

# CORRUPTING *the* WORD *of* GOD

THE HISTORY *of the* WELL-MEANT OFFER

Herman Hanko  
Mark H. Hoeksema



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Dedicated to the faithful ministers, all now in heaven, who fought through the difficult years of 1924 to 1954 to maintain the heritage and truth established in the Protestant Reformed Churches: Cornelius Hanko, John Heys, Homer Hoeksema, Henry Kuiper, George Lubbers, Marinus Schipper, Herman Veldman, and Gerrit Vos



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We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.—*2 Corinthians 2:17*

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.—*Romans 1:16-17*

## PREFACE



Most of the content of this book was originally developed and presented by Prof. Herman Hanko for an interim course in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Recently it has become evident from literature published by Reformed and Presbyterian writers that there is renewed interest in the subject of the well-meant offer of the gospel, and this teaching is the subject of wide discussion and controversy. The Reformed Free Publishing Association is pleased to present this contribution to the debate from the viewpoint of its history.

The original material has been edited and in some instances rewritten and expanded, primarily by Professor Hanko. The core ideas, however, remain unchanged. They clearly set forth the history of the corruption of the word of God called the well-meant offer.

Of note is that Professor Hanko is the author of the first ten chapters and chapters 13 and 14. Chapters 11 and 12, written by Mark H. Hoeksema, are profitably added to the history presented in this book.

Rev. Angus Stewart provides a selected annotated bibliography for additional interest in and research of the subject of this book.

May this study of the history of the well-meant offer of the

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gospel be a blessing to God's people, who resist this corruption of the word of God and find the gospel to be not an offer but the power of God unto salvation.

—Mark H. Hoeksema

# INTRODUCTION



While the doctrine of common grace was a central issue in the controversies that led to the establishment of the Protestant Reformed Churches, imbedded in the formulation of the doctrine of common grace was the almost hidden doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel. It is part of the first of three doctrinal statements formulated and adopted by the Christian Reformed Church at its synod in 1924.

Concerning the first point, with regard to the favorable disposition of God toward mankind in general, and not only to the elect, Synod declares that according to the Scripture and the confessions it is determined that besides the saving grace of God, shown only to the elect unto eternal life, there is a certain kind of favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evidenced by the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dort 2.5 and 3–4.8–9, which deals with the general offer of the Gospel; whereas the quoted declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology also give evidence that our Reformed fathers from of old have advocated these opinions.<sup>1</sup>

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1 *1924 Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church Held from 18 June until 8 July 1924 in Kalamazoo, MI, USA*, trans. Henry De Mots (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College, Archives of the Christian Reformed Church), 145–46.

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In the discussions that followed the adoption of that statement of doctrine, the reference to the well-meant offer was often called the main point of the first point. While my intention in this book is to deal specifically with the doctrine of the well-meant offer of the gospel, my point is that a denial of the well-meant offer is an important reason for the existence of the Protestant Reformed Churches as a denomination. The three points of common grace as a whole and the main point of the first point, in spite of any claim to the contrary, have never been the teaching of the church of Christ.

The denial of the well-meant offer of the gospel by the Protestant Reformed Churches has set them apart from almost every ecclesiastical fellowship. Today it is difficult to find a Reformed or Presbyterian denomination that is not officially or unofficially committed to the well-meant offer. Not only is the well-meant offer widely accepted, but also the charge of hyper-Calvinism is hurled against those who deny it. The idea behind the charge is that true Calvinism includes the well-meant offer of the gospel. It is alleged that those who repudiate the well-meant offer are not faithful to the teachings of Calvin or to the genius of Calvinism.

My purpose is to trace the history of the idea of the well-meant offer throughout the history of the church of the new dispensation. Where did the idea originate? How did it creep into the church? What is its place in the historical development of the truth throughout the ages? Who taught it and who did not? Has the church of Christ, guided by the Spirit of truth, consistently and repeatedly repudiated it? Standing without proof is the bold statement of the authors of common grace that "Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology also give evidence that our Reformed fathers from of old have

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advocated these opinions.”<sup>2</sup> Can this claim be proved? Or is it an empty claim used to defend a position that has no real proof?

