

# LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

# MARCH 2025

## The First Controversy: Augustine vs. Pelagius

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The most significant controversy in the early church relating to the doctrine of salvation was the Pelagian controversy. The outcome of this fifth-century dispute shaped every subsequent debate on the subject up to and including the soteriological debates of the sixteenth-century Reformation. On one side of the Pelagian controversy, we find figures

such as Pelagius, Caelestius, and Julian of Eclanum. On the opposing side, we find figures such as Augustine and Jerome. In a later stage of the dispute, John Cassian took a position that has since come to be known as semi-Pelagianism, but for our purposes, we will focus on the most important teaching of the main original figures.

## **Who Was Pelagius?**

Pelagius was a British monk, and understanding something about monasticism is necessary for understanding the context of the Pelagian controversy. In the third century, a Christian ascetic movement began that manifested itself in the development of monasticism. Monks, whether individually or in communities, adopted rigorous ascetic lifestyles that were intended to help them achieve salvation. Asceticism involved all manner of practices intended to help the monk achieve self-discipline over bodily appetites in order that he might achieve union with God.

Augustine did not entirely reject monastic practices, but in Book 10 of his famous *Confessions*, he wrote the now-famous prayer: “Give what You command, and command what You will.” It was a request for God to give Augustine the ability to fulfill His commands. Pelagius believed that such a prayer undermined the entire monastic lifestyle of rigorous self-discipline by giving lazy monks an excuse for not obeying God’s commands: “It’s God’s fault. He didn’t give me the grace to enable me to obey.” Pelagius, therefore, rejected Augustine’s view.

## **Pelagius’ Rejection of Original Sin**

In order to understand the root of the controversy, it is also necessary to understand a few basic teachings of Pelagius (and Caelestius). First, and most importantly, Pelagius rejected any concept of original sin. He had long debated the Manichaeans, who argued that human beings were evil by nature because they have material bodies. In response, Pelagius argued that human beings are good by nature because they are created by God.

By rejecting original sin and the corruption of human nature that resulted from Adam's fall, Pelagius created a doctrine of grace that is not grace at all.

When Pelagius heard teachers like Augustine say that humans were created good, but they were also corrupted as a result of Adam's fall, he thought that sounded too much like Manichaeism. In response, Pelagius said that Adam's sin affected Adam only. He argued that we sin by imitating Adam, but we do so not because our nature has been corrupted. Instead, as children of Adam, we pick up the habit of sinning by imitation, just as children naturally pick up the habits and speech patterns of their parents. Over time, the sin habit, like an accent, becomes ingrained.

### **Pelagius' Unique View of Grace**

Pelagius would deny that his view has no place for God's grace in salvation, but his view of grace can be difficult to understand because it is so different from any other doctrine of grace, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant.

In the first place, according to Pelagius, God's gift of revelation in Scripture is a gracious gift. He didn't have to give us His law. Second, the gift of Jesus is gracious. We now have a new Adam to imitate. If we imitate Jesus, we gradually develop the new habit of obedience, and since Christ was sinless, we too, if we choose rightly, can achieve sinlessness. Third, and most importantly, our very human nature is a gracious gift. We did not ask to be created. Part of our nature is the ability to choose either good or evil. That ability is a gift from God that we did not earn or merit. In other words, God graciously gave us the free will by which we can choose to imitate Jesus rather than Adam. So, even Pelagius would claim to believe that salvation is by grace.

