

On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, Book III

Augustine of Hippo

Patristic · Nicene & Post-Nicene · Treatise

STROMATA 289

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INTRODUCTION

Composed in 412 as a hastily appended third book to a longer treatise for the tribune Marcellinus, this letter marks the moment Augustine first engaged Pelagius by name — though still cautiously, calling him a holy man whose commentary on Paul he had only just read. The argument turns on a single verse, Romans 5:12, and on whether infants inherit anything of Adam's sin; from this narrow exegetical quarrel the whole Pelagian controversy would unfold over the next two decades. Readers will find Augustine here in the mode of careful reply rather than full polemic, testing objections point by point and quoting his opponent at length before answering. It is argumentative reading, close and forensic, and it repays attention to what Augustine chooses not yet to say.

On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants (Book III)

In the Shape of a Letter Addressed to the Same Marcellinus.

In which Augustine refutes some errors of Pelagius on the question of the merits of sins and the baptism of infants — being sundry arguments of his which he had interspersed among his expositions of Saint Paul, in opposition to original sin.

To his beloved son Marcellinus, Augustine, bishop and servant of Christ and of the servants of Christ, sends greeting in the Lord.

Chapter 1 [I.]— Pelagius Esteemed a Holy Man; His Expositions on Saint Paul.

The questions which you proposed that I should write to you about, in opposition to those persons who say that Adam would have died even if he had not sinned, and that nothing of his sin has passed to his posterity by natural transmission; and especially on the subject of the baptism of infants, which the universal Church, with most pious and maternal care, maintains in constant celebration; and whether in this life there are, or have been, or ever will be, children of men without any sin at all — I have already discussed in two lengthy books. And I venture to think that if in them I have not met all the points which perplex all men's minds on such matters (an achievement which, I apprehend — nay, which I

have no doubt — lies beyond the power either of myself, or of any other person), I have at all events prepared something in the shape of a firm ground on which those who defend the faith delivered to us by our fathers, against the novel opinions of its opponents, may at any time take their stand, not unarmed for the contest. However, within the last few days I have read some writings by Pelagius, — a holy man, as I am told, who has made no small progress in the Christian life — containing some very brief expository notes on the epistles of the Apostle Paul; and therein I found, on coming to the passage where the apostle says, By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so it passed upon all men, Romans 5:12 an argument which is used by those who say that infants are not burdened with original sin. Now I confess that I have not refuted this argument in my lengthy treatise, because it did not indeed once occur to me that anybody was capable of thinking such sentiments. Being, however, unwilling to add to that work, which I had concluded, I have thought it right to insert in this epistle both the argument itself in the very words in which I read it, and the answer which it seems to me proper to give to it.

Chapter 2 \[II.\]— Pelagius' Objection; Infants Reckoned Among the Number of Believers and the Faithful.

In these terms, then, the argument is stated:— But they who deny the transmission of sin endeavour to impugn it thus: If (say they) Adam's sin injured even those who do not sin, therefore Christ's righteousness also profits even those who do not believe; because 'In like manner, nay, much more,' he says, 'are men saved by one, than they had previously perished by one.' Now to this argument, I repeat, I advanced no reply in the two books which I previously addressed to you; nor, indeed, had I proposed to myself such a task. But now I beg you first of all to observe, when they say, If Adam's sin injures even those who do not sin, then Christ's righteousness also profits even those who do not believe, how absurd and false they judge it to be, that the righteousness of Christ should profit even those who do not believe; and that thence they think to put together such an argument as this: That no more could the first man's sin possibly do injury to infants who commit no sin, than the righteousness of Christ can benefit any who do not believe. Let them therefore tell us what is the benefit of Christ's righteousness to baptized infants; let them by all means tell us what they mean. For of course, since they do not forget that they are Christians themselves, they have no doubt that there is some benefit. But whatever be this benefit, it is incapable (as they themselves assert) of benefiting those who do not believe. Whence they are compelled to class baptized infants in the number of believers, and to assent to the authority of the Holy Universal Church, which does not account those unworthy of the name of believers, to whom the righteousness of Christ could be, according to them, of no use except as believers. As, therefore, by the answer of those, through whose agency they are born again, the Spirit of righteousness transfers to them that faith which, of their own will, they could not yet have; so the sinful flesh of those, through whose agency they are born, transfers to them that injury, which they have not yet contracted in their own life. And even as the Spirit of life regenerates them in Christ as believers, so also the body of death had generated them in Adam as sinners. The one generation is carnal, the other Spiritual; the one makes children of the flesh, the other children of the Spirit; the one children of death, the other children of the resurrection; the one the children of the world, the other the children of God; the one children of

wrath, the other children of mercy; and thus the one binds them under original sin, the other liberates them from the bond of every sin.

