

PLEASANT SPRINGS DISCIPLESHIP • DOCTRINAL STUDY

TULIP, DAISY & ROSES

Calvinism, Arminianism, and Molinism Compared — and why Pleasant Springs Church teaches Molinism & the Origin of Sin

By Shane Gunn • Pleasant Springs Church, Henderson / Pinson, Tennessee

← Discipleship School

Where this fits: A Discipleship lesson on the three great Protestant systems for relating God’s sovereign grace to human freedom — and a companion piece to our lesson on [The Doctrine of Original Sin](#). We will trace how each view came into being, let Scripture make each side’s case, and state clearly what Pleasant Springs Church teaches and why.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Whenever a Christian says “Jesus died for my sins,” a series of deep questions follow. Did he die *for mine* in particular — or for everyone’s? Did I choose him, or did he choose me? Can I lose my salvation? Did God know, before the foundation of the world, exactly who would be saved? Did he *decide* who would be saved, or did he *foresee* who would believe? Is my “yes” to Christ really mine, or is it a yes God caused in me?

The Christian tradition has grouped its answers into three great schools:

- **Calvinism** — summarized by the acronym **TULIP**, formed at the Synod of Dort in 1619
- **Arminianism** — sometimes summarized as **DAISY**, stemming from the Remonstrants of 1610

- **Molinism** — summarized as **ROSES** in the modern form, based on the work of Luis de Molina in 1588

Pleasant Springs Church teaches Molinism, along with the ancient doctrine of the **Origin of Sin** (what the Eastern Christian tradition calls “ancestral sin”) rather than Augustine’s Latin doctrine of *Original Sin passed down from Adam as inherited guilt*. Many of our members have come out of Calvinist or Arminian backgrounds, and deserve a careful, honest map of where the other views come from and why we differ. This lesson is that map.

A word of tone at the outset. Calvinists, Arminians, and Molinists are **brothers and sisters in Christ**. The boundary of Christian fellowship is the Apostles’ Creed, not the Canons of Dort. We will try, in what follows, to put each view in its strongest form — the form its own adherents would recognize — not to score debating points.

Greek NT (Phil 2:12–13): μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε· θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ ἐνεργῶν ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ θέλειν καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας.

Philippians 2:12–13 (ESV): “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” — The single verse that makes the whole debate unavoidable.

PART 1 — THE ORIGIN OF THE DEBATE: PELAGIUS AND AUGUSTINE (400S)

The whole modern discussion traces back, not to the Reformation, but to a single theological controversy in the early fifth century between a British monk named Pelagius and the bishop of Hippo, Augustine. What we call “original sin” — the question of whether every human being is born already guilty and already corrupted because of Adam — was decisively framed in this fight, and the whole later debate over election and grace cannot be understood without it.

Pelagius (c. 354 – c. 420) — Britain & Rome

PROBABLY BORN IN BRITAIN • ASCETIC LAY THEOLOGIAN IN ROME, C. 380–410 • FLED TO NORTH AFRICA AND THEN PALESTINE AFTER ALARIC’S 410 SACK OF

Pelagianism

Denied original sin

Pelagius was a devout, disciplined ascetic of British or Irish origin who arrived in Rome around 380 and made his name as a moral teacher among the Roman Christian elite. He was horrified by the laziness of Roman Christians who excused their sin with lines like, “We’re only human,” and by the prayer he heard in Augustine’s *Confessions* — “*Grant what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt*” — which he believed excused human responsibility by making even our obedience God’s work.

Pelagius’s response was to defend human freedom and moral responsibility with great energy. God, he argued, would not command what we cannot do; therefore we *can* obey. Adam’s sin hurt Adam but did not infect his descendants. Every baby is born morally innocent, just as Adam was created; sin is learned by imitation and habit, not inherited. Grace helps us; but the *basic* capacity to choose right is ours by nature. This teaching, later called **Pelagianism**, made the human will the decisive factor in salvation.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) — North Africa

BORN TAGASTE, ROMAN NORTH AFRICA • MANICHEE IN YOUTH • CONVERTED UNDER AMBROSE OF MILAN IN 386 • BISHOP OF HIPPO 395–430 • DIED DURING THE VANDAL SIEGE OF HIPPO

Original Sin

Sovereign grace

Latin Doctor of the Church

Augustine had lived Pelagius’s doctrine from the inside for thirty years and knew it did not work. He had tried, as a young man, to will himself chaste. He could not. When grace finally broke through in the garden in Milan in 386, he did not experience it as cooperation with his unaided effort; he experienced it as rescue. Out of that experience — and years of careful reading of Paul, especially Romans 5 and 7 — came his mature doctrine of *original sin*.

In his early *On the Free Choice of the Will* (388–395) and then more firmly in a series of anti-Pelagian treatises after 412 (*On Nature and Grace*, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, *On the Predestination of the Saints*), Augustine argued:

1. Adam’s sin was not merely his own. When he sinned, all humanity — already present in him as in a seed — sinned with him. Romans 5:12 (in the Latin

Vulgate *in quo omnes peccaverunt*, “in whom all have sinned”) was the proof.

2. Every human after Adam is born with *both* inherited guilt *and* inherited corruption (*concupiscentia*). Even unbaptized infants, if they die, are lost because of this inherited guilt.
3. The will is free in one sense only — free to do what it wants. But what the fallen will *wants* is sin. It is *not* free to want God apart from sovereign grace.
4. Grace is therefore absolutely necessary, and it is sovereign, not cooperative. God elects some to salvation from the mass of condemned humanity (*massa damnata*); the rest he justly passes over.

A translation error that shaped a millennium. The phrase in Romans 5:12 on which the whole Latin doctrine hangs is Greek ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον. The most natural Greek reading is “because all sinned” or “with the result that all sinned” — that is, *each person* in succession sins, following Adam’s pattern. But Jerome’s Latin Vulgate rendered it *in quo omnes peccaverunt* — “in whom all sinned,” with Adam as the head in whom humanity was already present. The Latin reading anchored Augustine’s doctrine of inherited guilt. The Greek-speaking East read the verse differently and never developed the doctrine of inherited guilt in the Augustinian form. This is the root of the divergence between Western and Eastern Christianity on the nature of sin.

Greek NT (Rom 5:12): διὰ τοῦτο ὡσπερ δι’ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον.

Romans 5:12 (ESV): “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men **because all sinned.**”

The councils. Pelagianism was condemned at the Council of Carthage (418, sixteen canons against Pelagius), the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus (431), and the Second Council of Orange (529, a regional council in southern Gaul that settled the semi-Pelagian dispute that followed). Augustine won. The Latin West inherited, from his pen, the framework in which every later Western debate — Catholic, Reformed, Arminian, Molinist — has been conducted.

A middle position emerged almost immediately among the monks of southern Gaul, under **John Cassian** (c. 360–435, former deacon of John Chrysostom, founder of the monastery of St. Victor at Marseilles). Cassian agreed with Augustine that Adam’s fall wounded human nature and that grace is indispensable, but he insisted that the first small movement toward God — the mere *turning* of the wounded will to receive grace — comes from the sinner himself, not from prior grace. Grace then meets and empowers this initial human choice. This view was eventually called *Semi-Pelagianism* by later critics.

A century after Augustine, the Second **Council of Orange (529)**, under Caesarius of Arles, condemned Semi-Pelagianism along with Pelagianism. Its canons are a careful statement of moderate Augustinianism: the *initium fidei* (the beginning of faith) is itself a gift of God, not the sinner’s first natural movement. Orange (1) affirmed that grace precedes even our desire for grace, (2) affirmed real human freedom once grace has acted, and (3) rejected any idea that God predestines anyone to evil. It became the official Western framework for the next thousand years and still stands as the ecumenical limit of what Christians have agreed on in this area.

