

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

HAMARTIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Sin

The Catastrophe from Which the Gospel Rescues Us

UNIT 4: ORIGINAL SIN — TRANSMISSION AND FEDERAL HEADSHIP HOW THE FALL OF ONE MAN BECAME THE RUIN OF ALL

Lesson 11

The Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Arminian Alternatives What the Church Has Rejected — And Why

These Are Not Academic Disputes — They Determine Whether Salvation Is Ultimately God's Work or a Human Cooperation

"So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." — Romans 9:16

Key Texts: John 6:44, 65; Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:1–5, 8–9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:25

"So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."

Romans 9:16, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lesson 10 established the doctrine of original sin in its biblical and confessional foundations: Adam's transgression, as the covenant head of the human race, produced both the guilt and the corruption that every member of his posterity inherits from conception. No aspect of the human constitution escaped the Fall's reach; no faculty remained untouched; and the specific doctrines of federal headship and the imputation of Adam's guilt established the mechanism by which one man's transgression became the theological condition of all his descendants. This lesson turns from the doctrine itself to the alternatives that the church has repeatedly encountered and rejected: Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism.

These are not merely academic positions preserved in church history as curiosities. They are live theological alternatives that appear in new forms in every generation of the church's life, in contemporary evangelical preaching that emphasizes human decision, in the popular altar-call tradition's implicit anthropology, in the therapeutic gospel that reframes sin as sickness and salvation as recovery, and in the casual assumption of much contemporary Christianity that God does His part and the human being does hers, with salvation as the cooperative product of both. Understanding why the church condemned Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, and why the Synod of Dort rejected the Arminian Remonstrance, is not a matter of sectarian theological politics. It is the specific doctrinal formation that equips the minister to recognize the most persistent and most theologically consequential error in the entire history of Christian soteriology, and to address it with the biblical precision and the pastoral urgency it requires.

The outline's summary of the pastoral stakes is exactly right: these are not academic disputes. They determine whether salvation is ultimately a work of God or a cooperative effort between God and the human will. If God does His part and the sinner does hers, then the decisive factor in the salvation of any individual is the human will's response, and the glory of the salvation belongs, at least in part, to the one who responded rightly. If salvation is entirely God's work, if the faith, the repentance, the new birth, and the perseverance are all the gift of God rather than the contribution of the human will, then the glory of the salvation belongs entirely to God, and Romans 11:36's doxology is the only appropriate response: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." The theological dispute about Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism is, at its deepest level, a dispute about who gets the glory for the salvation of every soul who has ever been redeemed.

This lesson examines the three positions in sequence, Pelagianism (Section I), Semi-Pelagianism (Section II), and Arminianism (Section III), followed by the Reformed response and its specific biblical grounding (Section IV), the pastoral stakes of the doctrinal decision (Section V), and the doxological implications of the monergistic account of salvation (Section VI). A comparison table following the introduction provides an at-a-glance overview of the key distinctions across all three alternatives and the Reformed position that answers them.

Comparative Overview: The Four Positions

Category	Pelagianism	Semi-Pelagianism / Arminianism	Reformed (Augustinian)
Human Nature at Birth	Morally neutral; no inherited corruption	Weakened but not dead; capacity for good remains	Dead in sin; totally depraved; no capacity for spiritual good
Original Sin	Denied entirely; Adam's sin affected Adam alone	Affirmed in part; nature wounded but not destroyed	Fully affirmed; guilt and corruption transmitted to all
Free Will After Fall	Fully intact; able to choose God unaided	Partially impaired; prevenient grace restores capacity	Enslaved to sin; cannot choose God apart from regeneration
Role of Grace	Helpful but not necessary; enables better choices	Necessary; but grace and will cooperate equally	Absolutely necessary; grace is efficacious, not merely enabling
Who Initiates Salvation	Human will initiates; God responds	Human will responds to universally distributed grace	God initiates sovereignly; effectual grace creates the response
Basis of Election	Foreknowledge of future faith (or effort)	Foreknowledge of future faith (conditional election)	Unconditional; based on God's sovereign will, not foreseen merit
Condemning Council	Carthage (418) and Ephesus (431)	Orange (529) for Semi-Pelagianism; Dort (1618–19) for Arminianism	Affirmed by Orange, Dort, Westminster, and 1689 Confessions

I. Pelagianism

Adam's Sin Affected Only Adam, Human Nature Is Morally Neutral

A. The Core Claims of Pelagius

Pelagius was a British monk who arrived in Rome around 380 AD and achieved considerable influence among the aristocratic Christian community before the controversy bearing his name erupted. His theology was driven by a profound pastoral concern: he believed that the Augustinian emphasis on human moral inability and divine sovereign grace produced a practical fatalism that undermined moral responsibility and pastoral urgency. If human beings cannot obey God's commands without grace, Pelagius reasoned, then holding them accountable for disobedience is unjust; and if the commands are impossible without grace, the commands themselves lose their moral force. His solution was to insist on the full integrity of the human will's freedom as the precondition of genuine moral responsibility.

The specific Pelagian claims that Augustine identified and the councils condemned can be reduced to five essential propositions. First, Adam's sin injured only Adam himself. The sin was a moral choice with consequences for the individual who made it, not a covenantal act with consequences for the entire race he represented. Second, human beings are born in the same condition as Adam before the Fall, without original sin, without inherited guilt, and without the inherited corruption of nature that Augustine identified as the specific product of the Fall's transmission. Third, the human will retains, even after the Fall, the same freedom and the same moral capability that it possessed in the state of original innocence. Fourth, grace, understood by Pelagius as primarily the gift of law, the teaching of Christ's example, and the forgiveness of past sins, is helpful for enabling easier obedience but is not strictly necessary for moral performance. Fifth, the specific demands of divine law are achievable by the unaided human will, because a just God would not command what human beings cannot perform.

The influence of Pelagianism on Pelagius's most prominent disciple, Caelestius, took the implications to their logical extreme: if human beings are born without original sin and are morally capable of obedience, then infant baptism's rationale is undermined, the necessity of the atonement is reduced to example and inspiration, and the entire edifice of the doctrines of grace begins to collapse. It was specifically Caelestius's teaching in Carthage that triggered the first conciliar condemnations, but Pelagius's own writings provided the theological foundation for the positions his disciples were articulating.

B. The Conciliar Condemnation and Augustine's Response

The Council of Carthage (418 AD) condemned Pelagianism in eight specific canons, addressing both the doctrinal and the soteriological dimensions of the error. The foundational canon addressed original sin: Adam's transgression introduced death not merely to himself but to the entire human race, so that all human beings are genuinely heirs of both the guilt and the mortality that the transgression produced. Subsequent canons addressed the necessity of grace for every act of genuine righteousness, establishing that grace is not merely a pedagogical aid or an inspiring example but the specific power without which no human being can perform the obedience that God's law requires. The Council of Ephesus (431 AD) confirmed the Carthaginian condemnations, and subsequent ecumenical consensus has consistently maintained the heretical status of Pelagianism.