Chapter 3.— Pelagius Makes God Unjust.

We are driven at last to yield our assent on divine authority to that which we are unable to investigate with even the clearest intellect. It is well that they remind us themselves that Christ's righteousness is unable to profit any but believers, while they yet allow that it somewhat profits infants; according to this (as we have already said) they must, without evasion, find room for baptized infants among the number of believers. Consequently, if they are not baptized, they will have to rank among those who do not believe; and therefore they will not even have life, but the wrath of God abides on them, inasmuch as he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him; John 3:36 and they are under judgment, since he that believes not is condemned already; John 3:18 and they shall be condemned, since he that believes, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned. Mark 16:16 Let them, now, then see to it with what justice they can hold or strive to maintain that human beings have no part in eternal life, but in the wrath of God, and incur the divine judgment and condemnation, who are without sin; if, that is, as they cannot have any actual sin, so also they have within them no original sin.

Chapter 4.

To the other points which Pelagius makes them urge who argue against original sin, I have already, I think, sufficiently and clearly replied in the two former books of my lengthy treatise. Now if my reply should seem to any persons to be brief or obscure, I beg their pardon, and request the favour of their coming to terms with those who perhaps censure my treatise, not for being too brief, but rather as being too long; while any who still do not understand the points which I cannot help thinking I have explained as clearly as the nature of the subject allowed me, shall certainly hear no blame or reproach from me for indifference, or want of understanding me. I would rather that they should pray God to give them intelligence.

Chapter 5 \[III.\]— Pelagius Praised by Some; Arguments Against Original Sin Proposed by Pelagius in His Commentary.

But we must not indeed omit to observe that this good and praiseworthy man (as they who know him describe him to be) has not advanced this argument against the natural transmission of sin in his own person, but has reproduced what is alleged by those persons who disapprove of the doctrine, and this, not merely so far as I have just quoted and confuted the allegation, but also as to those other points on which I have now further undertaken to furnish a reply. Now, after saying, If (they say) Adam's sin injured even those who do not sin, therefore Christ's righteousness also profits even those who do not believe,— which sentence, you will perceive from what I have said in answer to it, is not only not repugnant to what we hold, but even reminds us what we ought to hold — he at once goes on to add, Then they contend, if baptism cleanses away that old sin, those children who are born of two baptized

parents must needs be free from this sin, for they could not have transmitted to their children what they did not possess themselves. Besides, says he, if the soul is not of transmission, but only the flesh, then only the latter has the transmission of sin, and it alone deserves punishment; for they allege that it would be unjust for the soul, which is only now born, and comes not of the lump of Adam, to bear the burden of so old an alien sin. They say, likewise, says Pelagius, that it cannot by any means be conceded that God, who remits to a man his own sins, should impute to him another's.

Chapter 6.— Why Pelagius Does Not Speak in His Own Person.

Pray, don't you see how Pelagius has inserted the whole of this paragraph in his writings, not in his own person, but in that of others, knowing so well the novelty of this unheard-of doctrine, which is now beginning to raise its voice against the ancient ingrafted opinion of the Church, that he was ashamed or afraid to acknowledge it himself? And perhaps he does not himself think that a man is born without sin for whom he confesses that baptism to be necessary by which comes the remission of sins; or that the man is condemned without sin who must be reckoned, when unbaptized, in the class of non-believers, since the gospel of course cannot deceive us, when it most clearly asserts, He that believes not shall be damned; Mark 16:16 or, lastly, that the image of God, when without sin, is not admitted into the kingdom of God, forasmuch as except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God, John 3:5 — and so must either be precipitated into eternal death without sin, or, what is still more absurd, must have eternal life outside the kingdom of God; for the Lord, when foretelling what He should say to His people at last —Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world, Matthew 25:34 — also clearly indicated what the kingdom was of which He was speaking, by concluding thus: So these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal. Matthew 25:46 These opinions, then, and others which spring from the central error, I believe so worthy a man, and so good a Christian, does not at all accept, as being too perverse and repugnant to Christian truth. But it is quite possible that he may, by the very arguments of those who deny the transmission of sin, be still so far distressed as to be anxious to hear or know what can be said in reply to them; and on this account he was both unwilling to keep silent the tenets propounded by them who deny the transmission of sin, in order that he might get the question in due time discussed, and, at the same time, declined to report the opinions in his own person, lest he should be supposed to entertain them himself.

Chapter 7 \[IV.\]— Proof of Original Sin in Infants.

