

THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION (SIN AND GRACE)
Part I: The Church Fathers and Apologists

Summary:

- I. INTRODUCTION.**
- II. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.**
- III. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE APOLOGISTS.**
 - A. The Major Apologists in the East.
 - B. The Major Apologists in the West.
- IV. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE THEOLOGIANS.**
- V. CONCLUSION.**

I. INTRODUCTION.

The doctrines of sin and grace are vitally and inseparably linked. The history of the Christian Church has vividly illustrated that misconception and error in the doctrine of sin results in damage to the doctrine of redemption. Hutchinson captured this vital linkage when he said (*Problem of Original Sin*, 1), “The character of salvation which is in Christ can never be properly comprehended apart from sin which is in the sons of Adam.” Fisher noted (*New Englander*. 27, 468): “The one word which expresses both the nature and end or aim of Christianity is Redemption. The Correlate of Redemption is sin. Parallel, therefore, in importance with the doctrine of Redemption in the Christian system is the doctrine of sin. The two doctrines, like the facts which they represent, are mutually inseparable.” Alteration in the biblical teaching on the nature and capacity of man will inevitably bring changes in the content and appeal of gospel preaching.

It is to these vital doctrines, the heart of the gospel message, that our attention now turns to determine how the church has defined and formulated the nature of sin in man and the nature of the reception of salvation grace. Today, we trace the embryonic formulations prior to the definitive work of Augustine.

II. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE CHURCH FATHERS.

As the Church Fathers have evidenced a theological vagueness, a non-speculative spirit, in the previous doctrines that we have studied, it is also true of the doctrines of sin and grace. Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 163): “For the most part, however, they are rehearsing the clichés of catechetical instruction, so that what they say smacks more

of affirmation than explanation. While taking it for granted that men are sinful, ignorant and in need of true life, they never attempt to account for their wretched plight.”

A. In the West

1. **Clement of Rome**, who has given us the epistle *To the Corinthians*, (ca. 96/98 A.D.), grants that men are in need of divine blessing, that “they may obtain thy favor” [chapter 61], which is only granted through Christ [chapter 16: “Ye see, dearly beloved, what is the pattern that hath been given unto us; for, if the Lord was thus lowly of mind, what should we do, who through Him have been brought under the yoke of His grace”].
2. **The Shepherd of Hermas** seems to conceive sin as outward acts and an inward desire, sins and sin; Hermas is the only Father to broach an idea of a sin nature with a rabbinical concept of a wicked imagination or desire (*Mandate*. 12.1, 1; 12.2, 2). Yet salvation is seen in a moral self-motivated context (*Mandate*. 12.6, 2). “If ye turn unto the Lord with your whole heart, and work righteousness the remaining days of your life, and serve Him rightly according to His will, He will give healing to your former sins and ye shall have power to master the works of the devil.”

B. In the East

1. **The Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 117–32 A.D.)** contains the only hint that the Fathers connected man’s plight to the narrative of Genesis 3, but this reference is indirect [chapter 12: “For the Lord caused all manner of serpents to bite them, and they died forasmuch as the transgression was wrought in Eve through the serpent”]. He later suggests that the souls of infants are sinless [chapter 6: “He renewed us in the remission of sins, He made us to be a new type, so that we should have the soul of children”]. In a somewhat clear passage he wrote (chapter 16): “But let us inquire whether there be any temple of God. There is; in the place where He Himself undertakes to make and finish it. For it is written; And it shall come to pass, when the week is being accomplished, the temple of God shall be built gloriously in the name of the Lord. I find then that there is a temple. How then shall it be built in the name of the Lord? Understand ye. Before we believed on God, the abode of our heart was corrupt and weak, a temple truly built by hands; for it was full of idolatry and was a house of demons, because we did whatsoever was contrary to God. But it shall be built in the name of the Lord. Give heed then that the temple of the Lord my be built gloriously. How? Understand ye. By receiving a remission of our sins and hoping on the Name we became new, created afresh from the beginning. Wherefore God dwelleth truly in our habitation within us. How? The word of His faith, the calling of His promise, the wisdom of the ordinances, the commandments of the teaching, He Himself prophesying

in us, He Himself dwelling in us, opening for us who had been in bondage unto death the door of the temple, which is the mouth, and giving us repentance leadeth us to the incorruptible temple. For he that desireth to be saved looketh not to the man, but to Him that dwelleth and speaketh in him, being amazed at this that he has never at any time heard these words from the mouth of the speaker, nor himself ever desired to hear them. This is the spiritual temple built up to the Lord”.

