

AUGUSTINE AND PELAGIUS VIEW ON SALVATION: SALVATION BY GRACE OR WORKS

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Abstract

Salvation is a crucial part to the Christian's life. There are several interpretations according to the term of salvation. We are saved by grace and through faith and our salvation is the gift from God, but the questions arise, if salvation is given by God, why do we have to obey the law of God, is it taking apart for our salvation? What do both Augustine and Pelagius view about salvation? Are they have the same perspective about salvation or not? How does the Seventh-day Adventist outlook about the salvation and how the bible says according to this issue? There are at least 2 arguments that arise related to this discussion. The argument from Pelagius that human effort affects salvation while Augustine's argument states that there is no part at all for humans to get salvation but an absolute gift from God. The purpose of the research paper is to know about salvation that is given by God. Besides that, to compare what is salvation according to Augustine and Pelagius with the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs which is suitable with our doctrine or not. Salvation is an absolute gift of God, so the good deeds produced by human beings are an expression of gratitude for the salvation that God has given.

Keywords: *salvation, grace, faith, good deeds.*

Introduction

Salvation is a crucial part of our religious life mainly as Christian believers. Sometimes people do not concern about this. Although, we go to the church every worship, read the bible every time, but we do not understand many doctrines. One of the doctrines that we sometimes do not recognize is salvation. Many Christians tend to lack this doctrine. Nowadays, churches have been teaching about this doctrine but the people who are come into the churches forget about salvation. What salvation is, and how to reach salvation, by faith or works? Sometimes, we have these questions appearing in our minds. Because of these confusing questions, several people chose to leave the church and become apostates.

During the Protestant Reformation in the early 1500s, a familiar term regarding salvation was "sola fide," Latin for "by faith alone." The reformers, at that time, accused the Catholic Church of departing from the "simple purity of the Gospel" of Jesus Christ.

According to them, we have been saved by God through faith alone they explained this faith as "the confidence of man because God will forgive sins because of Christ's sake."¹

According to Ephesians 2:8-9², we are saved by grace. Therefore, the Protestant reformers were defending their selves from the teaching of the Catholic Church about salvation by works. Because of this polemic, many of the Christian believers bemused what is the truth. This paper will be explained about salvation according to Augustine and Pelagius. Both were prominent scholars and got more attention mainly for their opinion and perspectives about salvation.

Methodology

This study will involve literary and theological while several sources will be taken from the internet. In its literary analysis, an explanation will be offered concerning Augustine and Pelagius' view about salvation. Then, a biblical evaluation of its teaching will be made to understand fully the concept of Salvation and the correlation between their concept and the SDA concept.

Augustine's Background and His Perspectives on Salvation

Augustine was a particular scholar that ever lived in this world. He had many contributions especially in the theological issues that could help the scholars and also his thoughts have been giving enlightenment in the scholarly world. It's better before seeing his arguments about salvation, people should know about his world or background. Who is Augustine? Why did he become a fascinated person in his time? or what about salvation according to his perspectives? These questions will be explained in this chapter.

Augustine Background

In Augustine's era, the province of Africa was an important and prosperous part of the Roman Empire. In theory, the Roman Empire was a realm of peace, justice, and prosperity, founded on Roman law and protected by the Roman Army. We could imagine that Roman was a ruler of the world like the United States today. They had well in the army, fine in financial aspects and no wonder if the Roman Empire was a sovereign. Empire knows this land had prosperity and wealth in whole aspects, so a Roman legion was based in Africa for internal security and to help with engineering and agricultural project.

His early lives

Augustine was born in North Africa on AD 13 November 354, in a Roman-style town 200 miles from the sea and 2,000 feet above it. In those days the place was called Thagsste,

¹Sal Ciresi, "Bible Says Faith and Works Needed for Salvation", accessed May, 22 2021, <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/bible-says-faith-and-works-needed-for-salvation-1015>

²Ephesians 2:8-9: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast.

but today it is the town of Souk-Ahras in Algeria³. He was born in mixed religion; his father was paganism on the other and his mother was a Christian.⁴

His father's name was Patricius. However, he was a famous person, he had good work he was respected by many people in their town but unfortunately, he did not have enough money because he was poor. During his life, he did not deal with Christian. Fortunately, before his death, he converted to Christianity because his wife contributed.

