

# Pelagianism\*

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Pelagianism is a religious doctrine taught by Pelagius about A.D. 400. He taught that Adam was created mortal and would have died whether he sinned or not. His sin was not transmitted to his posterity and man can live altogether without sin. Grace or divine aid is not necessary, and man's will is not corrupted. Every child is born in a state of innocence as Adam was, and his perseverance in virtue depends on him.

Arminianism is a heresy originating in the 17th century. It is a liberal reaction to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The Arminians developed the Five articles of Remonstrance in opposition to the 5 points of Calvinism. The articles of the Remonstrance are in short: (1) election and condemnation was conditioned by the rational faith or non-faith of man, (2) the atonement, while qualitatively adequate for all men, was efficacious only for the man of faith, (3) unaided by the Holy Spirit, no person is able to respond to God's will, (4) Grace is not irresistible, and (5) believers are able to resist sin but not beyond the possibility of falling from grace.

Pelagianism and Arminianism are very similar heresies. This will be shown by a comparison of the Arminian articles of Remonstrance and the Pelagian Synod of Arles. I think it is possible that Arminius took the ideas of Pelagius, who lived 1300 years earlier and used them as a basis for his beliefs. Both of these heresies totally deny the five points of Calvinism. Pelagius denied that the whole human race fell with Adam. In this he also denies total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. The Arminian Articles of Remonstrance also deny these five points.

Article I of the Remonstrance denies eternal predestination or unconditional election. The Pelagians also took this stand at the Synod of Arles in 473 when they condemned the belief "that the foreknowledge of God impels men violently towards death." Neither the Arminians nor the Pelagians wanted to admit that the merciful God, the God of love, could condemn a person to eternity.

Article 2 of the Remonstrance claims that Christ died for all men and that he loves them all. This denies limited atonement. The Synod of Arles agrees with this when it condemns the belief that Christ has not undergone death for the salvation of all men.

Article 3 implies that man is not totally depraved, that he can do good. This good that he can do is to accept the offer of grace. Pelagianism says that the labor of human obedience is not to be joined with the grace of God. This, basically, says that man apart from God can do good works.

Article 4 says especially that "grace is not irresistible." The Synod of Arles denies that after the fall of the first man free choice was utterly extinguished.

Article 5 denies perseverance of the saints. The assertion of the Synod of Arles said that he that is saved is in danger. This doctrine takes away the most beautiful and comforting fact from the Christian. The belief that God will preserve us and keep us from the hands of Satan is a most comforting drought.

I think the comparison of the Five articles of Remonstrance and the propositions condemned by the Synod of Arles in 473, shows how closely these heresies, more than 1000 years apart, resemble each other. This also gives evidence that the basic heresies keep cropping up in different forms to try and deceive the orthodox Christian world. It seems that Satan has

done a good job of camouflage as we see how Arminianism is flourishing today.

The Roman Catholic church also adopted the Pelagian ideas in 1547 at the Council of Trent. They condemned those who believe that the free will of man does not cooperate at all by responding to the awakening call of God. In saying this they became synergistic, that man and God must cooperate in man's salvation.

The main opponent of Pelagius was his contemporary Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. He wrote with very strong language against the beliefs of Pelagians. In 417 at the Third Ecumenical Council the doctrines of Pelagius were first condemned. Then at the Council of Orange in 529, twenty-five canons were passed accepting most of Augustine's teachings, a lot of it in his own words. But even here, in Orange, they didn't go along with double predestination. "But not only do we not believe that some have been predestinated to evil by the divine power . . ." They wouldn't accept it that God would will someone to evil.

1. The Pelagians can't go along with the belief of total depravity because they say it would make man careless and profane. Our Heidelberg Catechism teaches against this.

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