I am not arguing in this historical overview that the faith of the church of the past is in any way decisive in determining the truth or falsity of the doctrine of a well-meant offer. Scripture alone is the rule of faith and life. Regardless of what the church in former years may or may not have taught, the history of that doctrine may not determine whether we should accept it or repudiate it.

Yet a study of how the church in the past dealt with this doctrine is important. The authors of common grace appeal not only to scripture and the confessions, but also to theologians from the “golden age of Reformed theology” in support of their position. Is their claim true?

The question is also important because Christ promised his church that he would send them the Spirit of truth, who would guide the church into the truth (John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:7–13). While it is possible for the church to err in its official decisions on matters of the truth, historical testimony carries some weight, whether it is the united testimony of Reformed writers in the golden age of Reformed theology or, better yet, the testimony of the church for two millennia. Any individual or ecclesiastical body that claims a doctrine to be true that has been repeatedly declared by the church to be false not only must have studied thoroughly the history that he contradicts, but also must have studied all the relevant biblical and confessional testimony. One wonders whether there is not a certain arrogance when an individual or a church body claims to know better than the whole church since Pentecost.

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2 Ibid., 146.

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This cuts both ways. If a doctrine has not been taught and has been consistently and repeatedly repudiated, it is theologically dangerous to hold it as biblical. The one who does this is swimming in treacherous waters and is almost certain to drown.

The term *well-meant offer of the gospel* is of fairly recent vintage. The church prior to the Reformation of the sixteenth century did not use the term or any similar term. However, similar ideas and other doctrines associated with the well-meant offer have been discussed and debated by the church from the time of Augustine (d. 430). Augustine and his followers explained the same biblical texts that are used today to prove the well-meant offer. In their exegesis of these texts they repudiated the present-day interpretations and interpreted them in full harmony with orthodox theology through the ages. Worse yet, the interpretations of texts given by today's supporters of the well-meant offer are the same as those given in the past by heretics who repudiated the truth.

My contention in this book is that the doctrine of a well-meant offer of the gospel has been taught by those who repudiated other truths of scripture and taught doctrines contrary to the Christian faith and inseparably connected to a well-meant offer. My contention is also that the line of the biblical, Reformed faith not only consistently and frequently repudiated the necessary corollary doctrines of a well-meant offer, but also repudiated the doctrine itself and by name.

In this book I choose to use the term *well-meant offer of the gospel*, because it is a well-known and accurate description of the error. There are other names for this error. Sometimes it is called *free offer of the gospel* or *gracious offer of the gospel*. All three terms refer to the same doctrine.

*Well-meant offer* emphasizes God's sincerity in offering salvation in the gospel to all who hear it. The gospel announces

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God's love for all men and his will and intention to save all men. *Free offer of the gospel* emphasizes that the salvation God accomplished in Christ is freely given to all who are moved by God's love for all men to accept the promises offered to them. *Gracious offer of the gospel* emphasizes that God's grace is shown to all men by his desire to save them and that he gives to everyone who hears the gospel the grace to receive it. The last term is the most accurate description of what the defenders of the doctrine claim the gospel says and does.

The fundamental questions are, is the grace of almighty God given only to the elect, whom he has chosen to be his beloved people, or are all men the objects and recipients of that grace? Is grace common or particular?

May God use this book to convince many that the gospel is not an offer but is still the power of God unto salvation to those who believe (Rom. 1:16).

—Herman Hanko



## Chapter 1



# PELAGIANISM AND SEMI-PELAGIANISM

**A**lthough the term *well-meant offer* came into use only after the Reformation, and although the doctrine was not discussed until the post-Reformation history of the church, the issues involved in the doctrine were on the agenda of the church already at the beginning of the fifth century. Discussion and debate over those issues were part of the controversy between Augustine, bishop of Hippo, and the Pelagians and semi-Pelagians. Augustine was a strong defender of sovereign and particular grace and has received the name *Doctor Gratiae* (doctor of grace). The origin of the well-meant offer of the gospel is connected with Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism.

The well-meant offer of the gospel was not itself an explicit point of controversy in the first four centuries of the existence of the new dispensational church. The church in the first four centuries was preoccupied with many and varied controversies concerning the doctrine of the Trinity and the person and natures of Christ. Until the time of Augustine of Hippo (354–430), the church had paid very little attention to questions

concerning anthropology and soteriology. The doctrine of free will was generally held in the early church, perhaps as a reaction to Manichean fatalism. However, the church also held to the truth of salvation by grace alone. The two obviously contradictory doctrines were held simultaneously with little thought given to how they could be reconciled. The issue was not closely examined or extensively studied in the light of scripture.

