

ANSWERING CRITIQUES OF OUR WORK "MAKING SENSE OF GOD'S ELECTION"

Part II: Answering A Calvinist's Claim That Our Stance On Free Will In Salvation Is Errantly Semi-Pelagian

I. Introduction

- A. Though no Calvinist has critiqued our work as being Semi-Pelagian for its view that human free will authors faith in the salvation process, several over the decades have shared that persuasion with me, so we address it.
- B. We answer this critique here (as follows):

II. Answering A Calvinist's Claim That Our Stance On Free Will In Salvation Is Errantly Semi-Pelagian.

- A. To understand the term "Semi-Pelagian" and the Calvinist's great aversion to human free will in salvation, we note this point of view is deeply rooted in the Pelagius-Augustine controversy of the early fifth century:
 1. A little after A. D. 400, the monk Pelagius, influenced by pagan Stoicism to believe, "If I ought, I can," denied that man inherited original sin from Adam and taught that all men might strive after virtue and held that one was justified by faith alone, but a faith that was a meritorious product of self-discipline. In other words, Pelagius made faith into a kind of meritorious contribution of the sinner to his own salvation. (Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, 1959, p. 168; carm.org/pelagianism)
 2. When Augustine heard of this belief, he began a long polemic against it, arguing that "he had been saved by irresistible divine grace from sins which he could never have overcome by his own strength," Ibid., Walker, p. 169. Augustine and others of his supporters eventually got the Church to condemn Pelagianism as heresy at the Third General Council of Ephesus in A. D. 431, Ibid., p. 169-170.
 3. Yet, many Church leaders opposed the lack of free will in Augustine's belief, so they developed the Semi-Pelagian idea that "God and man co-operate to achieve man's salvation . . . man can make the first move toward God by seeking God out of his own free will, and that man can co-operate with God's grace even to the keeping of his faith through human effort," carm.org/semi-pelagianism; Ibid., Walker, p. 170-171.
 4. Becoming deeply committed to defending God's grace, Augustine wrote that he changed his own initial view of what he considered to be Semi-Pelagianism, the idea that "the faith by which we believe in God is not the gift of God . . . [and by it] obtain the gifts of God" with the view that salvation faith was authored by God "'especially by'" what he saw in 1 Corinthians 4:7 (B. B. Warfield, Calvin and Augustine, 1974, p. 378; brackets ours) His view on the divine authorship of salvation faith later deeply affected his followers.
 5. By the time of the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church had turned fully Pelagian, and the reformer Martin Luther complained, "The monks are really Pelagians. They trust in themselves and their own works, and consequently undermine both the Church and faith." (James Atkinson, The Great Light: Luther and Reformation, 1968, p. 34, citing D. Martin Luthers Werke, Weimar, 1883, v. 56, p. 501, line 17ff.) As we noted in our work "Making Sense of God's Election," Luther and Calvin thus found in Augustine a Church father respected even by the Catholic Church and so appealed to his view on the divine authorship of faith to protect the view of justification by God alone before the Roman Catholic Church.
 6. Understandably, today's Calvinist, like Augustine and the reformers before him, is committed to defending God's grace in salvation. However, as we noted in our work, his doing so by holding to his view that faith is authored directly by God puts him in an illogical and hence a false stance on election and predestination!
 7. Then, we also noted in our work that Augustine's finding God's authoring salvation faith in 1 Corinthians 4:7 where nothing in that context speaks of salvation faith was evidently influenced by his pagan Neo-platonism and its pantheistic tendency where man is somewhat like a mere extension of God.
 8. However, our "Making Sense of God's Election" work has shown not only that making faith authored by God as in Augustinianism and Calvinism produces an illogical and hence a false view of faith, election and predestination, but also that faith is not meritorious, that God alone saves the sinner, meaning we stand against both the Augustinian-Calvinist as well as the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian schools of thought!
- B. In summary, then, since our work, "Making Sense of God's Election" shows that the salvation of the sinner is entirely the work of God, not the work of man, that faith is utterly unable to produce anything in the saving of the soul, we assert that man alone authors his own faith and God saves him totally apart from any human merit or work, including that man's faith itself. Our position is thus not Semi-Pelagian.

Lesson: Our work "Making Sense of God's Election" is not errantly Semi-Pelagian simply because we assert that man freely authors his own faith, for, *UNLIKE both historical Semi-Pelagian and Pelagian views, we hold that faith is simply not a meritorious entity, that only God saves the sinner in His pure grace.*