Augustine's mother was Monica. She was married at 12 years old but was 23 Augustine was born. She was getting married when she was young. Augustine was not only the son, but he also had brothers and sisters. One of the touching stories about his mother was when they were first married, Monica was lived with her spouse in his mother's house. However, her relationship with her mother-in-law had been difficult for the first time. But she is still patient and respected.⁵

Augustine's Education

One of the current scholars who study Augustine's life and his thought, his name is Peter Brown, in his book he explained about what is the language that Augustine used he said that some secondary sources say baldly that "Augustine spoke Punic," which they identify with the Semitic language of ancient Carthage. On the other hand, he said no, even he says that the "Punic" to which Augustine and his contemporaries referred as a form of Berber.

In any case, Augustine in later life did seem to need an interpreter to deal with the country people from the non-Latin-speaking parts of his diocese.⁶ Augustine received a Christian education. His mother had him signed with the cross and enrolled among the catechumens.⁷ Once, when very ill, he asked for baptism, but, all danger being soon

³A. Knowles & P. Penket. *Augustine and His World* (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 26.

Souk-Ahras : The name derives from the Arabic word "souk" which means *market*, and the Chaoui Berber word *ahra* (plural *ahras*) which means lion, in reference to the Barbary lions which existed in the neighboring forests until their extinction in 1930; hence *Souk Ahras* means *market of lions*. The old name of the Numidian city of Thagaste, derives from the Berber Thagoust, which means *the bag*, given that the site of the town is located at the foot of a mountain surrounded by three peaks in the form of a bag containing the city. Subsequently, when the Arabic language entered the region it was called *Soukara*. In other sources, it is cited as the Palace of the African. (Accessed June 3, 2021: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Souk_Ahras)

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid, 29.

⁶P. Brown. *Augustine: A Biography* (California: University of California, 2000), 96.

⁷The catechumen is a convert to Christianity receiving training in doctrine and discipline before baptism; one receiving instruction in the basic doctrines of Christianity before admission to communicant membership in a church (*Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "catechumen," accessed June 23, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catechumen>)

passed, he deferred receiving the sacrament, thus yielding to a deplorable custom of the times.⁸ But His growth became the faithful man and tried to give his contributions in the theological perspective by following God's word.

Whereas Augustine's interest in history was confined to what he needed for polemical purposes and what he needed to incorporate in his argumentation, he had a deep interest in theological questions about history, its meaning, and relevance to God's providence and its place in the pattern of the economy of salvation."⁹ Augustine was a phenomenal theology also, because "the influence of Augustine's work and thought profoundly extends beyond the religious matters."¹⁰

Augustine Views on Salvation

Every human being needs salvation. We cannot separate from this. However, since the first man was fallen by sin, they do not have the power to save themselves. When they have fallen, instead of using their power, contrary they are hidden from God. Therefore, man needs salvation from God.

Salvation is taking apart in scholars' perspectives including Augustine. Augustine's views of salvation flow logically from his understanding of the fallen human will: because the will cannot incline toward God of its own accord, God must initiate salvation.¹¹ According to his thought that God has given salvation since man was chosen to deal with sin as a sinner. God-given the man freedom to choose whether it is true or wrong, but the freedom of will was given by Him.

Besides that, God has prepared the solution, if a man chooses to be a sinner, he would be given the way out, that is salvation, and they do not have a part to create their salvation. "Augustine reacted forcefully against Pelagianism, insisting upon the priority of the grace of God at every stage in the Christian life, from its beginning to its end. Human beings did not, according to Augustine possess the necessary freedom to take the initial steps toward salvation."¹² Augustine writes to God in his book, "You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight".¹³

⁸Portalié, Eugène. *Life of St. Augustine of Hippo*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 2. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), accessed 18 July 2021, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02084a.htm>.

⁹Allan D, Fitzgerald, ed. *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishings Co, 1999), 433.

¹⁰Christian, Von Dehsen. *Lives and Legacies* (Phoneix: The Oryx Press, 1999), 16.

¹¹*Augustine: Salvation and the Christian Life*, accessed June 14, 2021, <https://www.theologian-theology.com/theologians/augustine/>

¹²Alister E, McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Chichester: Blackwell Ltd, 2011), 19.

¹³Paul G, Doerksen. *Take and Read Reflecting Theologically on Books* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 99.