Although a certain freewillism may have predominated then, Athanasius' defense of the divinity of Christ at the Council of Nicea in 325 was an example of the early church's commitment to salvation by grace alone. He maintained that Christ had to be "true God of true God,"<sup>1</sup> because salvation was exclusively God's work that came through Christ. Therefore, Christ had to be God.

Already at the time of Augustine the church was committed to the idea of meritorious good works, an idea that finally prevailed in Roman Catholic thought and was not banished from the thinking of the church until the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The idea of meritorious good works is intimately connected with the idea of free will, for good works cannot merit unless man has the power to perform them. This idea undoubtedly made it impossible for Augustinianism to prevail in the Roman Catholic Church after Augustine's death. The church was confronted with the question of whether to adopt a pure Augustinianism, which would require it to abandon its commitment to meritorious good works, or to hold to meritorious good works and turn its back on Augustine's teachings. The church chose the latter.

Pelagius taught that the will is absolutely free. He said that even after the fall man's will possesses the same power for

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1 Nicene Creed, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 11.

good and evil that Adam's will possessed before the fall. Whenever man is confronted with the choice of good or evil, he has the capability to choose either good or evil. Pelagius said that man's ability to choose the good is somewhat weakened by sin, but Pelagius saw sin as only a habit that does not affect man's nature. While a habit may become ingrained in a man's life, his will is not essentially affected, and his power to choose the good remains intact and unimpaired.

Augustine carried on his polemic against that heresy. As a result of his work, Pelagianism was officially condemned by the church at the Council of Carthage in 416 and at the Council of Ephesus in 431, held one year after Augustine's death.

Prior to Augustine's death, opposition to his teachings on particular and sovereign grace arose in various parts of the church, especially in southern Gaul. In opposition to Pelagius, Augustine taught the absolute inability of the human will of fallen and natural man to choose the good. Mankind fell in Adam, said Augustine, and the result of the fall for the whole human race was that man completely lost the ability to do the good and to will the good. His salvation was therefore dependent on grace. While Pelagius also spoke of grace, he insisted that grace was little more than a help, a measure of divine assistance, and was not essential to salvation. Augustine taught the absolute necessity of God's grace in salvation.

Other doctrines were necessarily involved. When Augustine was asked regarding the determining factor in who receives the gift of grace and who does not, his answer was sovereign predestination according to which God sovereignly chose his elect from eternity. The doctrines of sovereign grace and predestination were the occasion for controversy. In opposition to Augustine's views, theological positions similar to those connected with the well-meant offer were proposed.

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One of Augustine's opponents was Cassian (360–435), who correctly may be called a semi-Pelagian. He did not agree with the position of Pelagius that the will is absolutely free, but Cassian insisted on maintaining that the will is free to a certain extent. He said that sin as it entered the human race through the fall of Adam does not rob man of a free will but does weaken man's will so that it is difficult for man to choose the good. Therefore, man needs divine assistance.

Just as Augustine's teaching of the inability of the human will to choose the good led him to the doctrine of sovereign predestination via the truth of sovereign grace, so Cassian proceeded from the idea of free will to the doctrine of divine love that wills the salvation of everyone. The two ideas are connected. If salvation is ultimately dependent on the choice of man's will and not on the choice of God's sovereign predestination, it is obvious that God loves all men and seeks the salvation of all men. God's love, which is all-embracing, extends thus to all men. Whether or not a man is ultimately saved depends on his response to the overtures of God's love.

Cassian's views were followed by those of Prosper of Aquitaine (390–455). There has always been some question whether Prosper actually taught semi-Pelagian views. This doubt arises from his extensive correspondence with Augustine, which was the chief means by which Augustine learned of the semi-Pelagian teachings of various theologians in Gaul. It is difficult to ascertain from Prosper's correspondence whether he expressed his opinions or merely informed Augustine of what others were teaching and asked for more light on those views.