A note for our lesson. When Arminianism was condemned as “Semi-Pelagian” at Dort in 1619, and when Molinism was accused of “Semi-Pelagianism” by the Dominicans around 1600, the word was used polemically. Neither classical Arminianism nor classical Molinism actually says what Cassian said — both explicitly teach that grace must precede any human turning. We need to use the term carefully.

PART 3 — AQUINAS AND THE MEDIEVAL SYNTHESIS (1250)

For the thousand years between Augustine and the Reformation, Latin theology followed the Augustinian framework but nuanced it heavily. **Thomas Aquinas** (1225–1274) gave the classical medieval synthesis (see [Church History Lesson 30](#)). Briefly:

- Humanity after Adam is fallen and incapable of meriting salvation. Grace is

absolutely necessary and prior.

- Grace does not replace human nature; it perfects it. When God moves the will toward himself, the movement is *both* truly God’s act and truly the creature’s act, at different levels of causality.

- Predestination is real but is the gratuitous predestination of those God will save; reprobation is not a positive divine decree of damnation but the just non-election of those who, apart from election, would in any case be condemned by their sins.

Aquinas’s balance would be the common starting point for both Calvin and Molina. Both claimed to be defending him; both developed him in very different directions.

PART 4 — CALVIN AND THE REFORMED TRADITION (1536–1619)

John Calvin (1509–1564)

BORN NOYON, PICARDY, FRANCE • LEGAL AND HUMANIST TRAINING AT PARIS AND ORLÉANS • CONVERTED C. 1533 • PASTOR AND REFORMER IN GENEVA 1536–1538, 1541–1564 • *INSTITUTES OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION* FIRST EDITION 1536, DEFINITIVE EDITION 1559

Reformed

Predestination

Institutes

Calvin was an intensified Augustinian. In Book III of the *Institutes* (1559 edition, chapters 21–24), he gave the most rigorous development of the doctrine of predestination that the Reformation produced. God, from eternity and for his own good pleasure, has chosen some individuals to salvation and left others to the just consequences of their sins. This is sometimes called “double predestination” (election to life; reprobation to death); Calvin himself stressed the asymmetry — God *positively* elects the saved, but *passes over* the reprobate.

The second-generation Reformed scholastics — Theodore Beza (Calvin's successor in Geneva), William Perkins (Cambridge), Franciscus Junius, Johannes Piscator, and later Francis Turretin (Geneva), Herman Witsius (Holland), and John Owen (England) — sharpened and systematized Calvin's teaching into a coherent architecture with precise vocabulary. It was this systematized Reformed theology that clashed with Jacobus Arminius at Leiden and produced the 1618–1619 Synod of Dort.

Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609)

BORN OUDEWATER, HOLLAND • ORPHANED IN SPANISH CATHOLIC MASSACRE OF HIS HOMETOWN, 1575 • STUDIED GENEVA (UNDER BEZA), BASEL, AND PADUA • PASTOR AMSTERDAM 1588–1603 • PROFESSOR LEIDEN 1603–1609

Remonstrant

Conditional Election

Arminius was raised a Reformed Protestant and trained under Beza in Geneva. Sent to refute the theologian Dirck Coornhert's objections to Reformed predestination, Arminius found Coornhert's biblical arguments harder to answer than he had expected. Over the next fifteen years he quietly developed a modified Reformed theology: election is *based on foreseen faith*, not pure divine decree; grace is *prevenient* (it precedes any human turning) but is resistible; Christ died for all, not only for the elect. Arminius died in 1609 before his system was fully public; his followers, led by Simon Episcopius, published the Five Articles of the Remonstrance in 1610.

The Synod of Dort (1618–1619) was convened by the Dutch Reformed Church, with delegates from England, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, and France, to adjudicate the Remonstrant controversy. After six months and 154 sessions, the Synod issued the **Canons of Dort**, a point-by-point refutation of each of the Five Articles. From the order of the Synod's responses came, by way of later English summaries, the famous acronym

TULIP. The acronym is English (no Dutch or Latin equivalent exists), was popularized only in the early twentieth century, and is a rough but workable summary.

PART 5 — LUIS DE MOLINA AND MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE (1588)

Luis de Molina, S.J. (1535–1600)

BORN CUENCA, SPAIN • JESUIT NOVICE 1553 • UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA (PORTUGAL) 1563–1567 • PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF ÉVORA 1568–1591 • PUBLISHED *CONCORDIA* 1588

Jesuit

Middle Knowledge

Concordia (1588)

Luis de Molina was a Spanish Jesuit who spent twenty-three years of his life on a single problem: how to reconcile God’s sovereign efficacious grace with genuine human freedom. Every Catholic theologian after Trent was required to defend both — efficacious grace (against Pelagius) and real freedom (against Luther’s *Bondage of the Will*). But *how* the two fit together was wide open.

Molina’s 1588 *Concordia liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione* (“The Agreement of Free Will with the Gifts of Grace, Divine Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination, and Reprobation”) proposed a solution that has been debated ever since. At its heart is a doctrine called **middle knowledge** (*scientia media*).

Middle knowledge explained. Classical theology had already distinguished two kinds of divine knowledge:

Natural knowledge — God knows all *possible* things, all necessary truths, everything that *could* be, independently of his will. (For example, God knows that $2+2=4$ and that unicorns could exist.)

Free knowledge — God knows all *actual* things, everything that *will* be, because he has decreed them or permitted them. (For example, God knows the actual history of the world he is creating.)

Molina proposed a third, “middle” category, logically between the other two:

Middle knowledge — God knows, prior to any decision to create a particular world, *what every possible free creature would freely do in every possible circumstance*. These are the “counterfactuals of creaturely freedom.” For example: if Peter were placed in the courtyard of the high priest on this particular night, with these particular servant girls asking these particular questions, Peter would freely deny Christ three times. God knows that without deciding it — he knows it because, given the truth about Peter’s actual character, that is what Peter would do.

Middle knowledge gives God the resources to arrange circumstances such that what he wills to happen *will* happen, but always through the genuinely free choice of the creature. God is *sovereignly* choosing which world to create (which is full Calvinist-style sovereignty), and the creature is *freely* choosing within that world (which is full Arminian-style freedom). Molina believed this was the real answer.

LXX (1 Sam 23:11–12): “εἰ ἀποκλεισθήσεται, Κύριε ὁ θεὸς Ἰσραὴλ· ἀνάγγελον τῷ δούλῳ σου.” καὶ εἶπεν Κύριος· ἀποκλεισθήσεται.

1 Samuel 23:11–13 (ESV): David asks the Lord, “Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard?” And the Lord said, “He will come down.” David said, “Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?” And the Lord said, “They will surrender you.” Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah... **Saul did not come down**, and the men of Keilah never got the chance to betray David, because David left.

— **Classic Molinist proof-text.** God knew what *would* have happened if David stayed; David acted on that knowledge; neither event in fact occurred. God’s knowledge was true, but it was knowledge of a counterfactual — of what free creatures *would* have done.

The reaction. The Dominicans, led by the Thomist **Domingo Báñez** (1528–1604), savagely attacked Molina as a Pelagian in disguise. Molina’s own Jesuits defended him. Pope Clement VIII convened the Congregation *De Auxiliis* (“on aids [of grace]”) which met from 1598 to 1607 to adjudicate. After 120 formal sessions, Pope Paul V in 1607 ruled that **both** the Jesuit (Molinist) and Dominican (Thomist) accounts were within the bounds of Catholic orthodoxy, and that neither side could call the other heretical. The question remained open in Catholic theology. In Protestant theology, meanwhile, Molinism was largely unknown until the late twentieth century.