Augustine's specific response to Pelagianism developed the most comprehensive and the most influential account of original sin, total depravity, and sovereign grace in the entire patristic period, an account that became the foundation for the Reformed tradition's doctrine of the human condition and its soteriological implications. Against Pelagius's claim that Adam's sin affected only Adam, Augustine insisted on the corporate, covenantal character of Adam's transgression: we were all in Adam in the seminal sense, and what Adam did he did as our representative head. Against Pelagius's claim that human nature remains morally intact after the Fall, Augustine developed the doctrine of total depravity: not that every person is as wicked as she could be, but that every faculty of the fallen human person has been corrupted and redirected by sin so that no faculty is capable of genuine spiritual good toward God apart from divine grace. And against Pelagius's account of grace as merely enabling and assisting, Augustine developed the doctrine of sovereign, effectual grace: the grace that saves is not the grace that makes salvation possible but the grace that makes salvation actual, that creates the faith, the repentance, and the desire for God that the unregenerate person cannot produce by her own corrupted resources.

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 5:6, 8, NASB 1995

II. Semi-Pelagianism

Grace Is Necessary, But the First Move Is Ours

A. The Semi-Pelagian Compromise

Semi-Pelagianism emerged in the generation after Augustine as a mediating position between the full Pelagian denial of original sin and Augustine's robust doctrine of sovereign, effectual grace. Its most articulate proponents, John Cassian (c. 360–435), Vincent of Lérins (d. c. 445), and the monks of southern Gaul, were not Pelagians; they fully affirmed the necessity of grace for salvation and the genuine corruption of human nature by the Fall. Their specific objection to Augustine was not his doctrine of original sin but his doctrine of sovereign election and effectual calling: the claim that God's grace is not merely a provision that the human will can accept or reject but a sovereign, effectual action that creates the human response as its necessary consequence.

The Semi-Pelagian mediating position holds that the human will and divine grace cooperate in salvation, with the specific question of who initiates the cooperation resolved in favor of the human will. The sinner, while genuinely unable to complete the journey of salvation without divine grace, is capable of taking the first step, of reaching out for grace, of expressing an initial desire for God, of making the first movement toward the divine assistance

that will then enable the entire process. God's grace responds to and builds upon this initial human movement, but the decisive question of whether any individual will be saved is ultimately resolved by the presence or absence of this initial human reaching rather than by the sovereign, unconditional election of God. John Cassian's illustration was medical: the sick person must will to be healed before the physician's medicine can do its work; God's grace is the medicine, but the will's initial desire for healing is the precondition of the medicine's application.

The specific Semi-Pelagian claim that the Council of Orange condemned in 529 AD was precisely this first-movement doctrine: the claim that the *initium fidei*, the beginning of faith, the first reaching out for God, originates with the human will rather than with divine grace. The council's condemnation was unambiguous: "If anyone says that the grace of God can be conferred as a result of human prayer, but that it is not grace itself which makes us pray to God, he contradicts the prophet Isaiah, or the Apostle who says the same thing: 'I have been found by those who did not seek Me; I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for Me'" (Romans 10:20). Even the prayer for grace is itself a gift of grace; no movement of the human will toward God precedes the divine grace that makes such movement possible.

B. *The Persistent Resurrection of the Semi-Pelagian Pattern*

What makes Semi-Pelagianism most theologically significant is not its fifth-century expression but its persistent resurrection in every subsequent century of the church's life. The Semi-Pelagian intuition, that grace is necessary but that the human will makes the decisive contribution that grace enables, is the most naturally congenial account of salvation to the unregenerate human mind, because it preserves both the necessity of grace (rendering the doctrine acceptable to believers in grace) and the decisive role of the human will (rendering the doctrine acceptable to the natural human instinct for self-determination and moral credit). Every time the church has been tempted to soften the full Augustinian-Reformed account of sovereign, effectual grace, it has typically been in the direction of some form of the Semi-Pelagian pattern, affirming that grace is necessary while insisting that the human will's first movement provides the decisive factor in the individual's salvation.

The contemporary evangelical altar-call tradition, the decisional regeneration theology that makes the human "decision for Christ" the moment at which God's saving work begins, and the popular notion that God has done everything He can and now the human will must do the rest all represent, in their various forms, the structural logic of Semi-Pelagianism applied to contemporary pastoral practice. The council of Orange's condemnation is as relevant to these contemporary expressions as it was to Cassian's fifth-century formulations: the beginning of faith is not due to the human will but to the grace of God that creates the very desire for faith that it then brings to its completion.

"For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

Philippians 2:13, NASB 1995

III. Arminianism

Prevenient Grace Restores the Freedom to Respond

A. *The Remonstrance of 1610 and the Arminian System*

Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) was a Dutch Reformed theologian who had studied under Theodore Beza in Geneva and served as a pastor and professor within the Dutch Reformed Church. His theological concerns arose from questions about double predestination and its relationship to divine justice and human responsibility, and his lectures and writings increasingly questioned the Calvinist consensus of his tradition. After his death, his followers articulated his positions in the Remonstrance of 1610, a document addressed to the States of Holland and West Friesland requesting theological accommodation within the Dutch church. The Remonstrance presented five articles that constitute the classical Arminian theological system.

The five Arminian articles are: (1) God elects to salvation those whom He foreknows will persevere in faith, election is conditional on foreknown faith rather than unconditional divine choice; (2) Christ died for all people

without exception, making salvation possible for all; (3) human nature is genuinely corrupted by the Fall so that saving grace is necessary; (4) God's gracious influences can be resisted, the Holy Spirit's work in salvation can be decisively rejected; and (5) believers have the genuine possibility of falling from grace, though the Remonstrants initially expressed uncertainty about whether genuine apostasy is actually possible. The third and fifth articles are particularly significant for the Hamartiology discussion: the Arminians affirm original sin and genuine depravity, but they address the problem it poses for human moral responsibility through the doctrine of prevenient grace rather than through the Reformed doctrine of effectual calling.

B. *The Reformed Critique of Prevenient Grace*

The centerpiece of the Arminian response to the problem of total depravity is the doctrine of prevenient grace: God distributes to every human being a preliminary grace that restores the spiritual freedom that the Fall removed, making the acceptance or rejection of the gospel a genuine, equally possible choice for every person. On the Arminian account, total depravity is real but its effects have been universally addressed by prevenient grace, so that the effective anthropological condition of every person hearing the gospel is not that of Ephesians 2:1's "dead in trespasses and sins" but of a person whose death has been sufficiently addressed by prevenient grace to enable a genuine response.