Yet at the same time salvation is conceived within a moral context, Christ the new lawgiver. He wrote (chapter 19), “Thou shalt work with thy hands for a ransom for thy sins.”

2. **The Homily of Clement (ca. 150 A.D.)** has some particularly interesting statements relative to sin and salvation. This homily recognizes that all mankind is sinful and full of evil lust (13:1): “We are full of much folly and wickedness”. This state of sinfulness calls forth loudly for repentance which is not so much a change of mind as a change of habits by good works (16:4): “Almsgiving therefore is a good thing, even as repentance from sin. Fasting is better than prayer, but almsgiving than both. And love covereth a multitude of sins, but prayer out of a good conscience delivereth from death. Blessed is every man that is found full of these. For almsgiving lifteth off the burden of sin.” Again, 8:6: “Keep the flesh pure and the seal (baptism) unstained, to the end that we may receive life.” On, (6:9): “But if even such righteous men as these cannot by their righteous deeds deliver their children, with what confidence shall we, if we keep not our baptism pure and undefiled, enter unto the Kingdom of God? On who shall be our advocate, unless we be found having holy and righteous works”.

N.B. Other examples can be cited, but the evidence suggests that the Fathers did not understand the nature and extent of sin. A better charge is perhaps vagueness. Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 163): “Similarly, while enumerating all sorts of benefits bestowed by Christ, the Apostolic Fathers nowhere co-ordinate their main ideas or attempt to sketch a rationale of salvation.” Seeberg gives us this general summary (*History*. 1, 78-79): “There is a general agreement also as to the sinfulness and misery (especially death) of the human race, which is, through its disobedience, lost to God and given over to the folly of idolatry, the power of devils, and eternal perdition. The salvation which Christ has obtained and brought to men is quite differently described: (a) Forgiveness of sins through baptism, new creation. In *Hermas* and 2 *Clement*, only the sins of the past are included. There is a great lack of clearness in conception; it is particularly noticeable that the significance of the forgiveness of sins for the

whole subsequent Christian life is greatly obscured.

‘Righteousness’ is always merely an active, actual righteousness.

(b) Communion with God, the indwelling of the Father, or Christ, or the Spirit in the heart (Ignatius, Hermas). (c) Knowledge of God as the One God, the Creator, Lord, Father, etc. (d) The new law.

(e) Eternal life as the reward of moral living”.

III. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE APOLOGISTS.

The universality of human sinfulness and the need of divine grace in Christ in order to be delivered from it was acknowledged in a general form by the church. In constructing a more specific statement, the Ancient Church showed two great tendencies: one characteristically Eastern, the other Western. The questions were these: Is man’s power to good diminished by sin, and, if so, to what extent? and What is the precise relation which the agency of human will sustains to the workings of the Holy Spirit in regeneration?

A. The Major Apologists in the East.

Of the Apologists, Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 166): “Their general view of human nature is dichotomist; they consider it to be a compound of two elements, body and soul. And they are unanimous that man is endowed with free-will.”

N.B. Context: The Apologists and Gnosticism. To understand the Apologist stress on free will is to understand that they were refuting the Gnostics who asserted that man was created sinful and that he had no free will. The Apologists refuted these views without much reference to the consequences of human apostasy in the moral agent, and the human will itself. Shedd wrote (*History*, 2, 29): “It was a natural consequence of this polemic attitude towards Gnosticism, that the anthropology of the second and third centuries of both the Western and the Eastern Church was marked by a very strong emphasis of the doctrine of human freedom. At a time when the truth that man is a responsible agent was being denied by the most subtle opponents which the Christian theologian of the first centuries was called to meet, it was not to be expected that very much reflection would be expended upon that side of the subject of sin which relates to the weakness and bondage of the apostate will”.