PART 6 — THE MODERN MOLINIST REVIVAL

For three centuries Molinism remained a Catholic debate inside Jesuit-Dominican polemics. In 1977 the American philosopher **Alvin Plantinga** (Calvin College, later Notre Dame) published *God, Freedom, and Evil*, which used middle knowledge as part of his famous “Free Will Defense” against the problem of evil. Suddenly Molinism was back, and in Protestant hands.

William Lane Craig (b. 1949) — American Molinist philosopher

PHD PHILOSOPHY BIRMINGHAM (1977), PHD THEOLOGY MUNICH (1984)
• RESEARCH PROFESSOR AT HOUSTON CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY AND
TALBOT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY • FOUNDER OF REASONABLE FAITH

Molinist apologist

Divine Foreknowledge

Craig’s *The Only Wise God* (1987), *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (1991), and many later works have made Craig the most widely known Molinist of our time. His debates with Calvinist theologians are a useful way for ordinary Christians to hear the Molinist case stated clearly.

Kenneth Keathley (b. 1958) — Southern Baptist Molinist

PHD MID-AMERICA BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • SENIOR PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY • *SALVATION AND SOVEREIGNTY: A MOLINIST APPROACH* (B&H ACADEMIC, 2010)

ROSES acronym

Southern Baptist

Keathley's *Salvation and Sovereignty* (2010) is the most accessible introduction to Molinism from within conservative evangelical Protestantism. In it he coined the **ROSES** acronym to parallel and correct TULIP, and much of the Molinist framing in the rest of this lesson follows his presentation.

Today there are probably more Protestant Molinists than Catholic ones — a remarkable historical reversal. The current Molinist scholarly community includes Craig, Keathley, Kirk MacGregor, John Laing, Thomas Flint, Alfred Freddoso, and others. Pleasant Springs Church stands in this evangelical Molinist tradition.

PART 7 — THE THREE ACRONYMS COMPARED

We can now set the three systems side by side. Below is each acronym expanded, with the Scripture each side emphasizes, the theologian most associated with each point, and a brief “PSC reads this as” gloss.

TULIP • Calvinism (Synod of Dort, 1619)

T Total Depravity

Fallen humanity is totally unable to do anything pleasing to God apart from grace. Every faculty — mind, will, affections — is touched by sin. No one seeks God on his own.

Scripture: Romans 3:10–12; Ephesians 2:1–3; John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 2:14.

Defined by: Augustine (original sin); systematized by Calvin (*Institutes* II.1–5), Perkins, Turretin.

U

Unconditional Election

God's choice of individuals to salvation is grounded in his sovereign good pleasure, not in any foreseen faith or worth in them.

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4–6; Romans 9:11–16; 2 Timothy 1:9; John 15:16.

Defined by: Augustine (*On the Predestination of the Saints*); Calvin (*Institutes* III.21–24); Canons of Dort, First Head.

L

Limited Atonement (Particular Redemption)

Christ died specifically and effectually for the elect. His atonement does not merely make salvation possible for all; it accomplishes salvation for those the Father gave him.

Scripture: John 10:14–15, 26; John 17:9; Ephesians 5:25; Acts 20:28.

Defined by: This is a post-Reformation doctrine (Beza, Owen). Calvin himself was less explicit. John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648) is the classic defense.

I

Irresistible Grace (Effectual Calling)

Whomever the Father has elected, the Holy Spirit will effectually draw to Christ. The elect cannot finally resist the saving grace of God.

Scripture: John 6:37, 44; Romans 8:29–30; Acts 13:48; Ephesians 2:5.

Defined by: Augustine; Calvin; Canons of Dort, Third and Fourth Heads.

P Perseverance of the Saints

Those whom God has truly saved will be preserved by his power to final salvation. A professing believer who falls away permanently was not truly regenerate in the first place.

Scripture: John 10:27–29; Romans 8:38–39; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:3–5.

Defined by: Augustine (*On the Gift of Perseverance*, 429); Canons of Dort, Fifth Head; Westminster Confession XVII.

DAISY • Arminianism (Remonstrants, 1610)

Note: DAISY is a recent Calvinist-invented acronym, and many Arminians reject it as a caricature. Classical Arminianism — as taught by Arminius, Wesley, and Thomas Oden — is a much more robust view than the acronym sometimes suggests. We give it here in the form common in comparison charts, but with the corrections Arminians would want made.

D Diminished Depravity (or better: Total Depravity with Prevenient Grace)

Fallen humans are totally depraved and cannot seek God on their own — but God gives every person *prevenient grace* (grace that “goes before”) that restores the ability to respond to the gospel when it is heard. Wesley especially emphasized this.

Scripture: John 1:9 (“the true light, which gives light to everyone”); John 12:32; Titus 2:11; Romans 2:14–15.

Defined by: Jacobus Arminius; more fully developed by John Wesley and Methodist theology; Thomas C. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (1993).

A Abrogated Election (Conditional Election)

God’s election of individuals to salvation is based on his *foreknowledge* of who would freely respond to his grace in faith. Election is real; it is just not unconditional.

Scripture: Romans 8:29 (“those whom he foreknew he also predestined”); 1 Peter 1:1–2; 2 Peter 3:9.

Defined by: Arminius (*Declaration of Sentiments*, 1608); Five Articles of Remonstrance, Article 1 (1610).

I Impersonal / Universal Atonement

Christ died for every human being without exception, making salvation genuinely available to all. The atonement is sufficient for all, though efficient only for those who believe.

Scripture: John 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:4, 6; 1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 3:9; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9.

Defined by: Arminius; Article 2 of the Remonstrance; Wesley.

S Sedentary (Resistible) Grace

God's saving grace is extended to all who hear the gospel, but it can be genuinely resisted. "If God makes me love him, it is not love — it is coercion."

Scripture: Matthew 23:37 ("How often would I have gathered your children... and you were not willing"); Acts 7:51 ("you always resist the Holy Spirit"); Luke 7:30; Hebrews 3:7–8.

Defined by: Arminius; Article 4 of the Remonstrance.

Y Yieldable Justification (Conditional Perseverance)

A person genuinely saved by faith can, by persistent willful unbelief or rebellion, fall from grace. Classical Arminianism (Wesley) generally teaches this; some modern Arminians accept "eternal security" instead.

Scripture: Hebrews 6:4–6; Hebrews 10:26–29; 2 Peter 2:20–22; John 15:6; Galatians 5:4.

Defined by: Arminius; Article 5 of the Remonstrance (held cautiously); Wesley (more firmly).

ROSES • Molinism (Kenneth Keathley, 2010)

Pleasant Springs Church's position. ROSES is a Southern Baptist evangelical formulation of Molinism. It agrees with Calvinism on God's real sovereignty and effective grace, and with

Arminianism on genuine human libertarian freedom and the universality of the atonement — and shows, by way of middle knowledge, that the two sets of affirmations are not in fact contradictory.

R Radical Depravity

Fallen humanity is deeply corrupted — as deep as “total” in the Calvinist account — but God’s grace in Christ, working through the Word and the Spirit, genuinely restores the capacity to believe when the gospel is heard. “Radical” captures both the depth of the fall *and* the sufficiency of grace.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1–9; Romans 3:23; Jeremiah 17:9 (on depravity) — and Titus 2:11; John 16:8 (on grace restoring).