Now, although I may not be able myself to refute the arguments of these men, I yet see how necessary it is to adhere closely to the clearest statements of the Scriptures, in order that the obscure passages may be explained by help of these, or, if the mind be as yet unequal to either perceiving them when explained, or investigating them while abstruse, let them be believed without misgiving. But what can be plainer than the many weighty testimonies of the divine declarations, which afford to us the clearest proof possible that without union with Christ there is no man who can attain to eternal life and salvation; and that no man can unjustly be damned, — that is, separated from that life and salvation — by the judgment of God? The inevitable conclusion from these truths is this, that, as nothing else is effected when infants are baptized except that they are incorporated into the church, in other words, that they are united with the body and members of Christ, unless this benefit has been bestowed upon them, they are manifestly in danger of damnation. Damned, however, they could not be if they really had no sin. Now, since their tender age could not possibly have contracted sin in its own life, it remains for us, even if we are as yet unable to understand, at least to believe that infants inherit original sin.

Chapter 8.— Jesus is the Saviour Even of Infants.

And therefore, if there is an ambiguity in the apostle's words when he says, By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so it passed upon all men; Romans 5:12 and if it is possible for them to be drawn aside, and applied to some other sense — is there anything ambiguous in this statement: Unless a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God? John 3:5 Is this, again, ambiguous: You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins? Matthew 1:21 Is there any doubt of what this means: The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick? Matthew 9:12 — that is, Jesus is not needed by those who have no sin, but by those who are to be saved from sin. Is there anything, again, ambiguous in this: Except men eat the flesh of the Son of man, that is, become partakers of His body, they shall not have life? By these and similar statements, which I now pass over, — absolutely clear in the light of God, and absolutely certain by His authority — does not truth proclaim without ambiguity, that unbaptized infants not only cannot enter into the kingdom of God, but cannot have everlasting life, except in the body of Christ, in order that they may be incorporated into which they are washed in the sacrament of baptism? Does not truth, without any dubiety, testify that for no other reason are they carried by pious hands to Jesus (that is, to Christ, the Saviour and Physician), than that they may be healed of the plague of their sin by the medicine of His sacraments? Why then do we delay so to understand the apostle's very words, of which we perhaps used to have some doubt, that they may agree with these statements of which we can have no manner of doubt?

Chapter 9.— The Ambiguity of Adam is the Figure of Him to Come.

To me, however, no doubt presents itself about the whole of this passage, in which the apostle speaks of the condemnation of many through the sin of one, and the justification of many through the righteousness of One, except as to the words, Adam is the figure of Him that was to come. For this phrase

in reality not only suits the sense which understands that Adam's posterity were to be born of the same form as himself along with sin, but the words are also capable of being drawn out into several distinct meanings. For we have ourselves perhaps actually contended for various senses from the words in question at different times, and very likely we shall propound yet another view, which, however, will not be incompatible with the sense here mentioned; and even Pelagius has not always expounded the passage in one way. All the rest, however, of the passage in which these doubtful words occur, if its statements are carefully examined and treated, as I have tried my best to do in the first book of this treatise, will not (in spite of the obscurity of style necessarily engendered by the subject itself) fail to show the incompatibility of any other meaning than that which has secured the adhesion of the universal Church from the earliest times — that believing infants have obtained through the baptism of Christ the remission of original sin.

Chapter 10 \[V.\]— He Shows that Cyprian Had Not Doubted the Original Sin of Infants.

Accordingly, it is not without reason that the blessed Cyprian carefully shows how from the very first the Church has held this as a well understood article of faith. When he was asserting the fitness of infants only just born to receive Christ's baptism, on a certain occasion when he was consulted whether this ought to be administered before the eighth day, he endeavoured, as far as he could, to prove that they were perfect, lest any one should suppose, from the number of the days (because it was on the eighth day that infants were before circumcised), that they so far lacked perfection. However, after bestowing upon them the full support of his argument, he still confessed that they were not free from original sin; because if he had denied this, he would have removed all reason for the very baptism which he was maintaining their fitness to receive. You can, if you wish, read for yourself the epistle of the illustrious martyr *On the Baptism of Little Children*; for it cannot fail to be within reach at Carthage. But I have deemed it right to transcribe some few statements of it into this letter of mine, so far as applies to the question before us; and I pray you to mark them carefully. Now with respect, says he, to the case of infants, whom you declared it would be improper to baptize if presented within the second and third day after their birth, since that due regard ought to be paid to the law of circumcision of old, so that you thought that the infant should not be baptized and sanctified before the eighth day after its birth — a far different view has been formed of the question in our council. Not a man there assented to what you thought ought to be done; but the whole of us rather determined that to no one born of men ought God's mercy and grace to be denied. For since the Lord in His gospel says, 'The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them,' Luke 9:56 so far as in us lies, not a soul ought, if possible, to be lost. You observe how in these words he supposes that it is fraught with ruin and death, not only to the flesh, but also to the soul, for one to depart this life without that saving sacrament. Wherefore, if he said nothing else, it was competent to us to conclude from his words that without sin the soul could not perish. See, however, what (when he shortly afterwards maintains the innocence of infants) he at the same time allows concerning them in the plainest terms: But if, says he, anything could hinder men from the attainment of grace, then their heavier sins might rather hinder those who have reached the stages of adults, and advanced life, and old age. Since, however, remission of sins is given even to the greatest sinners after they have believed, however much they have previously sinned against God, and since nobody is forbidden baptism and grace, how much more ought an infant not to be forbidden who