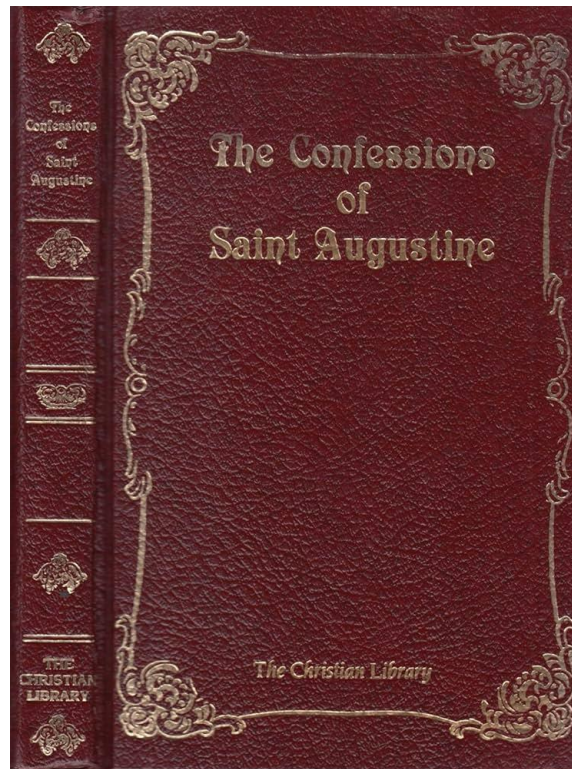
## Augustine's Response

Augustine responded by noting that Pelagius completely failed to understand the nature of humanity's problem, and as a result, he completely failed to understand the solution. By rejecting original sin and the corruption of human nature that resulted from Adam's fall, Pelagius created a doctrine of grace that is not *grace* at all. Augustine insisted that there is an enormous difference between humanity before and after the fall of Adam. He also insisted that Adam's corrupted nature is passed on to all his posterity. For Augustine, grace is a gift given to sinners who do not deserve it.

It's important to understand that Augustine also began to develop the doctrine of grace in ways that would contribute to the development of the medieval ecclesio-sacerdotal system of soteriology that today defines Roman Catholicism. But for our purposes here, the key point in the Pelagian controversy was the insistence on the biblical truth of the doctrine of original sin. This was spelled out in detail in the canons of the Council of Orange (529). Unless the problem is accurately diagnosed, there is no possibility of correctly understanding the solution (the doctrine of salvation).

# ANNOUNCEMENTS: WHAT'S HAPPENING AT LBC?

**BOOK OF THE MONTH**— This month we are featuring **the Confessions of St. Augustine**.



The Confessions of St. Augustine is a landmark in Christian literature, written by one of the most influential figures in early Christianity—St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo. In this work, Augustine lays bare his personal struggles, moral failures, and search for spiritual truth, leading to his conversion to Christianity. It serves as a powerful reflection on sin, redemption, and the role of divine grace in personal transformation.

With its timeless message, this autobiography resonates with readers across generations, offering insights into faith, personal growth, and philosophical questions about the nature of God, memory, and time.

**GUESS WHOS COMING TO DINNER** – This event takes place again on Friday March 7<sup>th</sup>. If you are interested in being a host, or being a guest, be sure to sign up.

**MEN'S BREAKFAST** – The next breakfast will take place on Saturday March 15<sup>th</sup> at 8:30. All men are invited to join us for a time of food, fellowship and growing in the faith.



**LADIES BIBLE STUDY** – This study continues to take place on Friday mornings at 9:30am. Please contact Aprile Dempsey or Janis Sharp for more details.

**EVENING SERVICE** – This month's evening service will take place on March 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7pm. We look forward to a time of singing, study of God's Word and corporate prayer.



**FOOD BANK SUNDAY** – Please remember that March 30<sup>th</sup> is this month’s Food Bank Sunday. Not sure what to bring? A list of items are posted on the Food Bank box at the back of the sanctuary. Cash donations are also gladly welcomed.



**RESOURCES** - Be sure to take advantage of the resource section at the back of the church. This includes material regarding specific life issues and a variety of sermons.

**Please note there has been a major delay in Tabletalk deliveries due to a printing problem experienced by Ligonier Ministries.**

**This is being resolved and we look forward again to the regular shipment of these helpful devotionals.**

**FEB CENTRAL ANNUAL ZOOM MEETING-** The elders will be attending this meeting via zoom on Tuesday March 25<sup>th</sup>. Please keep this in prayer.



### **NEW FEB MISSIONARIES**

This past the year, Pastor Eric and the Elders have been in discussion with the FEB office to set up a partnership with FEB Missionaries. We were particularly made aware of the need for Gospel mission right here in our own nation – particularly in the province of Quebec. Less than 1 percent identify as evangelical Christians. After consultation with the FEB, we are excited to announce the following partnership.



Daniel and Isabelle Dupuis



Daniel and Isabelle live in the greater-Abitibi region of northwestern Québec, in the town of Amos. The desire of their hearts is to fill the Abitibi region with the Gospel.

Ministering within the local church in Val-d'Or, QC they are working to develop disciple-making movements by sharing the love of Christ, discipling those who are open to a relationship with Christ, and equipping and training them as they seek to impact the lives of friends, family members, and contacts around them.

Daniel and Isabelle are also partnering with other believers in the area so that together they can develop disciple-making churches. Daniel writes, *"We want to pass on to them our experience, our skills, and our vision for the region so that everyone can present Christ in their surroundings. My desire is to train an evangelist who will equip others in each local church and work together to enable them to reproduce the process with others in their respective congregations."*

Because the Abitibi region is far from any major centre, they often lack the resources needed to advance the ministry. With this in mind, Daniel has started the process to set up a local training centre in the area that will work in collaboration with SEMBEQ to provide discipleship and leadership training.