Defined by: Molina (*Concordia*, disp. 13–14); Keathley (*Salvation & Sovereignty*, ch. 3).

O Overcoming Grace

God’s grace is genuinely efficacious — it really accomplishes salvation — but it operates not as overwhelming *force* but as irresistibly attractive *light*. God, by middle knowledge, knows who will freely respond if placed in which circumstances, and arranges circumstances so that his purposes are accomplished through the free “yes” of his creatures. The grace “overcomes” the darkness by its beauty, not by its coercion.

Scripture: John 6:44 combined with John 12:32 (the Father “draws,” Jesus when lifted up “draws all”); Luke 15:20–24 (the father runs to meet the returning son who freely chooses to come home); Romans 2:4 (“the kindness of God leads you to repentance”).

Defined by: Molina (middle knowledge); Keathley; William Lane Craig (*Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 1991).

S Sovereign Election

God sovereignly chose, before the creation of the world, to actualize a particular world from among all possible worlds. In that chosen world, he knew infallibly (by middle knowledge) who would freely believe and who would freely refuse. His election is therefore *both* sovereign (he

chose which world to create) *and* genuinely respectful of creaturely freedom (each person in that world freely chooses). Election is real and unconditional in one sense (God’s choice of the world) and conditional in another (each believer’s faith is a true free act).

Scripture: Ephesians 1:4–5 (God chose us before the foundation of the world) *and* 1 Peter 1:1–2 (chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”); Acts 2:23 (Christ crucified “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” but “by the hands of lawless men”).

Defined by: Molina; Keathley.

E Eternal Life (Assurance)

Salvation is permanent for those who are genuinely regenerate. A true believer cannot lose his salvation. However — and this is where ROSES nuances the Calvinist “P” — the *warning* passages of Scripture (Heb 6, Heb 10, 2 Pet 2) are real warnings, not merely tests. They are one of the means God uses to cause his people to persevere. The believer’s assurance rests not on the quality of his own perseverance but on the finished work of Christ, received by faith.

Scripture: John 10:27–30; Romans 8:31–39; Philippians 1:6; 1 John 5:11–13 — held together with Hebrews 6:4–6 as warning, not threat.

Defined by: Keathley (ch. 7–8).

S Singular Redemption (Unlimited Atonement, Limited Application)

Christ’s death is *sufficient* for the sins of all humanity without exception and is genuinely offered to all. Its saving benefits are *applied* only to those who, by grace, freely believe. This is essentially the classical Lombardian formula: “sufficient for all, efficient for the elect.” It affirms what the Arminian sees in John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2, and what the Calvinist sees in John 10 and Ephesians 5:25, without pitting the texts against each other.

Scripture: 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:4, 6; John 1:29; Hebrews 2:9 (universal sufficiency) — and John 10:14–15; Ephesians 5:25–27 (particular efficacy).

Defined by: Peter Lombard, *Sentences* III.20 (c. 1150); Molina; Keathley.

PART 8 — THE CONTESTED SCRIPTURES — HOW EACH SIDE READS THEM

Four passages, more than any others, anchor this debate. Honest theology reads them all, not just the favorable ones.

Greek NT (John 6:44): οὐδείς δύναται ἐλθεῖν πρός με ἐὰν μὴ ὁ πατήρ ὁ πέμψας με ἐλκύσῃ αὐτόν.

John 6:44 (ESV): “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

Calvinist: Only the elect are “drawn” in this effectual sense; all whom the Father draws come. **Arminian/Molinist:** The drawing is real and necessary, but it is a persuasive divine attraction rather than a deterministic pull. Hold with John 12:32: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* people to myself.”

Greek NT (Rom 9:15–16): τῷ Μωϋσεῖ γὰρ λέγει· ἐλεήσω ὃν ἂν ἐλεῶ· ἄρα οὖν οὐ τοῦ θέλοντος οὐδὲ τοῦ τρέχοντος ἀλλὰ τοῦ ἐλεῶντος θεοῦ.

Romans 9:15–16 (ESV): “For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy’ ... So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.”

Calvinist: Sovereign election, pure and simple. God mercies whom he wills.

Arminian: Paul is arguing about the inclusion of Gentiles as a corporate group, not about individual eternal destinies. Context (Rom 9–11) is Israel and the Gentiles.

Molinist: God’s mercy is his sovereign initiative; but his mercy operates in the real world through the real (middle-knowledge-known) free responses of human beings.

Greek NT (1 Tim 2:3–4): θεοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν, ὃς πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν.

1 Timothy 2:3–4 (ESV): “God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Arminian/Molinist: God’s genuine desire is the salvation of every human being; an atonement that excludes some by design is therefore impossible. **Calvinist:** “All people” here means “all sorts of people” (kings, common men, Jew and Gentile). God’s revealed “will of command” differs from his secret “will of decree.”

Greek NT (Matt 11:21): οὐαί σοι, Χοραζίν, οὐαί σοι, Βηθσαϊδά· ὅτι εἰ ἐν Τύρῳ καὶ Σιδῶνι ἐγένοντο αἱ δυνάμεις αἱ γινόμεναι ἐν ὑμῖν, πάλαι ἂν ἐν σάκκῳ καὶ σποδῶ μετενόησαν.

Matthew 11:21 (ESV): “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

Molinist: This is the clearest middle-knowledge text in all of Scripture. Jesus knows what Tyre and Sidon *would* have freely done in circumstances that did not actually occur. That is the very definition of *scientia media*. Calvinists and Arminians both find the verse awkward; Molinism takes it at face value.

PART 9 — PLEASANT SPRINGS’ POSITION: MOLINISM + THE ORIGIN OF SIN

Pleasant Springs Church teaches Molinism on election and grace, together with what we call the **Origin of Sin** on the nature of the fall — rather than the classical Augustinian doctrine of *Original Sin* in which Adam’s guilt is biologically or federally imputed to every descendant.

A. Why Molinism?

1. It preserves God’s real sovereignty. By choosing which of infinite possible worlds to actualize, God genuinely decides the course of history, the scope of

salvation, the fact that Christ is crucified on this hill, on this day, by these Roman soldiers.

2. It preserves real human freedom. Every free act is genuinely the free act of the creature. Peter's denial is genuinely Peter's denial; Pilate's sentence is genuinely Pilate's sentence. God does not cause them to sin; he knows what they would freely do and includes that in his plan.

3. It makes love possible. Our deepest commitment at Pleasant Springs is that God is love (1 John 4:8), and he wants a family who love him and love one another *freely*. Without genuine libertarian freedom, there is no difference between love and coercion. A programmed response is not love. A God who forces himself on his creatures has not been loved by them — whatever else he may have received from them.

4. It lets all the Scriptures be true at once. John 6:44 and John 12:32, Ephesians 1:4 and 1 Timothy 2:4, Romans 9 and 2 Peter 3:9 — all stand together, none reduced to a polemical footnote.

5. It honors the historical Church. Molinism was adjudicated by Rome as within orthodoxy (1607); was defended by one of the great scholastics of the 16th century; is held in evangelical form today by many sober Southern Baptist, Anglican, and non-denominational theologians. It is not a fringe view.

B. Why “Origin of Sin” rather than “Original Sin”?

We teach that sin *entered the world through Adam* and has affected every human descendant — as a *universal condition* (death, separation, a world system bent toward evil, a human nature in which temptation finds a ready hearing) and as a *universal fact* (every person past the age of accountability does in fact sin, and sins freely). What we do *not* teach is Augustine's Latin-Vulgate-driven position that every human being is born already **personally guilty** of Adam's transgression — guilty before he or she has

done anything at all, genetically transmitted by biological generation from father to child.