The Reformed critique of prevenient grace operates on several levels. First, the doctrine lacks explicit scriptural support. The Arminians typically cite John 1:9 ("there was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man") and Titus 2:11 ("the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men") as evidence for a universal distribution of grace. But neither text explicitly teaches the specific doctrine of a universally distributed grace that restores spiritual freedom: John 1:9 most naturally refers to Christ as the Light of the world who enlightens through the general revelation of creation and conscience (Romans 1:20–21) rather than through a specific grace-distribution that restores moral freedom; and Titus 2:11's "all men" most naturally refers to the universal scope of the gospel's offer rather than to a universal distribution of enabling grace.

Second, and more fundamentally, prevenient grace effectively relocates the decisive factor in salvation from the sovereign, unconditional election of God to the human will's response to the universally available enabling. If every person has received sufficient grace to respond to the gospel, and some respond while others do not, the decisive difference between the person who is saved and the person who is not saved is the response of the human will, not the sovereign election of God, not the effectual calling of the Spirit, but the human will's exercise of its God-given but ultimately self-determining freedom. Prevenient grace reproduces, within a framework that more robustly affirms original sin than classical Semi-Pelagianism did, the fundamental Semi-Pelagian location of the decisive factor in salvation in the human will's first movement. The council of Orange's condemnation of the Semi-Pelagian first-movement doctrine applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace's role in enabling the first movement of faith.

Third, the biblical picture of the unregenerate person is not of someone who has been partially restored to spiritual capability by a prevenient grace but of someone who is dead, enslaved, and constitutively unable to respond to the gospel apart from the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit. John 6:44's "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" is not the description of a spiritual disability that prevenient grace has universally addressed; it is the description of an ongoing, present, constitutional inability that the Father's specific, effective drawing addresses in the specific persons whom the Father has given to the Son (verse 37). The disability of the "cannot come" is not the description of a condition that prevenient grace has resolved in every person; it is the description of the condition that requires the specific, effectual divine action to address in each specific person who is actually brought to saving faith.

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day... No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father."

John 6:44, 65, NASB 1995

IV. The Reformed Response

Dort, TULIP, and the Monergistic Account of Salvation

A. *The Synod of Dort and the Canons*

The Synod of Dort (1618–19) was convened by the Dutch Reformed Church in response to the theological crisis generated by the Arminian Remonstrance. It was an international Reformed gathering, attended by delegates from the Dutch Reformed provinces, Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hesse, Switzerland, Nassau, East Frisia, and Bremen, making it one of the most broadly representative Reformed confessional bodies in the history of the Reformation era. The Synod's work over five months of deliberation produced the Canons of Dort: a comprehensive, biblically grounded, pastorally sensitive response to each of the five Arminian articles.

The five headings of the Canons of Dort, subsequently summarized by the TULIP acronym, are the most comprehensive confessional expression of the Reformed response to the Arminian system. Total depravity (First Head of Doctrine's Rejection of Errors) establishes the foundational premise from which the other four doctrines flow: because the Fall has left human beings genuinely dead in sin, with every faculty corrupted and every capacity for spiritual good toward God lost, the divine initiative in salvation must be sovereign and effectual rather than merely enabling. Unconditional election follows: because the decisive factor in salvation cannot rest on the human will's exercise of the freedom that total depravity has eliminated, the divine choice of those who will be saved must rest on God's sovereign will rather than on any foreseen human response. Definite atonement and effectual calling (irresistible grace) follow from the same logic: the atonement that definitively accomplishes the salvation of the elect requires the effectual calling that definitively applies it, and neither can be resisted in the sense of being ultimately and finally nullified by the human will whose depravity makes it incapable of the very response that the Arminian account requires it to provide. Perseverance of the saints completes the system: the God who elected unconditionally, atoned definitively, and called effectually will not abandon His work to the vagaries of a human will whose depravity was the specific reason for the sovereign initiative in the first place.

B. *The Biblical Foundation: Romans 9:16 and the Sovereignty of Mercy*

Romans 9:16 provides Paul's most concentrated statement of the monergistic account of salvation: "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (NASB 1995). The verse is the specific conclusion of Paul's argument about the divine freedom in election in Romans 9:6–16, where he has established (through the examples of Isaac and Jacob) that God's elective purposes operate not on the basis of human works, human worth, or, by implication, human foreseen faith, but on the basis of the divine call alone ("not because of works but because of Him who calls," verse 11). The "it does not depend on the man who wills" (*ou tou thelontos*) is the specific refutation of the Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Arminian accounts in which the decisive factor in the individual's salvation is located in the exercise of the human will's freedom or response. And the "but on God who has mercy" (*alla tou eleontos theou*) is the specific affirmation of the monergistic account: the salvation of every specific individual who has ever been saved is the specific product of the specific mercy of the specific God who chose to have mercy on that specific person, not because of anything in the person that made her more receptive than others but because of the sovereign, gracious, entirely unilateral will of the God who has mercy on whom He wills and hardens whom He wills (verse 18).

Ephesians 2:8–9 provides the Pauline grounding for the gift character of faith: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (NASB 1995). The phrase "that not of yourselves" most naturally refers to the entirety of the salvation described in the preceding clause, the grace and the faith and the saved condition together are the gift of God, not the contribution of the human person. Philippians 1:29 explicitly names faith as the gift of God: "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake", the believing is something granted, which is to say given, which is to say a gift of divine grace rather than the contribution of the human will. And 2 Timothy 2:25's description of the pastoral task of correcting opponents, "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth",

establishes that even repentance is in God's hand to grant, not the autonomous product of the human will's self-determination.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Ephesians 2:8–9, NASB 1995

V. The Pastoral Stakes

Why This Dispute Is Not Academic

The outline's identification of the pastoral stakes of the Pelagian-Semi-Pelagian-Arminian debate is among the most important sentences in the entire lesson: "These are not academic disputes, they determine whether salvation is ultimately a work of God or a cooperative effort between God and man." The apparently abstract question of whether the first movement in salvation comes from God or from the human will is not a peripheral doctrinal nicety; it is the question upon which the entire character of the Christian life, the entire content of Christian worship, and the entire logic of Christian evangelism depends.

A. *The Question of Assurance*

If salvation is ultimately determined by the human will's free response to grace, whether in the Pelagian form (the will's unaided choice of obedience), the Semi-Pelagian form (the will's first movement toward grace), or the Arminian form (the will's response to prevenient grace), then the ground of the believer's assurance rests, at least in part, on the quality and the durability of the human will's continuing exercise of its response. If the human will can fall away from the grace it has freely accepted, if the decisive factor in one's continued participation in saving grace is the human will's continued exercise of its freedom, then assurance is always provisional, always contingent on the continuation of the very thing that the fallen human will is weakest in sustaining. The Reformed doctrine of perseverance, rooted in the unconditional election and the effectual calling that the monergistic account of salvation provides, is the specific answer to this specific pastoral anxiety: the God who chose unconditionally, called effectually, and justified definitively will not abandon the work His sovereign grace has accomplished to the vagaries of the human will that His sovereign grace has transformed.