However, it seems almost certain that Prosper did not agree completely with Augustine and that especially toward the end of Prosper's life he agreed substantially with Cassian. It is even possible that Prosper was responsible in some respects for advancing

Cassian's views. Prosper probably introduced into the discussion the distinction in the will of God between one will that is universal and conditional and another will that is particular and unconditional. Desiring in some sense to maintain the sovereignty of God in grace and predestination, and yet committed to free will, Prosper spoke of a will of God that expresses his desire to save everyone and another will that is particular, limited to the elect, and realized in the work of sovereign grace. One will is conditional; the other will is unconditional.

That Prosper was semi-Pelagian in his views is also substantiated by the contention of many that he wrote the pamphlet *De Vocatione Omnium Gentium*,<sup>2</sup> which dealt particularly with grace as it related to the controversy. The author made a distinction between general grace and particular grace. He said that general grace is connected with general revelation, because general revelation reveals the general grace of God to all men. In addition, general grace that comes through God's revelation in creation is inwardly applied to the heart of every man, so that it becomes the origin of all religion in man. The general grace that everyone receives expresses God's will that all men be saved.<sup>3</sup>

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2 *De Vocatione Omnium Gentium* [The call of all nations], in *The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, trans. Joseph De Letter (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952).

3 The ideas that particular grace is built on general grace and that general grace is connected with general revelation are not foreign to many theologians who in recent years have adopted the well-meant offer of the gospel. See Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith: A Survey of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 32–60. See William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace: A Defense of the Historic Reformed Faith over against the Theology and Philosophy of the So-called "Reconstructionist" Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 67–162, 187–262.

Particular grace is given only to some and is necessary to salvation.

Augustine died in 430, and his disciples continued the theological battle.

Another opponent of Augustine was Faustus of Mileve, ordained bishop of Hippo in 454. He spoke of general grace that precedes special grace and is essential to special grace. General grace, bestowed without distinction on all men, becomes the means whereby the free will of man is preserved along with a certain religious and moral sense. Only when a man, by free will and the use of general grace, chooses the good is special grace given to him, by which he is actually saved. Thus for Faustus special grace was built on general grace, and salvation was dependent on the will of man.

To reinforce the contention that the well-meant offer is theologically connected with Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism, it is significant that in Augustine's day the semi-Pelagians quoted the same scriptural texts that are used today to defend a general and gracious offer of the gospel: Matthew 23:37, Romans 2:4, 1 Timothy 2:4, and 2 Peter 3:9. Many of the objections the semi-Pelagians raised against Augustine's position were identical to the objections brought in our time against the truth of sovereign grace and eternal predestination. Augustine often chided his opponents for their interpretations of scripture and for being content with arguments from human reason. Augustine insisted that those scriptural passages apply only to the elect. In defending that position from scripture, he became increasingly convinced of the biblical soundness of his position and of the wrongness of the positions taken by his opponents. He reaffirmed and reemphasized the truths of sovereign grace in the whole work of salvation and of eternal and sovereign predestination.

Augustine wrote the following about Matthew 23:37:

Our Lord says plainly, however, in the Gospel, when upbraiding the impious city: “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” as if the will of God had been overcome by the will of men, and when the weakest stood in the way with their want of will, the will of the strongest could not be carried out. And where is that omnipotence which hath done all that it pleased on earth and in heaven, if God willed to gather together the children of Jerusalem, and did not accomplish it? or rather, Jerusalem was not willing that her children should be gathered together? But even though she was unwilling, He gathered together as many of her children as He wished: for He does not will some things and do them, and will others and do them not; but “He hath done all that He pleased in heaven and in earth.”<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4, Augustine wrote:

We are to understand by “all men,” the human race in all its varieties of rank and circumstances,—kings, subjects; noble, plebeian, high, low, learned, and unlearned; the sound in body, the feeble, the clever, the dull, the foolish, the rich, the poor, and those of middling circumstances; males, females, infants, boys, youths; young, middle-aged, and old men; of every tongue, of every fashion, of all arts, of all professions, with all the innumerable differences of will and conscience, and whatever else

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4 Augustine, *Enchiridion* 97, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. F. Shaw (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 3:268.

there is that makes a distinction among men...We are not compelled to believe that the omnipotent God has willed anything to be done which was not done: for, setting aside all ambiguities, if “He hath done all that He pleased in heaven and in earth,” as the psalmist sings of Him, He certainly did not will to do anything that He hath not done.<sup>5</sup>

Augustine had one supporter of note, Fulgentius, who was a bishop of North Africa and a strong supporter of Augustinianism fifty years after Augustine’s death. Fulgentius also commented on 1 Timothy 2:4, a verse the semi-Pelagians constantly appealed to in attempts to support their contentions that Christ died for all men and desired to save all men.