This is not a modern invention. Eastern Christianity — Greek-speaking, reading Romans 5:12 in the original ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον (“because all sinned”) — never taught the Augustinian doctrine of inherited guilt. It has always taught instead what it calls **ancestral sin**: we inherit from Adam *the consequences* of his sin (mortality, corruption, the disordered will, the broken world) but not his personal guilt. The Greek Fathers — Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Chrysostom, John of Damascus — are unanimous on this.

Pleasant Springs stands with the Greek East here. Our reasons:

1. The Greek text of Romans 5:12 does not say “in Adam all sinned”; it says “because all sinned.” Jerome’s Latin *in quo* is a translation choice that cannot be sustained from the Greek. Every reputable modern English translation, including the ESV and the NIV, renders the phrase “because all sinned” or equivalent, not “in whom all sinned.”

2. Scripture elsewhere explicitly denies the inheritance of personal guilt.

LXX (Ezek 18:20): ἡ ψυχὴ ἡ ἀμαρτάνουσα, αὐτὴ ἀποθανεῖται· υἱὸς οὐ λήμψεται τὴν ἀδικίαν τοῦ πατρός, καὶ πατήρ οὐ λήμψεται τὴν ἀδικίαν τοῦ υἱοῦ.

Ezekiel 18:20 (ESV): “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.”

LXX (Deut 24:16): οὐκ ἀποθανοῦνται πατέρες ὑπὲρ τέκνων, καὶ υἱοὶ οὐκ ἀποθανοῦνται ὑπὲρ πατέρων· ἕκαστος τῆ ἑαυτοῦ ἀμαρτίᾳ ἀποθανεῖται.

Deuteronomy 24:16 (ESV): “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.”

If God himself has forbidden earthly courts to execute a child for the father’s sin, how can we say God’s own court does exactly that with every child born of Adam? This tension is what Ezekiel 18 exists to resolve — and it resolves it the other way from Augustine.

3. The Scripture consistently speaks of sin as *personal*. Romans 3:23 (“all have sinned and fall short”), 1 John 1:8 (“if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves”), and James 1:14 (“each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire”) all describe universal actual sinning, not inherited forensic guilt.

4. The classical doctrine makes infant death theologically impossible to handle. If inherited guilt is real, infants who die before baptism are in serious trouble — a conclusion Augustine himself drew and the Reformed scholastic tradition wrestled with for centuries (cf. Canons of Dort, First Head, Article 17, which carefully avoids answering the question). The Eastern and ancestral-sin position does not generate this pastoral nightmare: infants are under the consequences of Adam’s sin (mortality) but are not personally guilty, and are therefore received by the grace of Christ.

5. It does not minimize Adam’s fall. Adam’s sin is catastrophic; it really did introduce death, corruption, and the cosmic disorder in which we live. The world we are born into is a fallen world. Our own nature, shaped by that world, is disordered from conception. When we reach moral responsibility, we will sin, predictably, freely, and every one of us. But this is *not* the same thing as being born with Adam’s personal guilt already on our record.

C. Dr. Michael S. Heiser’s Scholarly Case (2015–2023)

The most thorough modern evangelical Protestant defense of the Origin-of-Sin position — close to what Pleasant Springs teaches — is the six-part series *The Doctrine of Original Sin* by Dr. Michael S. Heiser, available at miqlat.org. Heiser (1963–2023), a

Dead Sea Scrolls and Semitic-languages scholar at Logos Bible Software and author of *The Unseen Realm* (2015), brought sustained philological precision to the question.

Dr. Michael S. Heiser (1963–2023)

PHD HEBREW BIBLE AND ANCIENT SEMITIC LANGUAGES, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON • SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE AT LOGOS/FAITHLIFE • AUTHOR OF *THE UNSEEN REALM* (2015), *SUPERNATURAL*, *DEMONS*, *REVERSING HERMON*

Biblical Scholar

Miqlat.org

Heiser spent his career recovering the Second Temple Jewish “Divine Council” worldview that the New Testament writers assumed and most modern readers have forgotten. On original sin his position was that the traditional Augustinian doctrine reads into Romans 5:12 what is not there, generates theological problems it cannot solve, and is not required by any careful exegesis of Scripture. His six-part series at Miqlat makes five arguments Pleasant Springs affirms.

HEISER’S FIVE ARGUMENTS

1. What Romans 5:12 actually says. “*The only thing that the text says spread to all humankind was death. To say ‘guilt’ was what spread to all humanity is to import that idea into the text. That’s eisegesis.*” The Greek phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ (eph’ hô) is best rendered “with the result that” or “because,” not “in whom” (Jerome’s Latin error). What passes from Adam to us is **mortality**; what we contribute is **our own actual sinning**.

2. The Jesus problem. If inherited guilt is biologically or seminally transmitted from every parent to every child, then Jesus of Nazareth — a real human descendant of Adam through Mary (Luke 3:38), descended “according to the flesh” (Rom 1:3) — would inherit it too, unless we deny his full humanity. Every traditional answer (“Jesus was God,” “original sin is transmitted only through the male,” “Mary was a mere receptacle”) has been shown to have serious biblical or philosophical problems. The Origin-of-Sin

/ ancestral-sin account has no such problem: Jesus inherits mortality (and bears it on the cross) but never sins, because sinning requires volition.

3. Both “federal” and “seminal” headship fail. The classical Reformed doctrine of *federal headship* (Adam as federal representative whose guilt is imputed) depends on a covenantal transaction that is read into Genesis 2–3 rather than out of it. Augustine’s alternative *seminal headship* (all of humanity actually present “in Adam” and therefore actually sinning in his act) is logically incoherent, scripturally unsupported, and scientifically impossible.

4. Psalm 51:5 does not teach inherited guilt. “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” is often read as proof of inherited guilt. But the Hebrew preposition *beth* (“in”) functions here as a *beth of predication* — “as a sinner” rather than “in a condition of guilt.” David is confessing that he was *born into a world of sin* and will himself sin; he is not reporting that he was guilty at conception.

5. Romans 5:18–19 “all men” vs. “the many.” “One trespass led to condemnation for all men... by the one man’s disobedience *the many* were made sinners.” The shift of language is deliberate. Adam’s act put all humanity under the curse of death and the conditions in which they will sin; actual condemnation falls on “the many” who in fact sin. Likewise Christ’s work offers justification to all; actual justification is received by “the many” who believe. “*All could have eternal life and justification, but not all do.*”

6. The resurrection-based solution for those unable to believe. In Part 4 of the Miqlat series Heiser makes his most pastorally significant argument. The traditional doctrine of inherited guilt puts every theologian into a corner when parents ask, “Where is my stillborn child?” Every classical “solution” — “trust God’s grace without a verse,” “infant baptism secures them,” “God wipes our memories” — either invents a doctrine Scripture does not teach or resorts to baptismal regeneration. The Origin-of-Sin framework has a Scriptural answer. Paul’s direct parallel in **1 Corinthians 15:22** is that “as in Adam *all die*, so also in Christ shall *all be made alive*.” Adam’s sin resulted in death, not guilt; Christ’s resurrection undoes what Adam did. And in Revelation 20 the basis for the second death is not Adam’s guilt but personal moral guilt recorded in the “books” (Rev

20:12–15). A soul that has never committed an act of moral volition has nothing recorded in the books of judgment and is therefore not written into them. Such a soul can only be in the other book — the Book of Life — and is raised at the second resurrection by virtue of Christ’s finished work. *“Their salvation has nothing to do with works. It is accomplished by the resurrection. No one is in heaven by their own merit. No one is in heaven that is innocent without being resurrected by/with/because of Christ. Christ is the essential means of salvation. Without Christ, there is no eternal life.”*

Why this matters pastorally. Heiser’s framework resolves four problems at once that have vexed Augustinian theology for sixteen centuries:

- **Infants who die.** They have not sinned volitionally; they have not incurred personal guilt; they are received by the grace of Christ, whose resurrection has undone the death they inherited. This is not a pastoral evasion; it is the natural conclusion of the doctrine.
- **The unborn and the aborted.** Same answer. They inherited mortality from Adam and are delivered from it by Christ, having never committed a personal sin.
- **The severely mentally disabled.** Those who never reach the moral volition required to sin are not personally guilty. They are received.
- **The innocent-heathen question.** This lesson does not resolve every case, but the framework makes it possible to hold that God judges people by what they actually do with the light they actually have (Rom 2:14–16), not by a forensic imputation of someone else’s sin.