B. *The Question of Evangelism and the Question of Glory*

The evangelistic implications of the monergism-synergism distinction are equally significant. If salvation is ultimately a cooperative work in which the human will's response to grace is the decisive factor, then evangelism is fundamentally a persuasion exercise: the evangelist's task is to create the emotional and intellectual conditions under which the human will is most likely to exercise its freedom in the direction of faith. The techniques of decisional evangelism, the emotional appeal, the manufactured urgency, the "just as I am" moment of psychological openness, are the natural pastoral expression of a soteriology in which the decisive factor is the human decision. If, on the other hand, salvation is entirely the work of God, if faith and repentance are gifts of divine grace that the Spirit creates through the proclamation of the gospel, then evangelism is fundamentally a proclamation exercise: the evangelist's task is to faithfully proclaim the Word through which the Spirit sovereignly creates the response that He has ordained, trusting that God will use the faithful proclamation to accomplish what no human technique could produce.

Most fundamentally, the question of who gets the glory is the deepest pastoral stake of the entire dispute. Paul's "so that no one may boast" in Ephesians 2:9 is not a peripheral observation; it is the specific soteriological motivation for the gift character of faith. If faith is the human will's contribution to a salvation that God's grace makes possible, then the person who exercised the faith has a specific, irreducible contribution to her own salvation for which she can take credit, however modest, however secondary, it is hers and not God's. If faith is the gift of God, then the person who has believed has received faith from the same God whose grace provided the salvation that the faith receives, and there is nothing in the salvation, from its first cause to its final

glorification, that belongs to the believer's own initiative, wisdom, or will. "So then it does not depend on the man who wills" (Romans 9:16) is not a theologically abstract proposition; it is the specific, doxologically consequential claim that the God of the Bible is a God who gets all the glory for every salvation, because every salvation is entirely His work from the first cause of election to the final cause of glorification.

"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

Romans 10:17, NASB 1995

VI. The Doxological Implication

Monergism and the Glory That Belongs to God Alone

The ultimate theological stake of the Pelagian-Semi-Pelagian-Arminian debate is the question of where the glory of salvation lands. The more the human will contributes to its own salvation, the more the decisive factor in any individual's redemption rests on the exercise of human freedom, human wisdom, or human responsiveness, the more the glory of that salvation is shared between the divine grace and the human response. The more the entire salvation, from election through calling through faith through perseverance through glorification, is the sovereign, effectual, unilateral work of the God who "gave us His Son" (Romans 8:32), the more completely the glory belongs to the Giver rather than to the recipient.

Augustine grasped this doxological implication with specific clarity, and his famous prayer captures the entire soteriological question in a single sentence: "Command what You will, and give what You command." If God commands faith and repentance, as He does, and if the command itself generates the capacity to fulfill it through the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit who gives what God commands, as the Reformed tradition insists, then the entire transaction is divine from beginning to end: the command is divine, the capacity to fulfill it is divine, the fulfillment is divine, and the glory of the entire transaction belongs to the divine Giver who asked and then answered the asking by His own sovereign act. This is precisely what "solī Deo gloria" means as a soteriological principle: not merely that God deserves praise among the various contributors to salvation but that God is the only contributor, from the first cause of election to the final cause of glorification, and that the glory therefore belongs to Him alone.

The Canons of Dort conclude with a magnificent articulation of this doxological implication: "To God, who alone is good, omnipotent, and who is both able and willing to perform the whole work of salvation, and who alone is worthy of all praise, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen." This is the specific, Dort-grounded, Augustinian-Reformed doxology that the full doctrine of original sin, total depravity, and sovereign grace produces: not the cautious acknowledgment of a God who has done His part alongside a human being who has done hers, but the unreserved, comprehensive, unqualified ascription of all honor and glory to the God who alone is both able and willing to perform the whole work of salvation. The pastoral study of Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism is not the acquisition of theological ammunition for polemical combat; it is the specific doctrinal formation that makes this doxology possible, that clears away every alternative that would divide the glory between the divine Giver and the human recipient, and leaves the entire glory of the entire salvation precisely where the entire Bible places it: in the God who "does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." Solī Deo Gloria.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose... whom He predestined, He also called; and whom He called, He also justified; and whom He justified, He also glorified."

Romans 8:28, 30, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Pelagianism	The theological system associated with the British monk Pelagius (c. 354–420), who taught in Rome and provoked the most consequential theological controversy of the patristic era. Pelagianism holds: (1) that Adam’s sin harmed only Adam himself and did not corrupt the nature his posterity inherited; (2) that human beings are therefore born in a morally neutral condition, without original sin, possessing the same freedom that Adam possessed before the Fall; (3) that grace, while helpful for enabling easier obedience, is not strictly necessary for the performance of God’s commands, human beings can in principle obey God by the unaided exercise of their natural freedom; and (4) that salvation therefore depends ultimately on the human will’s proper exercise of its God-given freedom. Pelagianism was condemned as heresy at the Council of Carthage (418 AD), the Council of Ephesus (431 AD), and confirmed as heretical by subsequent ecumenical consensus. Its fundamental error is the denial of original sin, which renders the necessity of the cross logically unnecessary: if human beings are capable of obeying God’s law by the unaided exercise of natural freedom, Christ’s atoning death is at most an inspiring example, not a necessary substitutionary atonement.
Semi-Pelagianism	A mediating position between Pelagianism and Augustine’s robust doctrine of sovereign grace, associated with fifth-century figures such as John Cassian and Vincent of Lérins, and condemned at the Council of Orange (529 AD). Semi-Pelagianism affirms, against Pelagianism, that the Fall has genuinely weakened and corrupted human nature and that divine grace is necessary for salvation. But it holds, against Augustine, that the first movement toward God, the initial reaching out for grace, the first stirring of faith, originates with the human will rather than with the divine initiative. On the Semi-Pelagian account, God’s grace responds to and cooperates with the human will’s first movement toward Him rather than creating that movement through sovereign, effectual action. The Council of Orange’s rejection of this position was unambiguous: “The beginning of faith and the very desire to believe by which we believe in him who justifies the impious, and by which we arrive at the regeneration of holy baptism, is not due to us but to a gift of grace.” The fundamental error of Semi-Pelagianism is its location of the decisive factor in salvation in the human will rather than in the divine grace, making salvation ultimately dependent on the human person’s first movement rather than on God’s sovereign, effectual, prevenient action.
Arminianism	The theological system associated with the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) and his followers, who articulated their positions in the Remonstrance of 1610. Arminianism represents a sophisticated updating of Semi-Pelagian intuitions within a framework that affirms the necessity of grace more strongly than classical Semi-Pelagianism did. Its five key positions are: (1) conditional election, God elects those whom He foresees will believe (election based on foreknowledge of faith rather than unconditional divine choice); (2) unlimited atonement, Christ died for all people without exception; (3) prevenient grace, God universally distributes a preliminary grace that restores to every person the freedom to accept or reject the gospel; (4) resistible grace, the Holy Spirit’s work in salvation can be decisively and finally resisted; (5) conditional perseverance, believers can fall away from saving grace. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) was convened to address the Remonstrance, and its response, the five points of Calvinism (TULIP), represents the most comprehensive Reformed confessional response to the Arminian system.
Prevenient Grace	The distinctive Arminian doctrine, not explicitly condemned by the Council of Orange but contested by the Reformed tradition, holding that God distributes to every human being a preliminary grace that precedes and enables the human response to the gospel. On the Arminian account, total depravity would leave every human being incapable of responding to the gospel, but prevenient grace restores to everyone the spiritual freedom that the Fall removed, making the acceptance or rejection of the gospel a genuine choice available to all. The Reformed objections to the doctrine of prevenient grace include: (1) it is not taught as such