1. **Justin Martyr (ca. 100–ca. 165 A.D.)** has a rather fully developed anthropology and soteriology. He argued that man has no choice in being born but that we have a choice, ability, to select the good as opposed to the evil. He wrote (*Apology*, I, 10): “But we have learned from tradition that God has no need of the material gifts of men, since we see that He is the

Giver of all things. We have been taught, are convinced, and do believe that He approves of only those who imitate His inherent virtues, namely, temperance, justice, love of man, and any other virtue proper to God who is called by no given name. We have also been instructed that God, in the beginning, created in His goodness everything out of shapeless matter for the sake of men. And if men by their actions prove themselves worthy of His plan, they shall, we are told, be found worthy to make their abode with Him and to reign with Him, free from all corruption and pain. Just as in the beginning He created us when we were not, so also, we believe, He will consider all those who choose to please Him, because of their choice, to be worthy of eternal life in His presence. Our creation was not in our own power. But this—to engage in those things that please Him and which we choose by means of the intellectual faculties He has bestowed to us—this makes our conviction and leads us to faith. Indeed, we think it is for the good of all men that they are not prevented from learning these things, but are even urged to consider them. For, what human laws were unable to effect, the Divine Word would have accomplished, had not the evil demons enlisted the aid of the various utterly evil inclinations, which are in every man by nature, and scattered many false and ungodly accusations—none of which, however, applies to us”.

This implies free will then is the basis of God’s dealings with men (*Apology*. I, 28): “Indeed in the beginning when He created man, He endowed him with the power of understanding, of choosing the truth, and of doing right; consequently, before God no man has an excuse if he does evil, for all men have been created with the power to reason and to reflect. If anyone does not believe that God takes an interest in these things, he will be some artifice imply either that God does not exist, or that though He does exist, he takes delight in evil, or that He is (as unmoved) as stone, and that neither virtue nor vice is a reality, but that things are considered good or bad only in the opinion of men: this indeed would be the height of blasphemy and injustice”.

N.B. Foreknowledge is defined as foresight; that is, that God does not so much predetermine man’s actions as foresee how by their own volitions they are going to act and so announces it beforehand. He wrote (*Apology*. I, 84): “Plato, too, when he stated: ‘To him who chooses belongs the guilt, but in God there is no guilt,’ borrowed the thought from the Prophet Moses. Indeed, Moses is more ancient than all the Greek authors, and everything the philosophers and poets said in speaking about the immortality of the soul, or retribution after death, or speculation on celestial matters, or other similar doctrines, they took from the Prophets as the source of information, and from them they have been able to understand and explain these matters. Thus, the seeds of truth seem to be among

all men, but that they did not grasp their exact meaning is evident from the fact that they contradict themselves. So, if we declare that future events have been predicted, by that we do not claim that they take place by the necessity of fate. But, since God has foreknowledge of what all men will do, and has ordained that each man will be rewarded in accordance with the merit of his actions, foretells through the Prophetic Spirit that He Himself will reward them in accordance with the merit of their deeds, ever urging him to reflection and remembrance, proving that He both cares and provides for them”.

Martyr has little conception of Original Sin and treats the sin of Adam and Eve, yielding to the devil's devices, as simply a prototype of our sin. The nearest he comes to a corporate conception of sin is the assertion of a universal propensity conditioned by our environment (i.e., “children of necessity,” but no innate sinfulness). He wrote (*Apology*. I, 61): “We were totally unaware of our first birth, and were born of necessity from fluid seed through the mutual union of our parents, and were trained in wicked and sinful customs. In order that we do not continue as children of necessity and ignorance, but of deliberate choice and knowledge, and in order to obtain in the water the forgiveness of past sins, there is invoked over the one who wishes to be regenerated, and who is repentant of his sins, the name of God, the Father and Lord of all; he who leads the person to be baptized to the laver calls him by this name only”.