He always refers to The Sacred Scripture (Bible) as the main source of his perspective, including the salvation that he has been tried to explain.¹⁴ Augustine saw that salvation as a justification and centered into Christ and He also extended that Christ as the example and mediator between God and humanity that is why salvation only comes from Jesus through Him.¹⁵ Besides that, "Jesus Christ has reconciled human beings to God and rescued them from the power and guilt of sin so that human is freed to follow the example of Christ and share his victory over the powers of evil."¹⁶

Pelagius' Background and His Perspectives on Salvation

Pelagius was born about 354. While his exact birthplace is not known, and this book states that widespread evidence indicates that he came originally from the British Isles, although a few sources suggest he may have been born in Britain in modern France. He was a Culdee Monk¹⁷ and wore the moon-shaped tonsure of that ascetic Celtic Johannine Christian Order. He became better known when he moved to Rome to write and teach about his ascetic practices.

Unfortunately, although he teaches about ascetic practices was welcomed but many opponents against his practices. His teaching about salvation through works became a controversy in scholars' world. He tried to do his best against the concept that talked about salvation could be reached only by God. He had assumptions that salvation could be reached instead by God, man can reach that.

However, the Catholic Church denounced his ideas, and yet the Reformation accused Catholics of adhering to his beliefs and condemned both Pelagius and the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the Eastern Orthodox Church is silent. Pelagius stands, both in reality and in an icon, as a radical dissenter from the traditional view of original sin and the means of salvation.¹⁸

¹⁴"The Sacred Scriptures are the source of our insight into God's dealings with the human race" Allan D, Fitzgerald, ed. *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishings Co, 1999), 433.

¹⁵Donald K, McKim. *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Taught* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 85-86.

¹⁶Ibid, 86.

¹⁷Edward, D'Alton. *Culdees*. The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 4. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), accessed June 18, 2021, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04563b.htm>.

A word so frequently met within histories of the medieval Churches of Ireland and Scotland, and so variously understood and applied, that a well-informed writer (Reeves) describes it as the best-abused word in Scotie church history. The etymology of the term, the persons designated by it, their origin, their doctrines, the rule or rules under which they lived, the limits of their authority and privileges have all been matters of controversy; and on these questions much learning and ability has been shown, and not a little partizan zeal. In the Irish language, the word was written *Ceile-De*, meaning companion, or even spouse, of God, with the Latin equivalent in the plural, *Colidei*, anglicized into *Culdees*.

¹⁸Thomas J, Faulkenbury. *Out of the Mist: Celtic Christianity*, (1992), 52-54.

Pelagius Views on Salvation

Pelagius was one of the ascetic scholars who rejected Augustine's arguments about salvation. Instead of supporting the concept of salvation by Augustine, he has other arguments and through his argument made some scholars have a lack of respect for him. "For Pelagius, however, the situation was very different. Pelagius taught that the resources of salvation are located within humanity. Individual human beings can save themselves."¹⁹ They can save by their good works.

When the person doing well in his life, do good things to himself or the other can we say that he is taking apart with his salvation. The other words that salvation can be reached by our merit. "Pelagius taught that humans possess a genuinely free will that is capable of either sinning or not sinning."²⁰ So, different from Augustine, he says that whether the human being does the sin or not, we still have free will and he added that "grace is not a special work of God but rather a "natural grace" or "grace of creation".

Pelagius also believed in a "grace of revelation" or "grace of teaching," through which God shows humans how to live and enlightens their reason so that they can see God's will, which is expressed particularly through the law of God.²¹ Pelagius' grace is God's help or assistance, which is focused most clearly in God's teaching and the revelation of God's will and the rewards promised to those who act uprightly.²² In this case, there are seen that he emphasized to those who are do right that can achieve salvation and the grace of God only the assistance to the human to achieve the salvation but it is not too necessary because when we do right we could arrange our salvation. After all, human being can enrich their salvation with do good works.

It is not wondering if a human has a different argument about God. Moreover, it can be noticed that we are still human being has a limited taught and prove that God still the Creator of the earth.

This happens among Augustine and Pelagius while they debated about salvation mainly. For Augustine, humanity must depend upon God for salvation; for Pelagius, God merely indicates what must be done if salvation is to be attained and then leaves men and women to meet those conditions unaided. For Augustine, salvation is an unmerited gift; contrary to Pelagius, salvation is a justly earned reward.²³

¹⁹Alister E, McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Chichester: Blackwell Ltd, 2011), 19.