newborn has done no sin, except that from having been born carnally after Adam he has contracted from his very birth the contagion of the primeval death! How, too, does this fact contribute in itself the more easily to their reception of the forgiveness of sins, that the remission which they have is not of their own sins, but of those of another!

Chapter 11.— The Ancients Assumed Original Sin.

You see with what confidence this great man expresses himself after the ancient and undoubted rule of faith. In advancing such very certain statements, his object was by help of these firm conclusions to prove the uncertain point which had been submitted to him by his correspondent, and concerning which he informs him that a decree of a council had been passed, to the effect that, if an infant were brought even before the eighth day after his birth, no one should hesitate to baptize him. Now it was not then determined or confirmed by the council that infants were held bound by original sin as if it were new, or as if it were attacked by the opposition of some one; but when another controversy was being conducted, and the question was discussed, in reference to the law of the circumcision of the flesh, whether they ought to be baptized before the eighth day. None agreed with the person who denied this; because it was not an open question admitting of discussion, but was fixed and unassailable, that the soul would forfeit eternal salvation if it ended this life without obtaining the sacrament of baptism: but at the same time infants fresh from the womb were held to be affected only by the guilt of original sin. On this account, although remission of sins was easier in their case, because the sins were derived from another, it was nevertheless indispensable. It was on sure grounds like these that the uncertain question of the eighth day was solved, and the council decided that after a man was born, not a day ought to be lost in rendering him that succour which should prevent his perishing forever. When also a reason was given for the circumcision of the flesh as being itself a shadow of what was to be, its purport was not that we should understand that baptism ought to be administered on the eighth day after birth, but rather that we are spiritually circumcised in the resurrection of Christ, who rose from the dead on the third day, indeed, after His passion, but among the days of the week, by which time is counted, on the eighth, that is, on the first day after the Sabbath.

Chapter 12 \[VI.\]— The Universal Consensus Respecting Original Sin.

And now, again, with a strange boldness in new controversy, certain persons are endeavouring to make us uncertain on a point which our forefathers used to bring forward as most certainly fixed, whenever they would solve such questions as seemed uncertain to some. When this controversy, indeed, first began, I am unable to say; but one thing I know, that even the holy Jerome, who is in our own day renowned for great industry and learning in ecclesiastical literature, for the solution of sundry questions treated in his writings, makes use of the same most certain assumption without exhibition of proofs. For instance, in his commentary on the prophet Jonah, when he comes to the passage where the infants were mentioned as chastened by the fast, he says: The greatest age comes first, and then all the rest is pervaded down to the least. Jonah 3:3 For there is no man without sin, whether the span of his age be but that of a single day, or he reckon many years to his life. For if the very stars are unclean in the sight of God, Job 25:4 how much more is a worm and corruption, such as are they who are held subject to the sin of the offending Adam? If, indeed, we could readily interrogate this most learned man, how many authors who have treated of the divine Scriptures. in both languages, and have written on Christian controversies, would he mention to us, who have never held any other opinion since the Church of Christ was founded — who neither received any other from their forefathers, nor handed down any other to their posterity? My own reading, indeed, has been far more limited, but yet I do not recollect ever having heard of any other doctrine on this point from Christians, who accept the two Testaments, whether established in the Catholic Church, or in any heretical or schismatic body whatever. I do not remember, I say, that I have at any time found any other doctrine in such writers as have contributed anything to literature of this kind, whether they have followed the canonical Scriptures, or have supposed that they have followed them, or had wished to be so supposed. From what quarter this question has suddenly come upon us I know not. A short time ago, in a passing conversation with certain persons while we were at Carthage, my ears were suddenly offended with such a proposition as this: That infants are not baptized for the purpose of receiving remission of sin, but that they may be sanctified in Christ. Although I was much disturbed by so novel an opinion, still, as there was no opportunity afforded me for gainsaying it, and as its propounders were not persons whose influence gave me anxiety, I readily let the subject slip into neglect and oblivion. And lo! It is now maintained with burning zeal against the Church; lo! It is committed to our permanent notice by writing; nay, the matter is brought to such a pitch of distracting influence, that we are even consulted on it by our brethren; and we are actually obliged to oppose its progress both by disputation and by writing.