2. **Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–211/16 A.D.).** Shedd summarized Alexandrine anthropology when he wrote (*History*. 2, 31): “The most unqualified position, in reference to the power of free will in apostate man, was taken by the Alexandrian School. This was partly the result of the excessive speculative theology by which this school was characterized, and partly of its collision with Gnosticism.”

Clement understands that Adam was not created in perfected, uncontested holiness, but able to acquire virtue to enter into a state of salvation. The fault of our parents was that they used their wills errantly (i.e., indulged in sex). Therefore, they lost the immortal life of Paradise and their wills became prey to sinful passions. All men have a spark of the divine in them and are free to obey or disobey god's law. He understands that infants are exempt from sin as he stated (*The Instructor*. 4, 26): “The righteous Job said: ‘Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there;’ not naked of possessions, for that were a trivial and common thing; but, as a just man, he departs naked of evil and sin, and of the unsightly shape which follows those who have led bad lives. For this was what was said, ‘Unless ye be converted, and become as children,’ pure in flesh, holy in soul by abstinence from evil deeds; showing that He would have us to

be such as also He generated us from our mother—the water. For the intent of one generation succeeding another is to immortalize by progress”.

Kelley wrote (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 180): “His teachings seem to be that, through our physical descent from Adam and Eve, we inherit, not indeed their guilt and curse but a disordered sensuality which entails the dominance of the irrational element in our nature.” Clement also insists upon the necessity of divine influences in order to deliverance from sin, because, although man is able to commence moral improvement by the resolute decision of his will, he cannot bring it to completion without the aid of divine grace. ‘God,’ he remarked, ‘co-operates with those souls that are willing.’ ‘As the physician furnishes health to that body which synergizes towards health (by a recuperative energy of its own), so God furnishes eternal salvation to those who synergize towards the knowledge and obedience of the truth.’ In these extracts, which might be multiplied, Clement teaches that the initiative, in the renewal and change of the sinful heart, is taken by the sinner himself. The first motion towards holiness is the work of man, but it needs to be succeeded and strengthened by the influences of the Holy Spirit. Whenever, by virtue of its own inherent energy, the soul is itself willing, then God co-operates, and concurs with this willingness”.

Shedd summarized his views as follows (*History*. 2, 32-38): “Man, like every other spiritual being, can never lose the power of arbitrary choice. By means of this power, noble minds, at all times, here and hereafter, aided by that Divine Power which is indispensable to success, are lifting themselves up from ignorance and deep moral corruption, and are drawing nearer to God and the truth”.

3. **Origen (ca. 185–253/4 A.D.)** maintained an eternal concept of the origin of the soul (pre-existence). Universal sinfulness is explained by a precosmic Fall (i.e., no corporate sinfulness). Men are pure intelligences fallen from their splendor and united with bodies (*First Principles*. 2, 6): “Before the ages they were all pure intelligences (noe”), whether demons or souls or angels. One of them, the Devil, since he possessed free-will, chose to resist God, and God rejected him. All the other powers fell away with him, becoming demons, angels and archangels according as their misdeeds were more, or less, or still less, heinous. Each obtained a lot proportionate to his sin. There remained the souls; these had not sinned so grievously as to become demons or so venially as to become angels. God therefore made the present world, binding the soul to the body as a punishment. . . . Plainly He chastises each to suit his sin, making one a demon, another a soul, another an archangel”.