²⁰Donald K, McKim. *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Taught*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 86.

²¹Ibid, 86.

²²Ibid.

²³Donald K, McKim. *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Taught*, 86.

Biblical Evaluation on Salvation

God shows that He loves His creatures especially human beings. In fact, in the bible, He always concerns about what man needs and He provides all things to cover what the creature desires. However, he never left and always cares. However, many examples were given in the bible that shows that He loves us. Started from the first book in the bible, beginning in Genesis 1, God creates the world in six days and rests on the seventh. He creates from the first day to six days, and eventually on the sixth day, He creates the man perfectly. Genesis 1:26-27 says: Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and overall, the creatures that move along the ground." So, God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

However, before he creates the human, he made all things to support the first human life. They lived in Eden. Interestingly, inside the beautiful garden, God provides many fruits to pleasure their life. But God warned them, all of the fruits were allowed to eat instead of the tree in the middle of the garden. Finally, they choose to against God's will and became sinners when they ate the prohibited fruit.

In this situation, God shows his kindness and concern as a Creator. Genesis 3:15 says: And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." This is perhaps the most important verse of the entire Bible. This is the promise of salvation, and it establishes salvation as the theme of the Bible.²⁴ Therefore, God was initiating salvation when man fell into sin.

Saved by Grace through Faith

Nowadays, readers rarely confused about the salvation, is it the prominent gift comes from God, or as a human, we can try to reach our salvation with our works? Bible clearly explained these mystifying questions. John 3:16 says: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. In other words, God gave his Son to save man as a savior. Salvation only comes from God and it does not involve human efforts. "Salvation or "being saved" means redemption from the power of sin. In practical terms, God's salvation is what we need to get to heaven or attain eternal life."²⁵ However, the bible tells us that we are saved by grace and not according to our good works. Following these verses seen that salvation is given by God and it is the amazing gift that comes from Him.

The good news of the gospel can be summed up in the words of Paul to the Ephesians, "for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God..." (Eph. 2:8). Grace means a free and unmerited gift or favor. "The New Testament writers use "**charis**" preeminently of that kindness by which God bestows favor even upon the ill-deserving and grants to sinners pardon of their offenses and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ" Grace is God's part in our salvation. Faith is our response to God's grace.

²⁴Bill Stahl. *The Bible Story's of Salvation* (Bloomington, IN: Liberty Drive, 2008), 25.

²⁵*What Does the Bible Say About Salvation?* accessed June 27, 2021, http://www.christianbiblereference.org/faq_salvation.htm

According to this quote, since man fell in sin, we need salvation to save from eternal death. However, we are not able to save our own life but only God. That is why salvation by grace through faith is a part of God's part and how to respond to salvation that is already given by Him, we do it by faith.

The Wrong Perception on Salvation

Although the concept of salvation is very clearly explained in the bible, many people still have assumptions and eventually tend to question salvation. Instead of they believed salvation comes from God, they said that salvation can be reached by own works. How does the secular world view salvation? In a nutshell, the world sees mankind as basically good. Many believe that when you die, you automatically go to heaven. The world even believes that you can earn salvation through good deeds. There are many non-believers out there that try to compensate through charitable giving and humanitarian work. However, aligned with Pelagius, some people build their salvation's perspective that the man could be saved by works. If they do good works such as a deed, ascetic, they can achieve salvation. Some people based their opinion on John 14:15: If you love me, keep my commands.

The wrong interpretation leads to the wrong perspective and finally became destruction. However, they say if we want to go to heaven, we must follow God's commandments. We can be saved through the law. That is why the people race to be saved by doing good works. Law is the basis for reaching salvation, not in God. But in Rome 3:28 says: For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. In this passage apostle, Paul says that we are saved by grace only not because of our good deeds. Without the deeds of the law - Without works as a meritorious ground of justification.

The apostle, of course, does not mean that Christianity does not produce good works, or that they who are justified will not obey the Law, and be holy; but that no righteousness of their own will be the ground of their justification. They are sinners; and as such can have no claim to be treated as righteous. God has devised a plan by which, they may be pardoned and saved, and that is by faith alone.²⁶ We do the good works not because to reach salvation but because we are already saved by God's grace. Good works are the result of our faith.

