**Free will**

**Section 1: Religious Free will**

**Section 1a: Background**

* Free will, in religious terms, is the opposite of predestination.
* Therefore, all human moral actions are the result of the freely ‘willed’ choice of the individual. Therefore, an individual is free to decide whether to follow God’s morality or reject it.
* One implication of free will is that each individual is responsible for their own post-mortem fate i.e. heaven or hell.
* The syllabus asks you to consider two religious theologians who supported religious free will: Pelagius (354-420) and Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609)

**Section 1b: Religious free will - Pelagius**

**Background:**

* Pelagius (354-420) was an ascetic monk: therefore, he had chosen a religious path that prioritised abstention from worldly pleasures, to pursue spiritual goals.
* On a visit to Rome (the centre of the Roman Catholic Church), he was deeply concerned with the moral standards he found there. He blamed the abundance of sin, he found in Rome, on the Catholic Church’s predestination theology - later formulised by Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin (see earlier notes).
* This is because, according to Pelagius, people were not trying to control their urge to sin, because they felt the urge to sin was predestined and therefore they had no choice but to sin.
* In response Pelagius argued that people had the free will to resist sin. He wrote two major works on human free will: ‘On Nature’ and ‘Défense of the Freedom of the Will’.
* Pelagius theories angered the Catholic Church establishment in Rome (see earlier notes on Augustine). So much so that Pelagius was eventually declared a heretic by the Catholic church at the Council of Carthage in 418AD.
* (I’ve broken Pelagius’ free will theory into 4 parts – to make it easier to understand):

**Part 1: the role of original sin**

* His theory, like Augustine’s, starts with an interpretation of ‘the fall’ of Adam and Eve, that created the ‘original sin’.
* Pelagius argued an omnibenevolent God would not punish all of humanity for the sins of Adam and Eve. Therefore, in contrast to Augustine, Pelagius stated that Adam’s sin only affected Adam and is not inherited by all of humanity.
* Pelagius supported this argument by considering evidence found in Deuteronomy 24:16 - ‘Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sins.’
* Therefore, according to Pelagius, humanity does not inherit ‘original sin’ and therefore is not inflicted by an overwhelming desire to sin (see earlier notes on concupiscence by Augustine). As Pelagius stated: **“we (humanity) may not seem to be forced to do evil through a fault in our nature.”**
* In fact, Pelagius then went one step further by arguing that ‘the fall’ can be seen as a good thing for humanity.
* He wrote: “If God had simply instructed Adam and Eve to eat from the tree, and they had obeyed, they would have been acting like children. So, he forbade them from eating the fruit; this meant that they themselves had to make a free will decision, whether to eat or not to eat. Just as a young person needs to defy his parents in order to grow to maturity, so Adam and Eve needed to defy God in order to grow to maturity in his image.”
* Therefore, in Pelagius’ view, Adam and Eve, by choosing to eat from the forbidden tree, were illustrating to God that they were mature enough to receive the gift of free will. It is this, free will, that humanity inherits from Adam and Eve i.e. that all people are responsible, to God, for their own actions.

**Part 2: free will is used to follow God’s laws**

* Therefore, Pelagius believed that people can use their freewill to follow God’s moral law; such as following the commandments.
* Pelagius believed that following the commandments was within human free will capabilities because a loving God would not create commandments that humans did not have the capacity to follow. As Pelagius stated: **“No one knows better the true measure of our strength than He who has given it to us ……”**
* When humanity freely chose to resist a temptation and thus keep to a commandment, Pelagius referred to it as ‘doing good works’.

**Part 3: the role of ‘God’s grace’ in salvation**

* In the next part of his theory Pelagius wanted to make it clear, he was NOT arguing that humanity was completely able to fulfil the law (commandments etc) without God’s help.
* Instead, Pelagius argued that all ‘good works’ were carried out only with the grace of God. However, Pelagius saw God’s grace as enabling, not forcing, good works.
* What he means by this is that God is acting as a guide to do good works. God tries to guide humanity towards doing good but within the constraints of human free will.
* Therefore, humanity has the free will capacity to ignore God’s guidance and be sinful. In fact, Pelagius believes this ability to sin is actually a good thing because it emphasises the goodness when a person does do good works. This is a point Pelagius argued when he stated: **“this very capacity to do evil is also good – good, I say. Because it makes the good part better by making it voluntary and independent.”**
* Therefore, Pelagius believed, that people do have the free will to choose to do good works, or be sinful. However, when they freely choose to do good works, it is through the guiding grace of God. As Pelagius states: **“Free will is in all good works always assisted by divine help.”**

**Part 4: the role of ‘God’s grace’ in salvation**

* Pelagius believed that if people, with their free will, choose not to follow God’s commandments, they can still freely seek forgiveness. through God’s grace people can be forgiven for their sins and thus achieve salvation.
* This is because Pelagius stated that God grants atonement, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, to all those who freely choose to have faith in him.
* Therefore, Pelagius is putting forward the idea of universal atonement i.e. Christ's death on the cross was for the forgiveness of all humanity. Moreover, this means that all humanity can achieve salvation in heaven.
* However, Pelagius does clarify this slightly. He argued simply freely asking for forgiveness is not enough to receive God’s atonement. Repentance must be more than freely asking for forgiveness, it should also involve choosing not to do that sin again.