In short, unlike Clement and Western Apologists, Origen denies that Genesis account of the Fall. Origen holds that the human will includes both holy and sinful tendencies; that is, the will is the ultimate efficient cause of action. He postulated, like Clement, that every act is a mixture of self choice and divine aid. He wrote (*First Principles*. 2, 9, 6): “We however are mere men; but since we do not wish to encourage the insolence of the heretics by keeping silent, we shall reply as best we can to their objections with such arguments as come to mind. In our earlier chapters we have repeatedly shown, with assertions which we are able to draw from the divine Scriptures, that God the creator of all things is good, just and omnipotent. When ‘in the beginning’ he created those things which he wised to create, that is, rational beings, he had no cause for creating them but himself, that is, his goodness. Since he himself, in whom there was neither variety, change or incapacity, was the cause of the beings which he was about to create, all the beings which he created were created similar and equal’ for he had no cause for variety or diversity. But, as we have frequently shown and as we shall discuss again at the proper point, these rational creatures were endowed with the faculty of free choice; and they were induced, each one by his one free will, either to imitate God and so to advance or to ignore him and so to fall. This, as we have already said, was the cause of the diversity between rational creatures; its origin lay not in the will or judgment of the creator, but in the choice made by the creature’s own freedom. God then felt it just to order his creation in accordance with merit. So he drew the diversity of rational beings together into the harmony of a single world, in order to furnish out of these diverse vessels or souls or minds one ‘house,’ so to speak, in which there should be ‘not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earthenware, and some for noble use, some for ignoble’ (2 Tim. 2:20)”.

B. The Major Apologists in the West.

1. **Tertullian (ca. 155–240/60 A.D.)** is perhaps the most outstanding figure in the West. As to the origin of the soul, he rejected Origen’s pre-existence theory and advocated a “traducianism” (i.e., sin is transferred from Adam as a unit with the body). Out of this concept of the origin of the soul comes Tertullian’s maximum. *Tradux animal, tradux peccate* (the propagation of the soul implies propagation of sin), that is innate sin and the soul’s origin are compliments. Shedd wrote (*History*. 2, 44-45): “His argument, drawn out in full, was as follows. If there can be a traduction of the soul, there can be a traduction of sin. If a free-agent follows the agent, and shares in all its characteristics. if, therefore, there be nothing in a continuous process of transmission from a generic unity that is incompatible with the nature of a rational and voluntary essence like the soul, then there is nothing in such transmission that is incompatible with

the activity of such an essence, or, in other words, with the voluntariness of sin. If God can originate the entire human nature by the method of creation, and then can individualize this nature by the method of procreation, it follows that he can preserve all the qualities of the nature,—its rationality, its immateriality, its freedom, &c.,—in each of its individualizations, and from one end of the process to the other; for preservation is comparatively less difficult than creation from nothing. In other words, if mind, considered as an immaterial substance, does not lose its distinctive qualities by being procreated, but continues to be intelligent, rational, and voluntary at every point in the process, and in every one of its individualizations, then it follows that the activities and products of such a mental essence do not cease to be rational and responsible activities and products, though exhibiting themselves in that unbroken continuity which marks a propagation. It is evident that everything depends upon the correctness of the hypothesis that there is a *tradux animae*,—that man is one generic nature as to his spiritual part as well as his physical, and that his entire humanity is procreated. Hence the importance attached to the Traducian theory of the origin of the soul, by Tertullian, and the earnestness with which he maintained it”.

Having said this much Tertullian was not consistent in his views, because he did allow for free will. While he holds that the human nature bears stain (“every soul is counted as being in Adam until it is re-counted as being in Christ, and remains unclean until it is re-counted” (*Soul*, 40) and demonic influence, he speaks of human ability to effect change. “Some things are by virtue of the divine compassion, and some things are by virtue of our agency” (*Soul*, 21). Elsewhere he seems to minimize the human will for a monergistic theory of regeneration (*Soul*, 21): “And thus stones shall become the children of Abraham, if they be formed by the faith of Abraham, and the progeny of vipers shall bring the poison of their malignity. But this involves the energy of divine grace, more powerful than that of nature, and which holds in subjection to itself that free power of will within us which is denominate autexousion.”