Truly, by these *all persons* whom God *wills* to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) are signified not the entire human race completely, but the entirety of all who are to be saved. And, likewise, they are called “all” because divine goodness saves all those from all humanity, that is, from every nation, condition, and age, from every language and every province.<sup>6</sup>

Fulgentius proceeded to prove his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4 by appealing to Acts 3:38–39, Romans 8:28, and Psalm 115:3. He then wrote, “It is evil for someone to say that the Omnipotent is not able to do something that he willed to do...

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5 Ibid., 270–71.

6 Fulgentius, *Epistula* 17, 61, 63, 66, quoted in Francis X. Gumerlock, *Fulgentius of Ruspe on the Saving Will of God: The Development of a Sixth-Century African Bishop’s Interpretation of I Timothy 2:4 During the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 4, 96, 98–99.

Those whom he (i.e., the Son) wills to be given life are those whom he wills to be saved.”<sup>7</sup>

Again referring to 1 Timothy 2:4, Fulgentius wrote, “Therefore, they are called ‘all’ because they are gathered from all kinds of persons, from all nations, from all conditions, from all masters, from all servants, from all kings, from all soldiers, from all provinces, from all languages, from all ages, and from all classes. Thus *all* are saved whom God *wills to be saved*.”<sup>8</sup>

Fulgentius commented on Matthew 23:37, another favorite text of those who hold to the well-meant offer:

Whence our Savior reproves the malevolence of the unbelieving city with these words: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you; how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling* (Matt. 23:37). Christ said this to show its evil will by which it tried in vain to resist the invincible divine will, when God’s good will neither could be conquered by those whom it deserts nor could not be able to accomplish anything which it wanted. That Jerusalem, insofar as it attained to its will, did not wish its children to be gathered to the Savior, but still he gathered all whom he willed. In this it wanted to resist the omnipotent but was unable to because God who, as it is written, *Whatever the Lord pleases, he does* (Psalm 135:6), converts to himself whomever he wills by a free justification, coming beforehand with his gift of superabounding grace on those whom he could justly damn if he wished.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Ibid., 66.

8 Ibid.

9 Fulgentius, *De remissione peccatorum* 2.2–3, quoted in *ibid.*, 64.

Fulgentius also commented on 2 Peter 3:9:

He [God] does not want anyone to perish, namely of those whom *he foreknew and predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son* (Rom. 8:29). No one of these perishes. *For who opposes his will* (Rom. 9:19)? These are visited freely by the mercy of God before the end of this present life; they are moved for their salvation with a contrite and humbled heart and all by divine gift are converted to penance to which they are divinely predestined by free grace, so that, converted, they many not perish, but have life eternal...Because he who has done all things he wanted wants this, what he wants he always does invincibly. And so that is fulfilled in them which the unchangeable and invincible will of almighty God has, whose will, just as it cannot be changed in its plans, so neither is his power stopped or hindered in its execution; because neither is anyone able justly to censure his justice, nor can anyone stand opposed to his mercy...Therefore, when the Apostle Peter says that God *is patient, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance* (2 Peter 3:9), let us not so understand the word “all” as stated above, as if there is no one who will not do a fitting penance, but we must understand “all” here as those to whom God gives penance in such a way that he may also give them the gift of perseverance.<sup>10</sup>

A quotation from Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–542) regarding 1 Timothy 2:4 will suffice to demonstrate that ancient expositors could exegete scripture better than some modern theologians.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 62–64.

Caesarius was bishop of Arles, France, for forty years and is generally considered to be the most outstanding theologian of his time. He wrote in somewhat angry language his opposition to the position of the semi-Pelagians.