Greek NT (1 Cor 15:22): ὡσπερ γὰρ ἐν τῷ Ἀδὰμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζῶοποιηθήσονται.

1 Corinthians 15:22 (ESV): “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”

Paul’s parallel is exact: Adam’s sin produced *death* in all; Christ’s resurrection produces *life* in all who are Christ’s. The verse does not say “in Adam all are guilty” — it says “in Adam all die.” What Heiser reads out of Romans 5:12, Paul himself confirms in 1 Corinthians 15:22.

Greek NT (Rev 20:12): καὶ εἶδον τοὺς νεκρούς, τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικρούς, ἐστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, καὶ βιβλία ἠνοιχθησαν· καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοιχθη, ὃ ἐστὶν τῆς ζωῆς, καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

Revelation 20:12 (ESV): “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, **according to what they had done.**”

Judgment at the Great White Throne is “according to what they had done” — personal moral volition, not forensic imputation of someone else’s sin. A soul that never acted cannot be judged by acts it did not commit.

What we are not claiming. We are not claiming Heiser was right about everything he wrote, or that every feature of his Second Temple “Divine Council” framework belongs in a discipleship lesson on this topic. We are claiming that his philological reading of Romans 5:12 is correct; that the Greek-speaking Christian East has always read it that way; that the Augustinian doctrine of inherited guilt rests on a Latin translation error; and that an evangelical Protestant can — and should — confess the radical depravity of fallen humanity and the universal need for Christ’s redemption without affirming an Augustinian doctrine that Scripture does not actually teach.

D. Irenaeus and the Pre-Augustinian Church (c. 180 AD)

Our position is not a modern evangelical novelty. It is substantially the position held by **Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon** (c. 130 – c. 202), the most important Christian theologian of the second century and the disciple of Polycarp, who was the disciple of the Apostle John. Two hundred years before Augustine coined the term *original sin*, Irenaeus had already given the church a rich, multi-causal account of sin’s origin drawn directly from

the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Jewish apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple period.

The definitive scholarly study is Donald R. Schultz's 1972 McMaster University Ph.D. dissertation, *The Origin of Sin in Irenaeus and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, supervised by the great Pauline scholar E. P. Sanders. Schultz demonstrates, with 196 pages of careful philological and historical argument, four things that are decisive for our discussion.

SCHULTZ'S FOUR FINDINGS (1972)

1. The term “original sin” is Augustinian, not biblical or patristic.

“It is anachronistic to use the term ‘original sin’ prior to the period of St. Augustine.” Augustine coined the Latin phrase *peccatum originale* in his *Ad Simplicianum* (396) and developed it in the anti-Pelagian works of 412 and following. No writer before Augustine uses the phrase, and no writer before Augustine teaches the doctrine in Augustine's specific form.

2. The Old Testament contains no unified doctrine of the origin of sin.

“Nowhere in the Old Testament was there any such doctrine nor even an attempt to trace sin back to its origin.” The Hebrew Bible presents Adam's fall, but it does not build a systematic doctrine of inherited guilt on top of it. Adam's story sits alongside Genesis 6 (the Watchers), alongside the prophetic insistence on personal responsibility (Ezek 18), alongside the psalmists' confessions of personal sin. The Old Testament is varied.

3. Second Temple Judaism developed three different theories of sin's origin, not one. Schultz identifies three overlapping traditions in the inter-testamental literature:

- **The Watcher Theory** (1 Enoch, Jubilees, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Dead Sea Scrolls): the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1–4 — the “sons of God” or *Watchers* — descended and corrupted humanity by teaching forbidden arts and by begetting the Nephilim. Evil spreads from this angelic transgression.

- **The Adam Theory** (4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, Life of Adam and Eve): sin originated in Adam's disobedience, and its consequences spread to

Adam's descendants — though 2 Baruch famously insists that every person is “the Adam of his own soul” (2 Baruch 54:19) and bears his own guilt.

- **The Yetzer Theory** (rabbinic literature, especially the Mishnah and Talmud): every person is born with two impulses or inclinations — the *yetzer ha-tov* (good inclination) and the *yetzer ha-ra* (evil inclination). Sin arises when the evil inclination is indulged. This is close to the view of the apostle James in James 1:14 (“each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire”).

4. Irenaeus synthesized all three. Irenaeus, in his five-volume *Against Heresies* (c. 180), drew on all three Second Temple traditions alongside Paul. For Irenaeus, sin's origin was not a single event but a web of causes: the apostasy of the Watchers, the fall of Adam, the inclination of the individual heart. Christ's work of *recapitulation* — a term Irenaeus drew from Ephesians 1:10, *anakephalaiôsthai* — undoes the *whole* web. Christ retraces Adam's steps in obedience, defeats Satan and the fallen Watchers, cleanses the human heart, and restores humanity to the glory intended in creation. Irenaeus's account makes Christ's work *cosmic*, not merely forensic.

Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130 – c. 202)

BORN SMYRNA (ASIA MINOR) • DISCIPLE OF POLYCARP, DISCIPLE OF THE APOSTLE JOHN • PRESBYTER AND THEN BISHOP OF LYON (LUGDUNUM), GAUL, C. 177–202 • AUTHOR OF *AGAINST HERESIES* (C. 180) AND *DEMONSTRATION OF THE APOSTOLIC PREACHING* (C. 190)

Second-century Bishop

Recapitulation

Anti-Gnostic

Irenaeus is, for orthodox Christianity, the most important second-century writer. He personally knew men who had known the Apostles. He defended the four-gospel canon against Marcion and Valentinus, the rule of faith against Gnostic speculation, and the unity of the Testaments against those who rejected the Old Testament God. His treatment of sin — multi-causal, cosmic, and centered on

Christ’s recapitulation of Adam — is arguably the richest in the entire patristic corpus.

He does teach that Adam’s sin affects his descendants — we inherit mortality, captivity to Satan, and a disordered nature. He does *not* teach that Adam’s personal guilt is forensically imputed or biologically transmitted. Every individual human sins freely; every individual human is responsible for his or her own sin; and Christ, the Second Adam, undoes the whole sorry history by living the life Adam should have lived and dying the death Adam deserved.

The upshot: the Augustinian doctrine of original sin as inherited guilt is *one* Christian attempt to account for the origin of sin. It is not the only one; it is not the oldest; it is not the one the church held for its first four centuries. Irenaeus’s richer account — Adam, the Watchers, and the human heart — is older, more biblical, more consonant with Second Temple Judaism, and more faithful to the actual language of Genesis and Romans. It is the framework Pleasant Springs Church receives and teaches.