Term	Definition
	in Scripture, there is no biblical passage that describes a universal distribution of grace enabling all people to believe; (2) the passages that Arminians cite as evidence for prevenient grace (John 1:9; Titus 2:11) do not teach the specific doctrine of a universally distributed grace restoring moral freedom; (3) the biblical picture of the unregenerate person is not of one who has been partially restored to spiritual capability by prevenient grace but of one who is dead, enslaved, and blind, conditions that prevenient grace, as the Arminians describe it, seems to have resolved; and (4) prevenient grace effectively relocates the decisive factor in salvation from God's sovereign election to the human will's response to the universally available enabling, reproducing the fundamental Semi-Pelagian error within a more sophisticated doctrinal framework.
The Synod of Dort (1618–19)	The international Reformed council convened in Dordrecht, Netherlands, to respond to the Arminian Remonstrance of 1610. Delegates attended from Reformed churches across Europe, the Netherlands, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, and France, making it among the most broadly representative Reformed confessional gatherings in history. The Synod's response to the five articles of the Remonstrance produced the Canons of Dort, which articulate the five points of Calvinism in their classical form: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement (Definite Atonement), Irresistible Grace (Effectual Calling), and Perseverance of the Saints. Total depravity is the foundational point from which the others flow: if the Fall has genuinely left human beings dead in sin and incapable of any spiritual good toward God, then election must be unconditional (the divine choice cannot rest on foreseen faith), calling must be effectual (it must create rather than merely enable the response), atonement must be definite (the scope of the redemption must correspond to the scope of the election), and perseverance must be guaranteed (the sovereign God who initiates salvation also secures its completion).
TULIP (The Five Points of Calvinism)	The acronym summarizing the five doctrinal positions affirmed at the Synod of Dort in response to the Arminian Remonstrance: Total Depravity (T), the corruption of sin extends to every faculty of the human person, leaving the unregenerate completely unable to perform any spiritually good act toward God; Unconditional Election (U), God's choice of those He will save is not conditioned on anything in the elect, including foreseen faith or merit; Limited Atonement (L), Christ's atoning death was specifically effective for the elect (though its value is unlimited); Irresistible Grace (I), God's effectual call cannot be ultimately and finally resisted; the Spirit creates the faith He commands; Perseverance of the Saints (P), those whom God has elected and effectually called will persevere in faith to the end. The term "TULIP" is a modern pedagogical acronym that does not appear in the Canons of Dort themselves; the preferred designation for these five points in the Reformed tradition is often the Canons of Dort or simply the doctrines of grace. Total depravity is the first and foundational point because the entire architecture of the other four doctrines rests on the specific account of the human condition that total depravity provides.
Monergism vs. Synergism	The fundamental theological distinction between the Reformed view of salvation and all non-Reformed alternatives. Monergism (from Greek: mono = one; ergon = work) holds that salvation is entirely the work of God, that the divine initiative, the divine grace, the divine calling, the divine faith-creating work of the Spirit produces the human response as its effect rather than merely enabling it as a possibility. On the monergistic account, faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:25), repentance is granted by God (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25), and the new birth is accomplished by the sovereign action of the Spirit (John 3:8; 1 John 5:4). Synergism (from Greek: sun = together; ergon = work) holds that salvation is a cooperative work of God and the human will, that the divine grace enables, invites, or partially accomplishes the salvation that the human will completes by its free response. Every non-Reformed soteriology is ultimately synergistic in character: whether the human contribution is the first movement of Pelagianism, the initial reaching for grace of Semi-Pelagianism, or the response to prevenient grace of Arminianism, the decisive factor in the