But lifting yourself up in the most proud tribunal of your heart, you presume to judge God, saying...How does it seem [right] to him to will that the dew of divine grace remain in one cloud, that is, in the people of the Jews, through so many thousands of years, and that all of the other areas, that is, the whole world, did not deserve to be watered through the mercy of God? Or why afterward this one cloud, that is, the people of the Jews, would remain dry without the grace of God, and the areas of all the Gentiles would receive the dew of divine mercy?<sup>11</sup>

After quoting many other passages that emphasize God's irresistible will, Caesarius repeatedly asked why his opponents believed that God's will can be resisted, if God wills to save them. He ended with the charge that those men accused God and spoke against the apostle Paul.

The interpretations of these texts by the modern-day defenders of the well-meant offer of the gospel are identical to the interpretations given by the semi-Pelagians in Augustine's day. The interpretation by Augustine and some of his followers has been accepted by the church of Christ since the Reformation. The others have been repudiated.

Augustine's views did not prevail in the church of his day. Although several churchmen condemned to some extent the views of the semi-Pelagians, none stood firmly for the doctrines

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11 Caesarius of Arles, *De gratia*, quoted in *ibid.*, 163.

of Augustine. This was perhaps because the church had already committed itself to some idea of free will in its determination to preserve the merit of good works.<sup>12</sup>

In 529 the Council of Orange spoke on the controversy between Augustinianism and semi-Pelagianism, but its decisions were at best a compromise. While this council condemned certain aspects of the teachings of the semi-Pelagians and affirmed certain doctrines of Augustine, it refused to adopt a pure Augustinianism. It affirmed the doctrine of original sin and the unconditional necessity of grace, but it left room for the idea of sin as an illness rather than a spiritual death, and it was silent on the key doctrines of the absolute inability of the will to choose for the good and sovereign, double predestination. It warned against the idea of predestination to evil, something Augustine did not teach. In effect, semi-Pelagianism won the day.

What conclusions can be drawn from this history?

The idea of the offer of the gospel *per se* was not discussed at that time. This is understandable, because the whole truth concerning the preaching of the gospel did not receive theological attention, and no scriptural bases of the doctrine were established. The relationship between the views of the semi-Pelagians and preaching was not faced.

Further, although Augustine had outlined his basic position in the Pelagian controversy, the semi-Pelagians' attacks forced him to define his views more sharply and to defend them more carefully. The attacks of the semi-Pelagians brought Augustine back to scripture to study the passages involved and to reevaluate his work in the light of the word of God.

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12 For a detailed study, see Herman C. Hanko, "Double Predestination: Augustine, Synod of Orange, and Gottschalk" (master's thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1986).

It is a striking fact that in the history of the church and of its doctrine there were only a few periods in which the doctrines of sovereign grace and predestination were maintained. Augustine taught and maintained these doctrines over against Pelagius and the semi-Pelagians. Although semi-Pelagianism gained the upper hand, the result of Augustine's work is still a legacy to the church today.

Several ideas that throughout church history have been closely associated with and woven into the warp and woof of the doctrine of the well-meant offer were already taught in the days of Augustine. These include the freedom of the will; a double will of God that desires the salvation of all men and wills the salvation of only the elect; a general grace that everyone receives and a special grace that is conditionally granted upon the choice of the will; and a general love of God for everyone that is expressed in God's desire to save everyone.

Augustine stood firm against all these views in his defense of sovereign grace. While his views did not prevail in his time or in subsequent centuries, they were once again made the confession of the church and developed during the sixteenth-century Reformation.

Those who teach a well-meant offer of the gospel will have to admit that they belong in the camp of the Pelagians and have no place at the side of Augustine.



## Chapter 2



# MARTIN LUTHER AND JOHN CALVIN

The Middle Ages produced little of value regarding the well-meant offer. A brief mention of a few events will be sufficient.

The controversy between the followers of Augustine and the semi-Pelagians continued off and on for many years. The dispute came before several provincial synods, and the Synod of Valence in 855 even approved of Augustine's position. The Synod of Touchy in 860, the final synod to deal with the controversy, retracted the decisions of Valence and reiterated a Pelagian position.<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic Church was committed to the doctrines Augustine opposed: free will, the meritorious value of good works, God's love for all men, and a cross of Christ that had universal value—all the doctrines later associated with the error of the well-meant offer.

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1 For a more detailed discussion of this history, see Herman Hanko, *Contending for the Faith: The Rise of Heresy and the Development of the Truth* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 95–103.