In summary Kelley stated (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 176): “Thus Tertullian takes the view that, while Adam received from God true human nature in its integrity, the nature he passed on to his descendants is vitiated by an inclination to sin; an ‘irrational element’ has settled in the soul (*irrationale autem . . . coadoleverit in anima ad instar iam naturalitatis*). He is more explicit and outspoken about his sinful bias than previous theologians, in whose eyes corruption and death seem to have been the principal legacy of the Fall; but, although there has been much difference of opinion on this question, his language about ‘our participation in (Adam’s) transgression’, and about the ‘impurity’ of unbaptized infants,

can hardly be read as implying our solidarity with the first man in his culpability (i.e., original guilt) as well as in the consequences of his act.”

2. **Irenaeus (ca. 140–202)** following Tatian and Theophilus, teaches that man was created in the divine image with supernatural endowments and likeness (i.e., reason and free will) to God. The essence of Adam’s sin was disobedience that plunged the entire race to ruin (“through the disobedience of that one man . . . the many were made sinners and lost life” (*Against Heresies*. 3, 18, 7). In the Fall the image of God was destroyed, but remnants of the “likeness” (i.e., will) remain. He stated his concept of anthropology-soteriology thusly (*Against Heresies*. 4, 38, 3): “By this arrangement, therefore, and these harmonies, and a sequence of this nature, man, a created and organized being, is rendered after the image and likeness of the uncreated God,—the Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit nourishing and increasing (what is made), but man making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One. For the Uncreated is perfect, that is, God. Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover (from the disease of sin); and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is he who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality, but immortality renders one nigh unto God”.

He further added (*Against Heresies*. 4, 37, 1): “This expression (of our Lord), ‘How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldest not,’ set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free (agent) from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will (toward us) is present with Him continually. And therefore does He give good counsel to all. And in man, as well as in angels, he has placed the power of choice (for angels are rational beings), so that those who had yielded obedience might justly possess what is good, given indeed by God, but preserved by themselves. On the other hand, they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious, but poured contempt upon His supereminent goodness. Rejecting therefore the good, and as it were spuing it out, they shall all deservedly incur the just judgment of God, which also the Apostle

Paul testifies in his Epistle to the Romans, where he says, ‘But dost thou despise the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, being ignorant that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.’ ‘But glory and honour,’ he says, ‘to every one that doeth good.’ God therefore has given that which is good, as the apostle tells us in this epistle, and they who work it shall receive glory and honour, because they have done that which is good when they had it in their power not to do it; but those who did it not shall receive the just judgment of God, because they did not work good when they had it in their power so to do”.

He further stated (*Against Heresies*. 4, 37, 3), “All such passages demonstrate the independent will of man.”

N.B. Irenaeus does suggest a solidarity between Adam and the race. Irenaeus sees man as a debtor in Adam (*Against Heresies*. 5, 16, 3): “And not but the aforesaid things alone has the Lord manifested himself, but (He has done this) also by means of His passion. For doing away with (the effects of) that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, ‘He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;’ rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience, which was (wrought out) upon the tree (of the cross). Now He would not have come to do away, by means of that same (image), the disobedience which had been incurred towards our Maker if He proclaimed another Father. But inasmuch as it was by these things that we disobeyed God, and did not give credit to His word, so was it also by these same that He brought in obedience and consent as respects His Word; by which things He clearly shows forth God Himself, whom indeed we had offended in the first Adam, when he did not perform His commandment. In the second Adam, however, we are reconciled, being made obedient even unto death. For we were debtors to none other but to Him whose commandment we had transgressed at the beginning”.

IV. THE DOCTRINES OF SALVATION IN THE THEOLOGIANS.

It is in the period of the theologians that the doctrines of sin and grace are most clearly delineated. Most particularly in the theological conflict between Augustine and Pelagius. Before we turn to that crucial conflict, a word is in order about some other theologians in the era.