Term	Definition
	individual's salvation rests on the human will's exercise of its freedom. The monergism-synergism distinction is the most fundamental cleavage in the entire history of Christian soteriology, and the doctrine of total depravity establishes why the monergistic account is the only one that is consistent with the full Hamartiological account of the human condition.
Effectual Calling	The Reformed doctrine that God's calling of the elect to salvation is not merely an outward invitation (as in the general gospel call) but an inward, sovereign, Spirit-wrought work that creates in the called person the very faith, repentance, and desire for God that the call invites. 2 Timothy 2:25 establishes that repentance is granted by God ("if perhaps God may grant them repentance", NASB 1995) rather than produced by the unaided human will. Philippians 1:29 establishes that faith is granted as a gift ("For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him", NASB 1995). John 6:44 establishes that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, and verse 37 establishes that all whom the Father gives to the Son will come to Him, establishing the effectual character of the drawing. The effectual calling is the specific answer to the Hamartiological problem of total inability: because the unregenerate person is constitutively unable to come to Christ (John 6:44), unable to please God (Romans 8:8), and unable to receive the things of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14), the divine calling must do more than invite, it must create the response it invites. This is precisely what the Reformed doctrine of effectual calling affirms: God calls the dead to life, not by inviting those who can respond to do so, but by giving life to those who cannot respond so that they can and do.
The Council of Carthage (418 AD)	The North African council that issued the most comprehensive conciliar condemnation of Pelagianism, affirming eight specific canons against the Pelagian positions. Among the most significant: (1) that Adam's sin brought death not only on himself but on all his posterity; (2) that infants must be baptized for the remission of sins inherited from Adam (though the Reformed tradition would reframe this in non-baptismal terms as the affirmation that infants genuinely inherit original sin requiring grace to address); (3) that grace is not merely the ability to know and avoid sin but the specific assistance without which the will cannot make progress toward righteousness; and (4) that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is necessary not merely for the forgiveness of past sins but for every act of righteousness. The Council of Carthage's condemnations were confirmed by Pope Zosimus and subsequently ratified at the Council of Ephesus (431 AD), establishing the heretical status of Pelagianism as the consensus of the early church. Augustine's extensive anti-Pelagian writings, particularly <i>On Nature and Grace</i> , <i>On the Spirit and the Letter</i> , and <i>On Original Sin</i> , provided the theological foundation for the conciliar condemnations.
The Council of Orange (529 AD)	The local council held in Orange, Gaul (modern France), whose sixteen canons and concluding definition represent the most thorough and most influential early conciliar condemnation of Semi-Pelagianism. The council affirmed, against the Semi-Pelagian claim that the first movement toward God comes from the human will: (1) that the sin of Adam has corrupted not only the body but also the soul; (2) that grace is not given in response to human prayer but that even the desire to pray is itself the gift of grace; (3) that the beginning of faith is not due to human initiative but to grace; and (4) that no one has any good of his own but that whatever good he has is given by God. The council's concluding definition articulates the positive Reformed-anticipating position with clarity: "According to the Catholic Faith we also believe that after grace has been received through baptism, all who have been baptized can and ought, with the help and cooperation of Christ, to perform those things that belong to salvation, if they will labor faithfully." Orange was not a full anticipation of Augustinian monergism, it retained sacramental categories that the Reformation would later critique, but its rejection of the Semi-Pelagian first-movement doctrine represents the most authoritative early conciliar affirmation that the beginning of salvation is rooted in divine grace rather than human initiative.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that the question of who initiates salvation is not a peripheral doctrinal matter but the central soteriological question on which the entire character of the Christian life depends. The councils that condemned Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, and the Synod of Dort that rejected the Arminian Remonstrance, were not engaged in sectarian theological politics; they were defending the specific account of the human condition and the specific account of divine grace that the full biblical testimony requires. Total depravity is not merely an abstract anthropological proposition; it is the specific diagnosis that establishes why the divine initiative in salvation must be sovereign and effectual rather than merely enabling, and why the glory of every salvation must belong entirely to the God whose sovereign grace accomplished it.

We must also believe that the monergistic account of salvation is not merely a Reformed distinctive but the specific biblical teaching that the full New Testament testimony to the nature of faith (gift, Ephesians 2:8–9), the nature of repentance (granted, 2 Timothy 2:25), and the nature of the new birth (from above, John 3:3–8; not of human will, John 1:13) requires. The alternative accounts, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism, are not merely less satisfying theological options; they are specific distortions of the biblical account of what God does in salvation and what the human being contributes (nothing) to the sovereign, effectual, grace-wrought work of the Spirit.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The doctrine of monergistic grace should produce in the believing heart the specific wonder and gratitude of one who knows that her salvation is entirely the work of Another. Not the satisfaction of one who made a wise choice and received an expected reward, but the astonishment of one who has been given everything she has, the faith, the repentance, the new birth, the perseverance, the final glorification, by the same sovereign God whose grace preceded and produced every element of her participation in it. The Pauline “that no one may boast” is not a theological restriction imposed from outside; it is the specific recognition that there is literally nothing in the salvation to boast about except the grace of the God who accomplished it entirely. And the recognition that there is nothing to boast about is the specific precondition of the recognition that there is everything to wonder at.

Desire, above all, the doxological posture that Augustine’s prayer models: the prayer of one who knows that even the desire to pray is a gift of grace, that even the faith with which one trusts the God who saves is itself the gift of the same God, and that the appropriate response to this comprehensive, all-encompassing giftedness is not the modest pride of one who made a wise choice but the unreserved, comprehensive, eternity-filling praise of one for whom the entire salvation belongs to God from its first cause to its final expression. This is the specific doxology that the Reformed doctrine of sovereign grace produces, and it is the specific doxology that the Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Arminian alternatives cannot produce without qualification.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Study each of the three positions, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism, in a primary source before engaging any secondary source critique. For Pelagianism, read excerpts from Augustine’s *On Nature and Grace* or *On the Spirit and the Letter*, which preserve and refute Pelagian arguments. For Semi-Pelagianism, read selections from the canons of the Council of Orange (529 AD), available online, noting the specific claims the council condemns and the positive affirmations it makes. For Arminianism, read the five articles of the Remonstrance of 1610 alongside the Canons of Dort’s corresponding responses. The primary source engagement will prevent the common error of arguing against a caricature of positions that are genuinely more sophisticated than the caricature allows.
- Identify two specific ways in which the Semi-Pelagian pattern, grace is necessary, but the human will makes the first move, appears in the contemporary evangelical context you inhabit. These may include: altar-call theology that makes the human “decision” the moment of regeneration; evangelistic language that presents God as having “done everything He can” and now awaiting the human response; pastoral counseling that

treats conversion as primarily a matter of the counselee's willingness to "let God work"; or worship language that frames the human response as the decisive factor in the God-human encounter. For each identified instance, articulate: (a) the specific Semi-Pelagian assumption underlying it; (b) the specific biblical text or Reformed confession that corrects it; and (c) a specific alternative formulation that preserves the genuine human responsibility of the response while locating the decisive agency in the sovereign grace that produces the response.

- Read Romans 9:6–24 as Paul's most concentrated exegetical treatment of the sovereignty of grace in election, and work through the argument step by step. Identify: (a) the specific examples Paul uses (Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau) and what they establish about the basis of divine election; (b) the specific anticipation of the objection in verse 14 ("There is no injustice with God, is there?") and Paul's response to it; (c) the specific conclusion of verse 16 ("So then it does not depend on the man who wills... but on God who has mercy") and what it establishes about the location of the decisive factor in salvation; and (d) the second objection in verse 19 ("Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?") and Paul's response. Note that Paul does not answer the second objection by qualifying the sovereignty of God but by questioning the creature's standing to make the objection, a response that assumes rather than retreats from the comprehensive divine sovereignty of verses 6–16.
- Write a brief pastoral explanation (100–150 words) of the Reformed doctrine of effectual calling that: (a) honestly acknowledges the genuine human responsibility of faith and repentance; (b) grounds both faith and repentance in the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit who gives what God commands; and (c) concludes with the specific doxological implication, that the God who calls effectually gets all the glory for the salvation that His call produces. The exercise will develop the ability to hold together the genuine human responsibility and the comprehensive divine agency that the Reformed soteriology requires without either denying the responsibility (the antinomian error) or relocating the decisive agency to the human will (the Semi-Pelagian error).
- Pray through the Canons of Dort's concluding doxology as a personal prayer of response to this lesson: "To God, who alone is good, omnipotent, and who is both able and willing to perform the whole work of salvation, and who alone is worthy of all praise, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen." Then reflect: does this doxology accurately describe the God you believe in and the salvation you have received? Does the phrase "the whole work of salvation" genuinely encompass your understanding of your own conversion, perseverance, and final glorification? Is there any dimension of your salvation, any element of the faith you exercise, the repentance you practice, or the holiness you pursue, that you are inclined to attribute to your own initiative rather than to the sovereign grace that the Canons' doxology ascribes to God alone? And if so, what specific biblical text or Reformed doctrinal argument most directly addresses that inclination?

