



## Rooted Disciples

### Session 4- The Life of Faith

#### Articles IX- XIV

##### **IX Of original or birth sin.**

Do we sin because we are sinners? Or are we sinners because we sin?

I thought I would begin with a question that gets to the heart of the issue. Let me unpack it further, in case the meaning is not self-evident. Do we sin (do wrong things) because of a sinful nature. Or are we said to be sinful on the basis purely of the acts themselves?

The Biblical argument:

Read Romans 5:12 and I Corinthians 15:22.

The Old Testament also bears witness to this. For example: Psalm 51:5.

We die both because of the sin of Adam and our own sin. It is not an either / or.

##### **Pelagianism.**

Article IX is against Pelagius, whose teaching was held to be dangerous to the church.

Pelagius was a 4<sup>th</sup> century theologian, possibly from Wales.

According to Griffiths, Pelagius taught:

1. Adam was created mortal and would have died if he had not sinned
2. The sin of Adam hurt only himself
3. Infants are, therefore, just as Adam was before his fall
4. Man can keep God's commandments if he will.
5. And so, all men may be sinless if they choose, and many saints before Christ lived free from sin.

Pelagius taught that we are condemned as sinners because we choose to sin.

The Articles rejected this and said that we have the fruit of sin, because we have the root of sin. Sin doesn't stand in simply choosing to follow Adam 'as the pelagians do vainly talk; but it is the fault and corruption of every man...as the offspring of Adam...'

One of the many problems with Pelagius was he made sin look like a whim on the part of humans. He also diminished the need for divine grace, because in his thinking we could change our will and fix ourselves. Thus, the article leads into Article 10 which says that 'we have no power to do good works pleasant and acceptable to God...'

If you are speaking with someone who thinks the resources of salvation lie within humanity, you might be speaking with a pelagian!



The Roman church, along with others who have partially bought into this teaching, can be described as semi-pelagian according to Griffiths.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Church believes in ‘total depravity’**

‘man is very far gone from original righteousness...so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit.’

The Latin for very far gone is literally, ‘as far as possible.’

This does justice to Paul speaking of us being ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ (Ephesians 2:1). See also Genesis 6:5.

And yet we retain the image of God. While every part of our being is affected by sin, it does not mean that every part is as far gone as it could be.

‘a cup of water with a few drops of poison is poisonous throughout, but not as poisonous as it could be’ (Griffiths).

### **Concupiscence**

I managed to get through a theology degree without hearing this term. However, it has great relevance for an age where society believes our desires are sovereign.

This term refers to our disordered inclinations and desires. Naturally our sinful desires ‘in every person...deserveth God’s wrath and condemnation.’ We are answerable to God and not free to live as we wish.

A further question arises, however, that may challenge the convinced Christian. Are disordered thoughts and feelings, sinful if not acted upon? The Anglican view of concupiscence, states:

‘although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.’

Support for this comes from Paul (‘the Apostle’) in Colossians 3:5: ‘Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed which is idolatry.’

We therefore have a caution against complacency in our thought life.

### **X Of free will.**

Atherstone suggests a better title would be, ‘The limitations of free will.’

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<sup>1</sup> Semi-pelagianism. ‘We are sinful, but we can still recognise the truth, co-operate with God’s grace and choose to seek Christ. We need God’s grace to be saved, but we can take first steps towards Christ on our own, apart from grace’ (Gotquestions.com). Roman Catholic Catechism (point 48): ‘our human nature is not totally corrupted but retains a measure of freedom and goodness.’



The fact that the Article is critical of the language of free-will will cause some of us to balk. However, note that the Article is only critical of the idea of free will in salvation. It states: 'The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith....'

Tom Woolford writes in his reflection on this Article:

'Why is there so much evil in our world? Men and women freely will it. For what are unbelievers judged and punished by a just and holy God? For what they have freely willed and done. When we sin, we sin freely and willingly. No-one else forces us to choose evil — not the Devil, not even Adam; and above all, not God. Our wills are by nature free, but free to will only as our nature directs: that is, to sin.'

But 'free will' must *not* feature in our answers to questions about faith and salvation. In answering the questions, 'Why do you believe?' or 'Why are you saved?', we must not reach *within* — to our 'free will,' our "natural strength and good works" — to answer. Article 10 forbids it, because Scripture forbids it (Ephesians 2:1-10). We must reach entirely outside ourselves, to the merit of Christ and the grace of God.<sup>2</sup>

## **XI Of the justification of man**

### **'accounted righteous'**

God not only removes our sin, but gives us his righteousness. 'A criminal is pardoned, but not regarded as righteous' (Atherstone).

To be justified is to be accounted righteous as Abraham had righteousness credited to him (Romans 4:1-8).

'only by the merit of our Lord'

It is only because of what Jesus has done.

How do we take hold of this righteousness?

By faith alone and not by our deeds.

The Article believes that we should meditate on these truths. Do we think often on justification? It is 'very full of comfort.'

## **XII Of good works**

Good works are the 'fruit of faith' and 'follow after justification.'

Good works do not save us.

When following on from faith, good works are pleasing to God, which is why we do them.

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<sup>2</sup> Church Society blog.



### **XIII Of works before justification.**

A rejection of the medieval Church's 'De congruo' doctrine. The 'grace of congruity' was the belief that a person could prepare themselves to receive grace. The school authors were the scholastics (such as Thomas Aquinas) who sought to blend philosophy and theology as well as defend the traditions of the church. The Council of Trent branded as heretics those who denied the merit of works before justification. Notice that such acts are not called 'good works.' Rather, the article says that they 'have the nature of sin.' (Isaiah 64:6, John 15:4, Romans 14:23.)

Griffiths reminds us of the 'supremacy of motive.' The article is not saying unbelievers ought not to do charitable things; but simply that they do not earn divine favour.

### **XIV Of works of supererogation**

This links to the Roman Catholic notion of a 'treasury of grace.' 'Excess merits' help the whole church. 'Once justified we can merit for ourselves and for others, the graces needed to grow in holiness, and for the attainment of eternal life.' (308, A Concise Catholic Catechism). E.g. 'Acts of charity' performing a good work while in a state of grace and offering that for someone else's spiritual or temporal benefit.

Read Luke 17:10

Arrogance:

Claiming that a person can fulfil the law of God and still have merit left over.

Suggesting that the sacrifice of Jesus was somehow insufficient and needs supplementing by human deeds.

Think it through...

Why is the doctrine of justification by faith alone very full of comfort? Do you feel it comforting you?

How do these truths drive us to Jesus in greater dependence and humility?