A. “Sin and Grace” before Augustine and Pelagius**1. In the East**

- a) **Athanasius (ca. 295–373 A.D.)** speaks of a solidarity of relationship between Adam’s first sin and the race (*Incarnation. 4, 6*), “Thus death wielded its power more and more, and corruption gathered force against men; the human race went to destruction, and man, rational and made in the image of the Word, began to perish.” Athanasius does not suggest that man participates in Adam’s actual guilt, his moral culpability, nor does he exclude the possibility of men living entirely without sin.
- b) **Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89 A.D.)** understands that the entire race participated in Adam’s first sin and fall (*Oration. 33, 9*): “But I am so old fashioned and such a philosopher as to believe that one heaven is common to all; and that so is the revolution of the sun and the moon, and the order and arrangement of the stars; and that all have in common an equal share and profit in day and night, and also change of seasons, rains, fruits, and quickening power of the air; and that the flowing rivers are a common and abundant wealth of all; and that one and the same is the Earth, the mother and the tomb, from which we were taken, and to which we shall return, none having a greater share than another. And further, above this, we have in common reason, the Law, the Prophets, the very Sufferings of Christ, by which we were all without exception created anew, who partake of the same Adam, and were led astray by the serpent and slain by sin, and are saved by the heavenly Adam and brought back by the tree of shame to the tree of life from whence we had fallen”.

To the fall, he traces a weakness of the will (i.e., ignorance and power). He wrote (*Oration. 45, 8*): “This being He placed in paradise—whatever that paradise may have been (having honoured him with the gift of free will, in order that good might belong to him as a result of his choice, no less than to Him Who had implanted the seeds of it)—to till the immortal plants, by which is perhaps meant the Divine conceptions, both the simpler and the more perfect; naked in his simplicity and in artificial life’ and without any covering or screen; for it was fitting that he who was from the beginning should be such. And He gave Him a Law, as material for his free will to act upon. This Law was a commandment as to what plants he might partake of, and which one he might not touch. This latter was the Tree of Knowledge;

not, however, because it was evil from the beginning when planted; nor was it forbidden because God grudged it to men—let not the enemies of God wag their tongues in that direction, or imitate the serpent. but it would have been good if partaken of at the proper time; for the Tree was, according to my theory, Contemplation, which it is only safe for those who have reached maturity of habit to enter upon; but which is not good for those who are still somewhat simple and greedy; just as neither is solid food good for those who are yet tender and have need of milk. But when through the devil’s malice and the woman’s caprice, to which she succumbed as the more tender, and which she brought to bear upon the man, as she was the more apt to persuade—alas for my weakness, for that of my first father was mine; he forgot the commandment which has been given him, and yielded to the baleful fruit; and for his sin was banished at once from the tree of life, and from paradise, and from God; and put on the coats of skins, that is, perhaps, the coarser flesh, both mortal and contradictory. And this was the first thing which he learnt—his own shame—and he hid himself from God. Yet here too he makes a gain, namely death and the cutting off of sin, in order that evil may not be immortal. Thus, his punishment is changed into a mercy, for it is in mercy, I am persuaded, that God inflicts punishment”.

Gregory then stressed sovereignty and free will (*Oration. 37, 13*): “All men, He saith, cannot receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. When you hear this, It is given, do not understand it in a heretical fashion, and bring in differences of nature, the earthly and the spiritual and the mixed. For there are people so evilly disposed as to think that some men are of an utterly ruined nature, and some of a nature which is saved, and that others are of such a disposition as their will may lead them to, either to the better, or to the worse. For that men may have a certain aptitude, one more, another less, I too admit; but not that this aptitude alone suffices for perfection, but that it is reason which calls this out, that nature may proceed to action, just as fire is produced when a flint is struck with iron. When you hear, To whom it is given, add, to those who incline that way. For when you hear, Not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy, I counsel you to think the same. For since there are some who are so proud of their successes that they attribute all to themselves and nothing to Him that made them and gave them wisdom and supplied them with good such are taught by this word that even to wish well needs help from God; or rather that even to choose what is right is divine and a gift of the mercy of God. For it is necessary both that we should be of God.