Greek NT (Eph 1:10): εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ.

Ephesians 1:10 (ESV): “As a plan for the fullness of time, **to unite all things in him**, things in heaven and things on earth.” — The Greek verb is *anakephalaiōsasthai*, “to sum up again,” “to recapitulate.” Irenaeus made this verse the hinge of his entire theology.

E. What Pleasant Springs Church Does *Not* Teach

Because three widely held Protestant views are regularly assumed to be “just what the Bible teaches,” it is important to state clearly that Pleasant Springs does **not** hold them. We name these views with respect; they are held by honest Christians, and in some cases by our own members’ home traditions. But we want you to know what each view actually is, so you can recognize it when you hear it, understand why we have chosen not to teach it, and continue to honor the brothers and sisters who do.

A brief note on tone. These are in-house disagreements among Christians who share the gospel. We are not saying that federal Reformed, Augustinian-seminal, or traducianist

believers are heretics, unsaved, or less faithful than we are. We are saying that we have weighed the biblical evidence and landed somewhere else, and we want to be transparent about where and why.

1. Federal Headship (Covenantal-Representative View)

JOHANNES COCCEIUS (1603–1669) • WESTMINSTER CONFESSION (1647), CHS. VI–VII • CHARLES HODGE, *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY* (1872)

What it claims: Adam stood as the *federal* (from Latin *foedus*, “covenant”) representative of humanity in a Covenant of Works in the Garden. His obedience would have secured life for all; his disobedience imputed guilt to all he represented. Every human is therefore born under the *legal imputation* of Adam’s transgression, even before committing any personal sin. Christ is the Second Adam whose obedience is imputed in the opposite direction to those whom he represents — the elect. This is the standard confessional Reformed doctrine (Westminster, Belgic, Heidelberg, Canons of Dort, Three Forms of Unity, London Baptist 1689).

Key texts cited: Romans 5:12–21 (“the one man” / “the many”); 1 Corinthians 15:22 (“in Adam all die”); the Covenant of Works inferred from Hosea 6:7 (“like Adam they transgressed the covenant”).

Why Pleasant Springs declines: The federal idea depends on reading a formal Covenant of Works into Genesis 2–3 that the text itself does not present. Hosea 6:7 is a disputed translation (ESV margin: “like men” / “at Adam” — a place name). The legal imputation of guilt to persons who have not sinned conflicts directly with Ezekiel 18:20 and Deuteronomy 24:16 (“the son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father”). Romans 5:12, read in the Greek rather than Jerome’s Latin, says that death — not guilt — spread to all because all sinned personally.

2. Seminal Headship (Natural/Realist View)

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354–430) • WILLIAM G. T. SHEDD, *DOGMAIC THEOLOGY* (1888) • A. H. STRONG, *SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY* (1907)

What it claims: All human beings were *actually present* in Adam at the moment of the Fall — seminally, that is, as the seed is present in the plant from which it grows. When Adam sinned, we were really (though not individually) there, and we really (though not individually) sinned. Augustine found scriptural warrant for this in Hebrews 7:9–10, where Levi is said to have paid tithes to Melchizedek “while still in the loins of his ancestor” Abraham. If Levi’s act in Abraham’s loins counted, so did ours in Adam’s. Human nature itself — not a legal covenantal relation — is what transmits guilt.

Key texts cited: Romans 5:12 (read in Jerome’s Latin as *in quo omnes peccaverunt*, “in whom all have sinned”); Hebrews 7:9–10 (Levi “in the loins” of Abraham); Psalm 51:5 (“in sin did my mother conceive me”).

Why Pleasant Springs declines: Seminal headship depends on the very Latin translation error Heiser identifies (*in quo* for $\acute{\epsilon}\phi\prime\tilde{\omega}$). Hebrews 7:9–10 is a rhetorical flourish about Levi’s subordination to Melchizedek’s priesthood, not a metaphysical claim about every act of every ancestor being imputed to every descendant. Psalm 51:5, read with David’s actual grammar, confesses that David was born into a sinful world (a *beth of predication*, “as a sinner”), not that he was personally guilty at conception. More fundamentally: if we were all “really in Adam,” then by the same argument Jesus was really in Adam too (see Heiser’s Jesus Problem above). Augustine himself saw the difficulty and never fully resolved it.

3. Traducianism (The Transmission of the Soul)

TERTULLIAN OF CARTHAGE (C. 155 – C. 220), *DE ANIMA* (C. 207) •
LUTHER AND LUTHERAN ORTHODOXY • W. G. T. SHEDD, *DOGMATIC THEOLOGY* (1888) • GORDON CLARK, *THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF MAN* (1984)

What it claims: The soul, like the body, is transmitted (Latin *tradux*, “an offshoot, a vine-shoot”) from parents to children. When a human being is conceived, father and mother together produce not only a body but a soul; that soul inherits the character — including the fallenness — of its parents. On this view, the inheritance of a sinful nature from Adam is not a legal fiction (as in federal headship) and not a metaphysical presence (as in seminal headship) but

a natural biological-spiritual reality: we are sinners by birth because our souls have been generated from sinful parents in an unbroken chain reaching back to Adam. Tertullian was the first serious defender; Luther and many Lutherans have held it; W. G. T. Shedd (the 19th-century American Reformed) argued for it vigorously as the natural complement to seminal headship.

The alternative view is called Creationism — that God directly creates each individual soul at (or near) conception and joins it to the body formed by natural generation. Aquinas and most Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology hold this; many Reformed (e.g., Charles Hodge) are creationists in this sense. Creationism avoids the claim that sin is a genetic property of the soul.

Key texts cited in favor of traducianism: Genesis 2:2 (God “rested” from creation, implying he is not still creating souls); Genesis 5:3 (Adam “fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image”); Hebrews 7:9–10 again; John 3:6 (“that which is born of the flesh is flesh”).

Why Pleasant Springs declines: Traducianism is usually paired with seminal headship and Augustinian original sin to make the whole inheritance-of-guilt picture work. Our case against Augustinian original sin therefore bears on traducianism as a theological engine of that doctrine. We take no firm position on the narrower question of where a soul comes from (creationism or traducianism) — Scripture is not explicit, and godly Christians disagree — but we do reject the doctrinal package in which a soul arrives in the world already carrying Adam’s personal guilt as part of its genetic or spiritual inheritance. Genesis 5:3 says Seth bore Adam’s image; it does not say Seth bore Adam’s guilt. Ezekiel 18:20 and Deuteronomy 24:16 remain decisive.

4. Pelagianism — and we are not this either

PELAGIUS (C. 354 – C. 420), CONDEMNED AT CARTHAGE 418 AND EPHESUS 431

What it claims: Adam’s fall harmed Adam alone. His descendants are born morally innocent, with the same capacity for righteousness that Adam was created with. Sin is learned by imitation, habit, and bad example. Grace helps us — it informs, instructs, and illumines — but it is not strictly necessary for the will to turn toward God.

Why Pleasant Springs declines: This was condemned by the ancient Church and rightly so. We are *not* Pelagian. The radical depravity of fallen humanity is the **R** of our ROSES; Scripture consistently teaches that the fall affected the race, not just the man (Gen 6:5, Ps 14:3, Jer 17:9, Rom 3:10–18, Eph 2:1–3). Every person past the age of moral accountability *will*, in fact, sin. Grace is absolutely necessary, prior, and sovereign. What we reject is the specific *mechanism* of inherited forensic guilt, not the universality of actual sin or the necessity of grace. This is the difference between the Origin-of-Sin doctrine (which is Irenaean, Eastern, and ancient) and Pelagianism (which was rightly condemned).