The Seventh-day Adventist Views on Salvation

According to Augustine, we are saved by the grace of God, and our deeds are not able to save our lives from sin. Contrary, Pelagius had a different perception, as we studied in the previous chapter, his arguments were not compatible with Augustine and the other scholars. Therefore, he said that we can create our salvation by doing good deeds. Salvation could be reached not only by God but human beings also. Now if we connect with church perspectives especially for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, how about salvation?

Ellen G. White Views on Salvation

Ellen Gold Harmon was a well-known person, especially in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Can be denied, she was the one who was considered as the last prophet in this church. Many contributions had been given in this church mainly about doctrines and her writings.

²⁶Albert Barnes. *Commentary on Romans 1*. "Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible". Accessed, April 15, 2021, <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/eng/bnn/romans-1.html>. 1870.

According to Ellen White in her book, she said she has a vision that he saw the sorrow of heaven when sin has been covered the earth because the humankind for the first time. Sorrow filled heaven, as it was realized that man was lost, and that world which God had created was to be filled with mortals doomed to misery, sickness, and death, and there was no way of escape for the offender. The whole family of Adam must die. I saw the lovely Jesus and beheld an expression of sympathy and sorrow upon His countenance. Soon I saw Him approach the exceeding bright light which enshrouded the Father. Said my accompanying angel, He is in close converse with His Father. The anxiety of the angels seemed to be intense while Jesus was communing with His Father. Three times He was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came from the Father, His person could be seen. His countenance was calm, free from all perplexity and doubt, and shone with benevolence and loveliness, such as words cannot express. He then made known to the angelic host that a way of escape had been made for the lost man. He told them that He had been pleading with His Father, and had offered to give His life a ransom, to take the sentence of death upon Himself, that through Him man might find pardon; that through the merits of His blood, and obedience to the law of God, they could have the favor of God, and be brought into the beautiful garden, and eat of the fruit of the tree of life.²⁷

According to this passage above, God loves the human, He never left us. Mainly our mediator Jesus Christ, He has given his life only for the human. Salvation comes from God. The plan for the salvation of lost mankind is based on man's acceptance by faith alone of Christ's substitutionary death. This lesson was taught at the gate of Eden as Adam and his descendants slew the sacrificial lamb. It was taught in the wilderness as the brazen serpent was elevated by Moses, and the people with the venom of the poisonous serpents in their veins were restored by looking in faith at the saving symbol.

It was taught by the sacrificial system given to Israel. It was taught by prophets and apostles. Again, and again, we are taught that salvation is by grace through faith, and at the same time, we are made to understand: While true faith trusts wholly in Christ for salvation, it will lead to perfect conformity to the law of God. Faith is manifested by works.²⁸ Sometimes many people have a wrong perception about salvation related to faith. They assume that we can save by faith only. Because we are saved then we could do all things including bad habits. It is a wrong perception of salvation. Salvation is reflected by our good works, but our works cannot give us deliverance but only through Jesus Christ.

The light given to me of God places this important subject above any question in my mind. Justification is the whole of grace and not procured by any works that fallen man can do. The matter has been presented before me in clear lines that if the rich man has money and possessions, and he makes an offering of the same to the Lord, false ideas come in to spoil the offering by the thought he has merited the favor of God, that the Lord is under obligation to him to regard him with special favor because of this gift.²⁹

²⁷Ellen G. White. *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1882), 149.

²⁸Ellen G. White. *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Sothern Publishing Association, 1972), 12.

²⁹*Ibid.*

Conclusion

Money cannot purchase salvation; our good works cannot buy salvation; our obedience to keep the commandments cannot earn salvation; salvation is only possible through God. However, we do great things because of we have been rescued by God's grace. When people acknowledge they cannot acquire righteousness by their efforts and rather than look up to Jesus Christ as their only resource, they will place less attention on themselves and more on Jesus. Even though sin has been contaminated and corrupted souls and bodies, and the heart has become estranged from God, many people are still trying in their obvious limitations to earn salvation through good deeds. They believe that Christ will do the kind of saving, but they will have to accomplish the rest. We must believe in Christ's righteousness as their only hope for eternity. Salvation cannot be reached by our own works but only through Jesus. We do good things as a sign of gratitude for the salvation we have received from God through his son Jesus Christ

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