This is why He saith not of him that willeth; that is, not of him that willeth only, nor of him that runneth only, but also of God. That sheweth mercy. Next; since to will also is from God, he has attributed the whole to God with reason. However much you may run, however much you may wrestle, yet you need one to give the crown. Except the Lord build the house, they laboured in vain that built it: Except the Lord keep the city, in vain they watched that keep it. I know, He says, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor the victory to the fighters, nor the harbours to the good sailors; but to God it belongs both to work victory, and to bring the barque safe to port”.

- c) **Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395)** understands that the race does share in Adam’s fall by a diseased propensity. He wrote (*Of the Beatitudes*, 6): “Evil was mixed with our nature from the beginning. . . through those who by their disobedience introduced the disease. Just as in the natural propagation of the species each animal engenders its like, so man is born from man, a being subject to passions from a being subject to passions, a sinner from a sinner. Thus sin takes its rise in us as we are born; it grows with us and keeps us company till life’s term”.

- N.B.** Kelley understands that the theologians in the East advocated a synergistic view of the will (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 351-52): “Though falling short of Augustinianism, there was here the outline of a real theory of original sin. The fathers might well have filled it in and given it greater sharpness of definition had the subject been directly canvassed in their day. A point on which they were all agreed was that man’s will remains free; we are responsible for our acts. This was a vital article in their anti-Manichaeism propaganda, but it raised the question of man’s need of divine grace. The issue is usually posed in the terms which the later Augustinian discussion has made familiar, and so viewed their position was that grace and free will co-operate”.

2. In the West

- N.B.** It should be stated that in the West, Gnosticism did not pose such a potent threat; hence, the church moved to a monergistic concept of soteriology. The pressure from Gnosticism was less heavy, and the attention of theologians was being turned more to the effects of sin upon the will itself. As a consequence, less emphasis was placed upon the doctrine of human power and more upon that of divine grace.

- a) **Ambrose (340–397 A.D.)** appears much clearer than theologians of the East in the solidarity of the race with Adam. He wrote (*Exposition on Luke. 7, 234*), “Adam existed and in him we all existed; Adam perished, and in him all perished”. Again, (*On the Death of Satyrus. 2, 6*): “In Adam I fell, in Adam I was cast out of Paradise, in Adam I died. How should God restore me, unless He find in my Adam, justified in Christ, exactly as the first Adam I was subject to guilt and destined to death?” And yet he at times speaks advocating a synergism (*Exposition on Luke. 2, 84*): “In everything the Lord's power cooperates with man's efforts; our free will gives us either a propensity to virtue or an inclination to sin.” In numerous passages the grace of salvation will only come to those who make the effort to bestir themselves”.
- b) **Hilary (d. 368)** shared the common theological opinions of Adam's origin and state, but is strongly given to synergistic impulses (i.e., assisting-cooperating grace). He wrote (Psalm 119): “In preserving our righteousness, unless we are guided by God, we shall be inferior through our own nature. Wherefore, we need to be assisted and directed by his grace in order to attain the righteousness of obedience. The persevering in faith is of God, but the origin and commencement of faith is from ourselves. It is the part of divine mercy to assist the willing, to confirm those who are making a beginning, to receive those who are approaching. But the commencement is from ourselves, that God may finish and perfect”.

B. “Sin and Grace” in Augustine and Pelagius (next lesson).

V. CONCLUSION.

The purpose of this lesson has been to introduce the topic of the doctrines of “Sin and Grace” in the early church prior to the full delineation in Augustine and Pelagius. The Church Fathers are, at best, vague and nonspeculative. The Apologists in the East, in their conflict with Gnosticism, so stressed man's created goodness and freedom (against the Gnostic stress on fatalism and material evil) that they did not relate Adam's first sin to posterity and, hence, stressed free will, or at least synergism. The Western Apologists and Theologians, without the negative influence of Gnosticism, were much more free to stress Genesis 3 and Romans 5 (i.e., solidarity of Adam and the race), but still did not see the effect of sin on the race as would Augustine and, thus, stressed assisting or cooperative grace (Synergism). All the early churchmen before Augustine stressed freedom of man within the confines of the “mere” assisting grace of God. Augustine now looms before us!