, it would have been prominently articulated first in the Scriptures and then reiterated by their immediate disciples.

Until the fourth century, with Augustine's emergence, there was no argument in favor of the notion of inherited sin. Nor did anyone entertain the ideas that God exists outside of time, predetermined all things from eternity, or selected some for salvation while leaving others lost. These concepts can be traced back to pagan beliefs, as substantiated by research into Manichaeism and Gnostic teachings. Both Manichaeism and Gnosticism unequivocally assert that sin is inherent in human nature, not a matter of choice.

The fallacy of Augustinian doctrine persists from the Reformation era to the modern day, with only a few minor exceptions along the way. If one traces the opposition that arose against this doctrine, it becomes evident that in every instance, dissenters faced severe persecution and were branded as the most heinous of heretics. Perhaps one of the last significant movements aimed at restoring Apostolic principles to the preaching of the Gospel occurred in 16th-century Germany with the Anabaptists.

Unfortunately, their historical presence is relatively obscure in our time because they were denounced as heretics by the Reformers who lived during the same era.

The movement originated in Germany during the advent of the printing press, which was first assembled there in 1439. Fresh translations of the Scriptures in local languages began to circulate, enabling ordinary individuals to access and read the very words of Christ for the first time. Many came to realize how they had been deprived by the controlling Catholic church for so long, sparking a small-scale revolution. People began to voice their grievances, author tracts and articles, and expose the errors that had held them captive to sin. What makes their success noteworthy is that they accomplished all of this without any organizational backing, publishing houses, and with very few individuals one might consider "scholars." Moreover, they freely shared their work, highlighting the source of their achievement.

Much like the Apostles, they traversed the countryside preaching repentance and faith, emphasizing humanity's responsibility to obey God and their capability to do so. They lacked any formal structure or system that would impede their evangelical zeal. Their endeavors were rooted in scriptures and a life dedicated to following Christ's example. Their faith was demonstrated through action—doing what Jesus had commanded—rather than getting embroiled in debates over interpretation. In contrast to the Protestants of the Reformation, who deemed them heretics, they responded in this manner:

The Anabaptists did not answer John Calvin in writing. They answered him with their lives.

"I am the way and the truth and the life."

To the Protestants, the Bible served as a manifesto in and of itself. Once they reached a consensus on how to "correctly" interpret it, they held it in profound reverence and treated it with unwavering devotion. They preached, persecuted, and waged significant wars in defense of the Bible and its doctrines.

For the Anabaptists, the Bible was merely the book that guided them to Christ. The Protestants identified the "key" to interpreting the Bible in the epistles of Paul, while the Anabaptists found it in Christ and His Sermon on the Mount. The Protestants viewed Paul as a brilliant theologian, the expositor of faith and grace doctrines, whereas the Anabaptists regarded him as someone who had forsaken everything to become a "fool for Christ's sake." They felt a sense of community with him in his martyrdom.

The Protestants were committed to obeying their authorities, frequently discussing the concept of "God-ordained authority" and holding their princes and church leaders in high regard. On the other hand, the Anabaptists were primarily driven by their dedication to obeying Christ.

The Protestants tended to act collectively and waited until "everyone was ready" to implement changes in religious practices. The Anabaptists, however, acted promptly according to what they believed Christ wanted them to do. Even if no one else joined them, they were willing to take action alone.

The Protestants followed a logical path, with theologians, princes, and educators carefully planning their actions in a sensible manner. In contrast, the Anabaptists followed Christ without elaborate plans,

a path that seemed illogical but was the source of their remarkable strength. This approach led them forward. (Adapted from Peter Hoover, "Secret of Strength")

Both movements had their extremes and could be criticized for espousing false doctrines. In this discussion, we will focus on the issue of original sin because it alone has rendered the message of true repentance virtually ineffective in our current time.

Throughout history, every movement that ventured outside the established system, when closely examined, revealed converts who genuinely repented and turned away from their sins. These individuals followed Christ, not doctrines, and demonstrated unwavering obedience to the Word, regardless of personal cost. They are indeed the kind of individuals the world does not deserve, yet their legacy speaks profoundly to our generation (adapted from Peter Hoover's "Secret of Strength").

The Anabaptists faced severe persecution, nearly to the point of extinction, before the year 1600. Those who managed to survive sought refuge in the New World and eventually became part of the various denominations already in existence. Similar to the holiness reformers who followed, these splintered groups gradually drifted away from their original roots. Today, the entire religious system has become corrupted, uniformly embracing the message of "come as you are, sins and all" as the gospel truth. While much is said about holiness, the importance of obeying Christ, and living a godly life, you will not find anyone willing to assert that sin must cease in the process of repentance.

They may stress the need for a desire to stop sinning and even hating one's own sin, but the prevailing belief is that sin will never completely cease as long as a person lives, even including sins as grievous as adultery, molestation, and theft. The grace of God can call, compel, prevent, and even exert influence over one's will to some extent. However, it cannot bring a complete halt to sin. According to this perspective, individuals are born as sinners by nature, powerless to obey God, and only free to choose from their evil desires.

The entire deception would crumble if grace could genuinely put an end to sin. This is why there has been such vehement opposition to this idea from Augustine's time to the present. As demonstrated, grace can accomplish everything necessary to call and redeem humanity, but it falls short of entirely eradicating the sinful nature (although some believe sanctification addresses the issue, the possibility of falling back into sin persists while one is alive). If indeed this grace, in any form, could halt sin, the entire framework would collapse. People would have to truly repent (cease from sinning) and obey from the heart. They would not be able to enter the Kingdom while dragging their old "sinful nature" with them.

The entire deception hinges on the belief in original sin. If it can be entirely removed or is proven to be nonexistent, the system collapses. Countless millions, if not billions, have based their eternal destinies on this fallacy and have approached God in a state of sin. Whole generations have lived and died believing in it, and wars have been waged, nations torn asunder, all due to this pervasive falsehood. It stands as the apex of all false doctrines, and its proponents will go to great lengths to defend and protect it, even resorting to the persecution of those who challenge it. It is, in essence, Satan's masterpiece.