Key Texts: *John 6:37, 44, 65; Romans 9:6–24; Ephesians 2:1–5, 8–9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:25; Romans 9:16; Philippians 2:13; Acts 11:18; John 1:13; 3:3–8*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, where would you have located the decisive factor in your own conversion, in the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit who created your faith, or in your own free decision to believe? How has the study of the Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Arminian alternatives and the Reformed response to them clarified, challenged, or confirmed your prior understanding of your own salvation? And what specific dimension of the monergistic account of salvation do you find most pastorally significant for your own ministry context?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read John 6:35–45 carefully and identify every specific statement Jesus makes about who can come to Him. What does verse 37 establish about the relationship between the Father’s giving and the Son’s receiving (“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me”)? What does verse 44 establish about the condition for coming to Jesus (“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him”)? What does the word “can” (*dunatai*) in verse 44 establish about the character of the inability, is it a strong disinclination or a constitutional impossibility? And what does verse 65 add to verse 44 (“No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father”), specifically, what does “granted” (*dedomenon*, perfect passive participle) establish about the source and the character of the capacity for coming?
3. Read Romans 9:6–24 and trace the logical structure of Paul’s argument. What does the Isaac/Ishmael example (verses 7–9) establish about the character of the divine promise, is it based on physical descent or sovereign divine selection? What does the Jacob/Esau example (verses 10–13) establish about the timing and the basis of the divine election, specifically, what does “not because of works but because of Him who calls” (verse 11) establish about the criterion of election? What does verse 16’s conclusion (“it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs”) specifically deny, and what does “but on God who has mercy” specifically affirm? And what does Paul’s response to the second objection of verse 19 (verses 20–24) reveal about his understanding of the creature’s standing to question the Creator’s sovereignty?
4. Read Ephesians 2:8–9 and identify the grammatical antecedents of the phrase “that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Most interpreters take the demonstrative “that” (*touto*) to refer to the entirety of the salvation described in the preceding clause (“by grace you have been saved through faith”) rather than to faith alone (since “faith” in Greek is feminine and *touto* is neuter). If *touto* refers to the entire salvation, grace and faith and saved condition together, what does this establish about the gift character of faith specifically? How does Philippians 1:29’s explicit statement that believing is “granted” to the Philippians support the reading that faith is included in the divine gift? And how does 2 Timothy 2:25’s “if perhaps God may grant them repentance” establish the gift character of repentance alongside the gift character of faith?
5. Read the specific conciliar canons that condemned Semi-Pelagianism and the Arminian positions. Canon 5 of the Council of Orange (529 AD) states: “If anyone says that not only the increase of faith but also its beginning and the very desire for faith, by which we believe in Him who justifies the ungodly and comes to the regeneration of holy baptism, is not in us by the gift of grace, i.e., by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit amending our will and turning it from unbelief to faith, from godlessness to godliness, but is naturally in us, he is opposed to the teaching of the Apostles.” What specific Semi-Pelagian claim does this canon target (the “is naturally in us” clause)? And how does the Reformed doctrine of effectual calling affirm the positive content of this canon (the “by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit amending our will” clause)?
6. Read Acts 16:14’s account of Lydia’s conversion: “A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” Analyze the conversion account in terms of the monergism-synergism question. Who is the agent of the specific action that produces the response (“the Lord opened her heart”)? What is the result of the Lord’s action (“to respond to the things spoken by Paul”, the human response of faith as the result of the divine opening)? And what does the sequence, divine opening producing human response, rather than

human response producing divine assistance, establish about the location of the decisive agency in Lydia's conversion?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson argues that the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace reproduces, within a more sophisticated framework, the fundamental Semi-Pelagian error of locating the decisive factor in salvation in the human will's response to universally available enabling. Evaluate this claim. Is the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace genuinely Semi-Pelagian in its structure, or does the Arminian affirmation of genuine total depravity and the universal distribution of prevenient grace represent a substantially different account that avoids the Semi-Pelagian error? What is the most theologically precise way to identify the structural similarity between Semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism while acknowledging the genuine differences?
8. The Reformed critique of Arminianism argues that the biblical passages used to support prevenient grace (John 1:9; Titus 2:11) do not actually teach the specific doctrine of a universally distributed grace that restores moral freedom. Evaluate this exegetical claim. What are the most plausible alternative readings of John 1:9 and Titus 2:11 from the Reformed perspective? And what would the Arminian need to demonstrate exegetically to establish that these texts do teach the specific doctrine of prevenient grace as Arminius and his followers define it?
9. Romans 9:16's "it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" is among the most frequently disputed texts in the entire Pelagian-Semi-Pelagian-Arminian-Reformed debate. The Arminian typically argues that the verse is addressing the basis of election in the divine nature (God's mercy rather than human merit) rather than the mechanism of salvation (divine monergism rather than synergism). Evaluate the Arminian reading. Does it adequately account for the specific language of the verse ("tou thelontos", of the one who wills; "tou trechontos", of the one who runs), and specifically for the comprehensive exclusion of the human will's role that the verse expresses?
10. The lesson presents the question of who gets the glory as the deepest pastoral stake of the Pelagian-Semi-Pelagian-Arminian-Reformed debate. Evaluate this claim. Is the doxological implication, that the monergistic account gives all the glory to God while the synergistic account divides the glory between God and the human will, the most fundamental stake of the debate, or are there other stakes (assurance, evangelism, the character of prayer) that are equally or more fundamental for pastoral ministry? And how does the doxological frame of the question affect the pastoral urgency of the doctrinal decision?
11. The outline notes that Arminianism was condemned by the Synod of Dort but that Arminian Christians are not by that condemnation excluded from the community of genuine believers. Evaluate the distinction between the heresy of Pelagianism (condemned as outside the bounds of Christian orthodoxy) and the error of Arminianism (rejected by the Reformed confessions but held by genuine believers). What criteria determine whether a theological error is heresy (placing one outside Christian orthodoxy) rather than merely error (a position held within the community of genuine faith despite its deviation from the full biblical account)?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson argues that the Semi-Pelagian pattern, grace is necessary but the human will makes the first move, is not merely a fifth-century error but appears in various forms in contemporary evangelical practice. Identify one specific practice in your ministry context, a specific form of evangelism, a specific pattern of pastoral counsel, a specific piece of worship language, that reflects the Semi-Pelagian structural assumption that the human will's initial response provides the decisive factor in the God-human encounter. Then articulate a specific, pastorally appropriate correction that preserves the genuine human responsibility (the person genuinely believes, genuinely repents, genuinely responds) while locating the decisive agency in the sovereign work of the Spirit that creates the response it calls for.
13. The question of assurance is among the most immediately pastoral stakes of the Pelagian-Semi-Pelagian-Arminian-Reformed debate. Assess the quality of the assurance available on each account: (a) On the