Chapter 13 \[VII.\]— The Error of Jovinianus Did Not Extend So Far.

A few years ago there lived at Rome one Jovinian, who is said to have persuaded nuns of even advanced age to marry — not, indeed, by seduction, as if he wanted to make any of them his wife, but by contending that virgins who dedicated themselves to the ascetic life had no more merit before God than believing wives. It never entered his mind, however, along with this conceit, to venture to affirm that children of men are born without original sin. If, indeed, he had added such an opinion, the women might have more readily consented to marry, to give birth to such pure offspring. When this man's writings (for he dared to write) were by the brethren forwarded to Jerome to refute, he not only discovered no such error in them, but, while looking out his conceits for refutation, he found among other passages this very clear testimony to the doctrine of man's original sin, from which Jerome indeed felt satisfied of

the man's belief of that doctrine. These are his words when treating of it: He who says that he abides in Christ, ought himself also to walk even as He walked. John 2:6 We give our opponent the option to choose which alternative he likes. Does he abide in Christ, or does he not? If he does, then, let him walk like Christ. If, however, it is a rash thing to undertake to resemble the excellences of Christ, he abides not in Christ, because he walks not as Christ did. He did no sin, neither was any guile found in His mouth; Isaiah 53:9 who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; and as a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so He opened not His mouth; Isaiah 53:7 to whom the prince of this world came, and found nothing in Him; John 14:30 whom, though He had done no sin, God made sin for us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 We, however, according to the Epistle of James, all commit many sins; James 3:2 and none of us is pure from uncleanness, even if his life should be but of one day. Job 14:5 For who shall boast that he has a clean heart? Or who shall be confident that he is pure from sins? We are held guilty according to the likeness of Adam's transgression. Accordingly David also says: 'Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.'

Chapter 14.— The Opinions of All Controversialists Whatever are Not, However, Canonical Authority; Original Sin, How Another's; We Were All One Man in Adam.

I have not quoted these words as if we might rely upon the opinions of every disputant as on canonical authority; but I have done it, that it may be seen how, from the beginning down to the present age, which has given birth to this novel opinion, the doctrine of original sin has been guarded with the utmost constancy as a part of the Church's faith, so that it is usually adduced as most certain ground whereon to refute other opinions when false, instead of being itself exposed to refutation by any one as false. Moreover, in the sacred books of the canon, the authority of this doctrine is vigorously asserted in the clearest and fullest way. The apostle exclaims: By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so it passed upon all men, in which all have sinned. Romans 5:12 Now from these words it cannot certainly be said, that Adam's sin has injured even those _who commit no sin_, for the Scripture says, _In which all have sinned._ Nor, indeed, are those sins of infancy so said to be _another's_, as if they did not belong to the infants at all, inasmuch as all then sinned in Adam, when in his nature, by virtue of that innate power whereby he was able to produce them, they were all as yet the one Adam; but they are called _another's_, because as yet they were not living their own lives, but the life of the one man contained whatsoever was in his future posterity.

Chapter 15 \[VIII.\]— We All Sinned Adam's Sin.

It is, they say, by no means conceded that God who remits to a man his own sins imputes to him another's. He remits, indeed, but it is to those regenerated by the Spirit, not to those generated by the flesh; but He imputes to a man no longer the sins of another, but only his own. They were no doubt the sins of another, while as yet they were not in existence who bore them when propagated; but now the sins belong to them by carnal generation, to whom they have not yet been remitted by spiritual regeneration.

Chapter 16.— Origin of Errors; A Simile Sought from the Foreskin of the Circumcised, and from the Chaff of Wheat.