WHAT THIS ALL ADDS UP TO

We do **not** teach Federal Headship — the legal imputation of Adam’s guilt through covenantal representation.

We do **not** teach Seminal Headship — the metaphysical presence of every descendant in Adam’s sinful act.

We do **not** teach the Traducianist doctrine of inherited spiritual guilt passed through biological generation.

And we do **not** teach Pelagianism — that humans are born in the condition Adam was created in and can save themselves by unaided will.

We teach the older, richer, and more biblical doctrine that the fall of Adam introduced death, disorder, and the universal condition in which every human will in fact sin — but that each person bears personal responsibility for personal sin, that moral innocents who die are received by Christ’s resurrection, and that no soul is condemned for a sin it did not commit.

PLEASANT SPRINGS CHURCH TEACHES

The Origin of Sin: Adam's free disobedience introduced sin and death into the human race. Every human being is born into that fallen world, inheriting *mortality, disorder, and a nature that will in fact sin*, but *not* inheriting the personal guilt of Adam's particular transgression. Every person's guilt is his or her own, and every person's salvation is Christ's free gift offered through the gospel.

Molinism: God sovereignly chose, before creation, to actualize this particular world — knowing infallibly by his middle knowledge what every free creature would do in every possible circumstance. Christ died for all (*singular redemption*), and grace genuinely draws all who hear (*overcoming grace*). Those who freely say yes are sovereignly elected in this world (*sovereign election*); those who freely say no bear the responsibility for their refusal (*resistible grace, from the human side*). A true believer is kept by the power of God for eternal life (*eternal assurance*), warned by Scripture to stand firm, and upheld by Christ to the end.

PART 10 — WHAT THE THREE SYSTEMS SHARE

It is easy to get lost in the differences. Let us end with what Calvinists, Arminians, and Molinists all confess together — which, by every historic measure, is the vastly greater part of the Christian faith:

1. God created the world good; sin has corrupted it; Christ will restore it.

(Gen 1–3; Isa 65:17; Rev 21:1–5.)

2. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. No human work contributes. All three systems confess this with equal force.

3. The Bible is the inerrant Word of God, the supreme authority for faith and life. (Chicago Statement; Westminster I; Remonstrant and Molinist writings equally.)

4. The Holy Spirit regenerates, indwells, sanctifies, and seals every true believer. (Titus 3:5; Eph 1:13; 2 Cor 1:22.)

5. Christ is truly God and truly man, crucified, buried, risen, ascended, and returning in glory to judge the living and the dead. (Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, confessed by all three.)

6. All who truly believe in Jesus Christ are justified, adopted, and will be with him in glory forever.

Calvinists, Arminians, and Molinists worship the same God, serve the same Christ, and walk by the same Spirit. The differences matter — this lesson would not exist if they did not — but they are in-house differences among the redeemed, not boundaries of Christian fellowship. Pleasant Springs Church stands confidently in the Molinist tradition while welcoming brothers and sisters from all three streams to the Lord's Table.

Greek NT (Eph 4:3–6): σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης. ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα... εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἐν βάπτισμα.

Ephesians 4:3–6 (ESV): “Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

PRAYER

Sovereign God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we stand at the foot of a mountain your servants have climbed for two thousand years, and we have not seen its top. Grant us the grace to love what is true more than what is familiar, and to honor the brothers and sisters with whom we differ as those who have struggled with Scripture and arrived at their conclusions in good faith. You are sovereign over all things, and you have made your creatures genuinely free. You love us with a love that is not coercion, and you draw us with a drawing that is not force. Teach us to say yes to you freely, to love you from the will and the heart together, and to invite others into that same love. Keep us from the pride that treats election as a trophy and from the anxiety that treats freedom as a burden. Let us rest in the finished work of your Son, who died for all, lives for all, and will one day — from every tribe and language and people and nation — gather a free and willing family to the praise of your glorious grace. In Jesus’s name, Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Romans 5:12 in the ESV and then look up the Greek phrase *ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον* in a study Bible or lexicon. Does the Greek say “in whom all sinned” or “because all sinned”? What difference does it make for how we think about infants, babies, the disabled, and the not-yet-accountable?

2. Ezekiel 18:20 says explicitly that a son does not bear the iniquity of his father. If that is true of earthly courts, how can it not be true of God’s court? Is this a serious problem for the classical doctrine of inherited guilt, or is there a resolution?

3. Read Matthew 11:21–24 (“if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented”). What does Jesus’s statement

presuppose about God’s knowledge? Which of the three systems — TULIP, DAISY, ROSES — reads this verse most straightforwardly?

4. If God determined, before creation, that some specific individuals would not be saved (strict Calvinism), in what sense is 1 Timothy 2:4 (“God desires all people to be saved”) a true statement? If God does not determine anything (radical Arminianism), in what sense is Ephesians 1:11 (“who works all things according to the counsel of his will”) a true statement? Does middle knowledge resolve the tension?

5. Whichever view your family or tradition has taught, can you state the *other* two views in their strongest form, in a way their adherents would recognize as fair? Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 attributes everything to God’s grace and everything to his own labor. Can you hold both?

FURTHER READING

- **Molinism:** Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, B&H Academic, 2010 — the best single-volume introduction
- William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, Baker, 1987
- William Lane Craig, *Four Views on Divine Providence*, ed. Dennis Jowers, Zondervan, 2011 — Craig represents Molinism alongside Reformed, Open Theist, and Thomist views
- **Calvinism:** John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559), Book III, chapters 21–24 — read the source
- Canons of the Synod of Dort (1619) — short, clear, the founding text of TULIP
- Michael Horton, *For Calvinism*, Zondervan, 2011 — contemporary sympathetic statement

- **Arminianism:** Jacobus Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments* (1608) — the source
- Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, IVP, 2006 — corrects caricatures
- Thomas C. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, Abingdon, 1993 — classical Arminian/Wesleyan grace theology
- Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, IVP, 2004 — paired with Michael Horton and the “Why I Am Not an Arminian” volume
- **Original / Ancestral Sin (Pleasant Springs’ position):** Michael S. Heiser, *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, 6-part essay series at miqlat.org — the most accessible modern Protestant defense of the Origin-of-Sin (ancestral sin) position; short, philologically precise, pastorally compelling
- Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, Lexham, 2015 — the Second Temple framework in which Genesis 3 and Genesis 6 are read together; essential background
- Michael S. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ*, Defender, 2017 — on the Watcher tradition and the New Testament
- Donald R. Schultz, *The Origin of Sin in Irenaeus and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Ph.D. dissertation, McMaster University, 1972 (supervised by E. P. Sanders) — the definitive scholarly demonstration that Irenaeus’s pre-Augustinian account drew on 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, 4 Ezra, and the Jewish apocalyptic literature; available in full text from McMaster’s digital commons
- Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, Book III.18–23 and Book V — the primary source for recapitulation and his treatment of Adam; available in the Ante-Nicene Fathers series, vol. 1
- John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, Fordham, 1974 — standard presentation of the Eastern “ancestral sin” doctrine
- Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background*, Alba House, 1972
- Peter Leithart, *Delivered from the Elements of the World*, IVP, 2016 — creative Protestant engagement
- **Historical background:** Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, vol. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, Chicago, 1971 — especially

chapters 7–8 on Augustine and Pelagius

- Justo González, *A History of Christian Thought*, vol. 2, Abingdon — Molina and the *De Auxiliis* controversy

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