Arminian account, where does the believer's assurance rest, and what specific pastoral challenges does the Arminian doctrine of conditional perseverance create for the pastoral care of believers struggling with doubt about their spiritual state? (b) On the Reformed account, where does the assurance rest, specifically, in what sense is the unconditional election and effectual calling of a sovereign God a more stable foundation for assurance than the human will's continued exercise of its freedom? And (c) what specific scriptural passages would you bring to a believer who is struggling with assurance, and how do they speak to the monergism-synergism question in the context of pastoral care for the doubting?

14. The lesson presents the Reformed doctrine as the specific position that gives all the glory of salvation to God alone (*solus Deo gloria*), while the Pelagian, Semi-Pelagian, and Arminian alternatives divide the glory to varying degrees between God and the human will. Evaluate your own pastoral preaching in light of this claim. In your typical presentation of the gospel, whether in a Sunday sermon, a personal evangelistic conversation, or a pastoral counseling session, does your language and theological framework communicate that salvation is entirely God's work (from the first cause of election to the final cause of glorification), or does it communicate a cooperative framework in which the human decision or response provides the decisive element? What specific adjustments in your gospel proclamation would bring it into closer alignment with the comprehensive *solus Deo gloria* of the monergistic account?
15. The Synod of Dort was convened because the Arminian Remonstrance threatened the integrity of the Dutch Reformed Church's confessional foundation. In the context of your own ministry setting, your local church, your denomination, or your broader ministry sphere, identify the specific theological pressure or tendency that most closely corresponds to the Arminian challenge that Dort addressed: the pressure toward a more "human-centered" soteriology, the avoidance of election language out of concern for offense, the implicit decisional-regeneration theology of much contemporary evangelical practice. How would a Dort-caliber confessional clarity about the sovereignty of grace in salvation address this specific pressure in your specific context? And what would pastoral fidelity to the Reformed confessional tradition look like in that specific context?
16. The lesson concludes with Augustine's prayer: "Command what You will, and give what You command." This prayer is the specific doxological expression of the monergistic soteriology: it asks God to provide what He commands, recognizing that the provision must precede and enable the compliance. Reflect on your own prayer life in light of this petition. Do you pray for faith as something that God gives (following Ephesians 2:8–9 and Philippians 1:29) or as something you muster from your own resources and then ask God to assist? Do you pray for the repentance of others as something that God grants (following 2 Timothy 2:25 and Acts 11:18) or as something you are waiting for the other person to generate on their own? What specific adjustments to your theology of prayer, specifically, the prayer for the salvation of specific persons, would the full adoption of the monergistic account produce?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's time of prayer with a slow, meditative reading of Romans 9:6–16, allowing the weight of each element of the passage to settle before moving on. The Isaac and Jacob examples establish that the divine election operates not on the basis of human descent, human works, or human merit but on the basis of the divine call alone, “not because of works but because of Him who calls” (verse 11). The quotation from Exodus (“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”, verse 15) establishes the absolute sovereignty of the divine mercy as the ground of the entire election. And the conclusion of verse 16, “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy”, is the specific doxological summary of the entire passage and the specific ground of the prayer that follows. Receive this summary as the personal, specific, doxologically charged word about your own salvation: it did not depend on you who willed it, or on any wisdom, receptivity, or spiritual sensitivity in you that made you more likely to respond than others. It depended on God who had mercy on you, the same God whose sovereign mercy, according to the same passage, is entirely free of any conditioning by human will, human effort, or human foreseen response.

Pray in three movements that correspond to the three positions this lesson has examined and the Reformed answer that each requires. First, confess the specific ways in which the Pelagian instinct, the assumption that you are capable of genuine spiritual good toward God by the resources of your own natural capacity, has expressed itself in your own spiritual life and ministry. The Pelagian instinct does not typically appear in the crude form of denying grace entirely; it appears in the subtler form of treating prayer, Bible reading, and spiritual discipline as the resources you bring to God in order to generate the spiritual progress you are seeking, rather than as the means of grace through which God provides what He commands. Bring these specific expressions of the Pelagian instinct before the God whose grace is necessary not only for extraordinary spiritual achievement but for every genuine act of obedience, every genuine desire for God, and every genuine movement of the heart toward Him.

Second, confess the specific ways in which the Semi-Pelagian instinct, the assumption that your first movement toward God provides the decisive contribution to your salvation, has affected either your understanding of your own conversion or your practice of evangelism. The Semi-Pelagian instinct in the area of conversion appears as the memory of one's own decision as the moment that decided the matter: “I decided to follow Jesus,” “I made my commitment,” “I accepted Christ”, language that locates the decisive agency in the human decision rather than in the divine opening of the heart. Reframe the memory of your own conversion in the language of Acts 16:14: “The Lord opened my heart to respond to the things that were spoken to me.” The response was real and genuinely mine; the opening that made the response possible was the Lord's sovereign work. Then pray for the specific persons in your evangelistic sphere, asking the God who opened Lydia's heart to do the same specific, sovereign, effectual work in the specific hearts you are naming.

Third, receive Romans 9:16's conclusion as the ground of the specific, monergistic, *solī Deo gloria* prayer that the Reformed doctrine of sovereign grace makes possible: the prayer that does not finally depend on its own eloquence, its own intensity, or the quality of the human experience it is generating, but on the God who has mercy. Pray with the specific confidence of one who knows that the decisive factor in the salvation of every person for whom she is interceding is not the quality of her intercession or the quality of the potential convert's receptivity but the sovereign mercy of the God who “wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4) by the same sovereign agency that the Canons of Dort describe as performing “the whole work of salvation.” And close with the Canons' own doxology, offered as the personal, specific, lesson-concluding response to the sovereignty of grace that the entire lesson has been establishing: “To God, who alone is good, omnipotent, and who is both able and willing to perform the whole work of salvation, and who alone is worthy of all praise, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.” *Solī Deo Gloria*.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.”

Ephesians 1:3–4, NASB 1995

Key Texts: John 6:37, 44, 65; Romans 9:6–24; Ephesians 2:1–5, 8–9; Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 2:25; Romans 9:16; Philippians 2:13; Acts 11:18; Acts 16:14; John 1:13; 3:3–8; Ephesians 1:3–6; Romans 8:28–30

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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