But surely, say they, if baptism cleanses the primeval sin, they who are born of two baptized parents ought to be free from this sin; for these could not have transmitted to their children that thing which they did not themselves possess. Now observe whence error usually thrives: it is when persons are able to start subjects which they are not able to understand. For before what audience, and in what words, can I explain how it is that sinful mortal beginnings bring no obstacle to those who have inaugurated other, immortal, beginnings, and at the same time prove an obstacle to those whom those very persons, against whom it was not an obstacle, have begotten out of the self-same sinful beginnings? How can a man understand these things, whose labouring mind is impeded both by its own prejudiced opinions and by the chain of its own stolid obstinacy? If indeed I had undertaken my cause in opposition to those who either altogether forbid the baptism of infants, or else contend that it is superfluous to baptize them alleging that as they are born of believing parents, they must needs enjoy the merit of their parents; then it would have been my duty to have roused myself perhaps to greater labour and effort for the purpose of refuting their opinion. In that case, if I encountered a difficulty before obtuse and contentious men in refuting error and inculcating truth, owing to the obscurity which besets the nature of the subject, I should probably resort to such illustrations as were palpable and at hand; and I should in my turn ask them some questions — how, for instance, if they were puzzled to know in what way sin, after being cleansed by baptism, still remained in those who were begotten of baptized parents, they would explain how it is that the foreskin, after being removed by circumcision, should still remain in the sons of the circumcised? Or again, how it happens that the chaff which is winnowed off so carefully by human labour still keeps its place in the grain which springs from the winnowed wheat?

Chapter 17 \[IX.\]— Christians Do Not Always Beget Christian, Nor the Pure, Pure Children.

With these and such like palpable arguments, should I endeavour, as I best could, to convince those persons who believed that sacraments of cleansing were superfluously applied to the children of the cleansed, how right is the judgment of baptizing the infants of baptized parents, and how it may happen that to a man who has within him the twofold seed — of death in the flesh, and of immortality in the spirit — that may prove no obstacle, regenerated as he is by the Spirit, which is an obstacle to his son, who is generated by the flesh; and that that may be cleansed in the one by remission, which in the other still requires cleansing by like remission, just as in the case supposed of circumcision, and as in the case of the winnowing and thrashing. But now, when we are contending with those who allow that the children of the baptized ought to be baptized, we may much more conveniently conduct our discussion, and can say: You who assert that the children of such persons as have been cleansed from the pollution of sin ought to have been born without sin, why do you not perceive that by the same rule you might just as well say that the children of Christian parents ought to have been born Christians? Why, therefore, do you rather maintain that they ought to become Christians? Was there not in their parents, to whom it is said, Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ? 1 Corinthians 6:15 a Christian body? Perhaps you suppose that a Christian body may be born of Christian parents, without having received a Christian soul? Well, this would render the case much more wonderful still. For you would think of the soul one of two things as you pleased — because, of course, you hold with the apostle, that before birth it had done nothing good or evil: Romans 9:11 — either that it was derived by transmission, and just as the body of Christians is Christian, so should also their soul be Christian; or else that it was created by Christ, either in the Christian body, or for the sake of the Christian body, and it ought therefore to have been created or given in a Christian condition. Unless perchance you shall pretend that, although Christian parents had it in their power to beget a Christian body, yet Christ Himself was not able to produce a Christian soul. Believe then the truth, and see that, as it has been possible (as you yourselves admit) for one who is not a Christian to be born of Christian parents, for one who is not a member of Christ to be born of members of Christ, and (that we may answer all, who, however falsely, are yet in some sense possessed with a sense of religion) for a man who is not consecrated to be born of parents who are consecrated; so also it is quite possible for one who is not cleansed to be born of parents who are cleansed. Now what account will you give us, of why from Christian parents is born one who is not a Christian, unless it be that not generation, but regeneration makes Christians? Resolve therefore your own question with a like reason, that cleansing from sin comes to no one by being born, but to all by being born again. And thus any child who is born of parents who are cleansed, because born again, must himself be born again, in order that he too may be cleansed. For it has been quite possible for parents to transmit to their children that which they did not possess themselves — thus resembling not only the wheat which yielded the chaff, and the circumcised the foreskin, but also the instance which you yourselves adduce, even that of believers who convey unbelief to their posterity; which, however, does not accrue to the faithful as regenerated by the Spirit, but it is owing to the fault of the mortal seed by which they have been born of the flesh. For in respect of the infants whom you judge it necessary to make believers by the sacrament of the faithful you do not deny that they were born in unbelief although of believing parents.

Well, but if the soul is not propagated, but the flesh alone, then the latter alone has propagation of sin, and it alone deserves punishment: this is what they think, saying that it is unjust that the soul which is only recently produced, and that not out of Adam's substance, should bear the sin of another committed so long ago. Now observe, I pray you, how the circumspect Pelagius felt the question about the soul to be a very difficult one, and acted accordingly — for the words which I have just quoted are copied from his book. He does not say absolutely, Because the soul is not propagated, but hypothetically, *‘If the soul is not propagated,’* rightly determining on so obscure a subject (on which we can find in Holy Scriptures no certain and obvious testimonies, or with very great difficulty discover any) to speak with hesitation rather than with confidence. Wherefore I too, on my side, answer this proposition with no hasty assertion: If the soul is not propagated, where is the justice that, what has been but recently created and is quite free from the contagion of sin, should be compelled in infants to endure the passions and other torments of the flesh, and, what is more terrible still, even the attacks of evil spirits? For never does the flesh so suffer anything of this kind that the living and feeling soul does not rather undergo the punishment. If this, indeed, is shown to be just, it may be shown, on the same terms, with what justice original sin comes to exist in our sinful flesh, to be subsequently cleansed by the sacrament of baptism and God's gracious mercy. If the former point cannot be shown, I imagine that the latter point is equally incapable of demonstration. We must therefore either bear with both positions in silence, and remember that we are human, or else we must prepare, at some other time, another work on the soul, if it shall appear necessary, discussing the whole question with caution and sobriety.

Chapter 19 \[XI.\]— Sin and Death in Adam, Righteousness and Life in Christ.

What the apostle says: By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so it passed upon all men, in which all have sinned; Romans 5:12 we must, however, for the present so accept as not to seem rashly and foolishly to oppose the many great passages of Holy Scripture, which teach us that no man can obtain eternal life without that union with Christ which is effected in Him and with Him, when we are imbued with His sacraments and incorporated with the members of His body. Now this statement which the apostle addresses to the Romans, By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so it passed upon all men, in which all have sinned, tallies in sense with his words to the Corinthians: Since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 For nobody doubts that the subject here referred to is the death of the body, because the apostle was with much earnestness dwelling on the resurrection of the body; and he seems to be silent here about sin for this reason, namely, because the question was not about righteousness. Both points are mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans, and both points are, at very great length, insisted on by the apostle, — sin in Adam, righteousness in Christ; and death in Adam, life in Christ. However, as I have observed already, I have thoroughly examined and opened, in the first book of this treatise, all these words of the apostle's argument, as far as I was able, and as much as seemed necessary.

Chapter 20.— The Sting of Death, What?

But even in the passage to the Corinthians, where he had been treating fully of the resurrection, the apostle concludes his statement in such a way as not to permit us to doubt that the death of the body is the result of sin. For after he had said, This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality: so when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal immortality, then, he added, shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? and at last he subjoined these words: The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 1 Corinthians 15:53-56 Now, because (as the apostle's words most plainly declare) death shall then be swallowed up in victory when this corruptible and mortal shall have put on incorruption and immortality — that is, when God shall quicken even our mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in us,— it manifestly follows that the sting of the body of this death, which is the contrary of the resurrection of the body, is sin. The sting, however, is that by which death was made, and not that which death made, since it is by sin that we die, and not by death that we sin. It is therefore called the sting of death on the principle which originated the phrase the tree of life,— not because the life of man produced it, but because by it the life of man was made. In like manner the tree of knowledge was that whereby man's knowledge was made, not that which man made by his knowledge. So also the sting of death is that by which death was produced, not that which death made. We similarly use the expression the cup of death, since by it some one has died, or might die — not meaning, of course, a cup made by a dying or dead man. The sting of death is therefore sin, because by the puncture of sin the human race has been slain. Why ask further: the death of what — whether of the soul, or of the body? Whether the first which we are all of us now dying, or the second which the wicked hereafter shall die? There is no occasion for plying the question so curiously; there is no room for subterfuge. The words in which the apostle expresses the case answer the questions: When this mortal, says he, shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. He was treating of the resurrection of the body, wherein death shall be swallowed up in victory, when this mortal shall have put on immortality. Then over death itself shall be raised the shout of triumph, when at the resurrection of the body it shall be swallowed up in victory; then shall be said to it, O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? To the death of the body, therefore, is this said. For victorious immortality shall swallow it up, when this mortal shall put on immortality. I repeat it, to the death of the body shall it be said, Where is your victory?— that victory in which you conquered all, so that even the Son of God engaged in conflict with you, and by not shrinking but grappling with you overcame. In these that die you have conquered; but you are yourself conquered in these that rise again. Your victory was but temporal, in which you swallowed up the bodies of them that die. Our victory will abide eternal, in which you are swallowed up in the bodies of them that rise again. Where is your sting?— that is, the sin wherewithal we are punctured and poisoned, so that you fixed yourself in our very bodies, and for so long a time held them in possession. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. We all sinned in one, so that we all die in one; we received the law, not by amendment according to its precepts to put an end to sin, but by transgression to increase it. For the law entered that sin might abound; Romans 5:20 and the Scripture has concluded all under sin; Galatians 3:22 but thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 15:57 in order that where sin abounded, grace

might much more abound; Romans 5:20 and that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe; Galatians 3:22 and that we might overcome death by a deathless resurrection, and sin, the sting thereof, by a free justification.

Chapter 21 \[XII.\]— The Precept About Touching the Menstruous Woman Not to Be Figuratively Understood; The Necessity of the Sacraments.

Let no one, then, on this subject be either deceived or a deceiver. The manifest sense of Holy Scripture which we have considered, removes all obscurities. Even as death is in this our mortal body derived from the beginning, so from the beginning has sin been drawn into this sinful flesh of ours, for the cure of which, both as it is derived by propagation and augmented by wilful transgression, as well as for the quickening of our flesh itself, our Physician came in the likeness of sinful flesh, who is not needed by the sound, but only by the sick — and who came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Mark 2:17 Therefore the saying of the apostle, when advising believers not to separate themselves from unbelieving partners: For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy, 1 Corinthians 7:14 must be either so understood as both we ourselves elsewhere, and as Pelagius in his notes on this same Epistle to the Corinthians, has expounded it, according to the purport of the passages already mentioned, that sometimes wives gained husbands to Christ, and sometimes husbands converted wives, while the Christian will of even one of the parents prevailed towards making their children Christians; or else (as the apostle's words seem rather to indicate, and to a certain degree compel us) some particular sanctification is to be here understood, by which an unbelieving husband or wife was sanctified by the believing partner, and by which the children of the believing parents were sanctified, — whether it was that the husband or the wife, during the woman's menstruation, abstained from cohabiting, having learned that duty in the law (for Ezekiel classes this among the precepts which were not to be taken in a metaphorical sense Ezekiel 18:6), or on account of some other voluntary sanctification which is not there expressly prescribed — a sprinkling of holiness arising out of the close ties of married life and children. Nevertheless, whatever be the sanctification meant, this must be steadily held: that there is no other valid means of making Christians and remitting sins, except by men becoming believers through the sacrament according to the institution of Christ and the Church. For neither are unbelieving husbands and wives, notwithstanding their intimate union with holy and righteous spouses, cleansed of the sin which separates men from the kingdom of God and drives them into condemnation, nor are the children who are born of parents, however just and holy, absolved from the guilt of original sin, unless they have been baptized into Christ; and in behalf of these our plea should be the more earnest, the less able they are to urge one themselves.

Chapter 22 \[XIII.\]— We Ought to Be Anxious to Secure the Baptism of Infants.

For this is the point aimed at by the controversy, against the novelty of which we have to struggle by the aid of ancient truth: that it is clearly altogether superfluous for infants to be baptized. Not that this opinion is avowed in so many words, lest so firmly established a custom of the Church should be unable to endure its assailants. But if we are taught to render help to orphans, how much more ought we to

labour in behalf of those children who, though under the protection of parents, will still be left more destitute and wretched than orphans, should that grace of Christ be denied them, which they are all unable to demand for themselves?

Chapter 23.— Epilogue.

As for what they say, that some men, by the use of their reason, have lived, and do live, in this world without sin, we should wish that it were true, we should strive to make it true, we should pray that it be true; but, at the same time, we should confess that it is not yet true. For to those who wish and strive and worthily pray for this result, whatever sins remain in them are daily remitted because we sincerely pray, Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Matthew 6:12 Whosoever shall deny that this prayer is in this life necessary for every righteous man who knows and does the will of God, except the one Saint of saints, greatly errs, and is utterly incapable of pleasing Him whom he praises. Moreover, if he supposes himself to be such a character, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him, 1 John 1:8 — for no other reason than that he thinks what is false. That Physician, then, who is not needed by the sound, but by the sick, knows how to heal us, and by healing to perfect us unto eternal life; and He does not in this world take away death, although inflicted because of sin, from those whose sins He remits, in order that they may enter on their conflict, and overcome the fear of death with full sincerity of faith. In some cases, too, He declines to help even His righteous servants, so long as they are capable of still higher elevation, to the attainment of a perfect righteousness, in order that (while in His sight no man living is justified) we may always feel it to be our duty to give Him thanks for mercifully bearing with us, and so, by holy humility, be healed of that first cause of all our failings, even the swellings of pride. This letter, as my intention first sketched it, was to have been a short one; it has grown into a lengthy book. Would that it were as perfect as it has at last become complete!

Source: Translated by Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis (NPNF, Series I, Vol. V).

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