

Sorry, Charlie

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Date: 04 April 2022

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[0 : 00] When we closed last Monday, and by the way, for our guests, we've been going through for, this is week 23 and pursuing holiness in an unholy world.

When we closed last Monday, we had just started speaking about some individuals that, another way to put it, they shipwrecked their entire denominations because of their aberrant view on justification and sanctification.

And in many of those denominations, they embraced the concept of perfectionism as a way of life. Those are my views, not shared by everyone, I'm sure, but several were guilty, though, of wreaking havoc on the church in their time.

And one such was a guy we're going to talk about a little bit tonight, and I hope I'm not stepping on any toes, but if I am, move your feet.

It was Charles Finney, lived up in the Northeast. The actions of Finney were egregious, to say the least.

[1 : 30] He was a Pelagian. Now, most of us in here don't know exactly what that term means, so I'll take a stab at explaining it. Pelagianism was named after its founder, a guy by the name of Pelagius, around 400 A.D.

And Pelagianism is a theological position that held that the original sin of Adam and Eve tainted Adam and Eve, but it had no taint on the human race, and that humans, by divine grace, have free will to achieve human perfection.

Pelagius, by the way, he lived from 355 to 420. He's older than Oscar. He was from Britain. He was a British philosopher.

He taught that God would never command believers to do anything that was impossible. And therefore, it must be possible in Pelagius' mind that we had the capacity as humans to achieve and satisfy all divine commandments.

He also taught and held that it was unjust to punish one person, and he had in mind their Christ, for the sins of another person.

[3 : 09] And even infants are born without sin, meaning in the Pelagian view, without a sin nature. Now, to a large degree, Pelagianism was defined by its chief opponent, a man that we should all hold in high esteem, Augustine, which a lot of people say Augustine, but it's actually Augustine.

But there's some exact definitions that are a little elusive from the Pelagian standpoint. Although Pelagianism had considerable support in the Christian world in his day, and it was really popular among Roman elite and the lowly monks of the Catholic Church, but it was vehemently attacked by Augustine and his supporters, and they had opposing views on grace and predestination and free will.

Augustine proved victorious in what they call the Pelagian controversy. It was decisively condemned at the Council of Carthage, in 418 AD, and even to this day, the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church hold that Finney, and they like to point out he was never a trained theologian.

That's strike one. Strike two is he was a lawyer. Actually, we'll give him two strikes there. But they thought he was heretical. They didn't embrace Pelagianism.

[5 : 05] Well, Finney did. So Finney set about, and he founded 50 communes in the state of New York.

Now, don't make a mistake that I made until 1959. I thought New York was New York City. There was a lot of New York. It's farms and dairies and countryside.

But why 1959? Because my family moved up there for seven years, although he lived out in New Jersey. But he founded 50 communes.

One of those communes, and there's a town there now by the same name, was called Oneida. Oneida, Oneida. Which is somewhat popular today, but not for religion.

It's the world headquarters of the Oneida flatware. They make knives and forks and spoons. The commune within Oneida had 300 followers of Finney living in it.

[6 : 10] And these are the people that started the flatware company. And it's still around to this day. Finney never thought it was necessary to explain the intricacies of his theology to the members of the commune.

But it didn't take long for his theology to come to the surface. In Finney's world of perfectionism, every man in the commune had access to every woman in the commune.

Now, women didn't have access to every man, but every man had access to every woman.

including very young girls, underage girls, and quite frankly, Derek's the youngest in here, but he'll get over it.

It was for the purpose of sex. To legitimize this conduct, they referred to it as communal marriage. Communal marriage.

We ran into that problem in Algeria, and I've been to Algeria a number of times. The Islamic terrorists over there will do that in a village. They'll rape everybody, and then the imam will come in, and he'll say, that was a marriage of convenience.

[7 : 33] You were married to her during that period of time, and now you're divorced, so you're okay. And you're going to go to heaven someday, or Allah. The great irony is that these men could practice literally horrific sexual misconduct, and Finney taught it had no negative impact on sanctification, on being recreated in the image of Christ.

Men in some of these communes were participating in a perpetual state of orgy, and at the same time claiming to be sanctified. And the lesson to be learned from such conduct is that to live that way, there's only one way you can do that.

You've got to redefine holiness and sin. That's the only way you can do that. Unless you just can't read the Bible, so maybe you say, well, I'm not responsible, I can't read.

That is why this lifestyle was referred to by true believers as the downgrade. And this wasn't the last downgrade.

Spurgeon went through a downgrade, but not this one. This was in like long, you know, it came along. It downgraded sanctification to accommodate what was actually sinful.

[9 : 03] So they were able to downgrade that. And you say, well, that's a bizarre illustration. It is, but it shows you that if you're going to hold to that doctrine, you've got to redefine holiness and sin.

They forced to devise downgraded definitions of sin, downgraded definitions of sanctification to accommodate the reality that they really were sinful, but they didn't want to call it that.

If it didn't meet their definition of sinful, then it wasn't sinful in their world. Well, I don't think God grades on a curve. Sometimes I wish He did, but as strange as this may seem to us here in the 21st century, there are a few denominations out there that follow some practices that are closely related. Some of these groups affirm that entire sanctification or perfectionism is attainable and should be attained. They still know that sin exists, but to be sin it has to be premeditated, conscious, and intentional.

If something happens that other churches might call sin, these are just accidental mistakes. But one byproduct of perfectionism is a tortured conscience.

[10 : 39] And I've got friends that while they would say, I've never achieved perfectionism, I think it's possible, but they're literally tortured because they've never been able to do it.

God's purpose for giving us a conscience to let us know that we are or have sinned. Either we are sinful or we have sinned.

How can your conscience function if you are so bent on constantly telling yourself, I'm without sin? Twice in my Christian walk, I've had men tell me they were sinless.

And one in particular, by the time I was through with him, he'd lost his salvation. He was mad, he was ready to fight, he was cussing me, and he told me, he said, boy, I'm in a lot of trouble here.

I said, yeah, yeah, you are. I'm going to read a quote from Dr. MacArthur, it's instructive, it's a little lengthy, but that's okay. All of this downgrade of holiness, redefinition of sin, is at the expense of a tortured conscience.

[11 : 48] And what you wind up doing is fearing you've lost your justification, fearing you might have lost your sanctification, because the fact is you can't hide your sin, especially to yourself.

All this starts when you separate sanctification from justification, and this found its way because of American revivalism, from Finney.

And there were others, I don't want to just pick on him solely. It found its way into mainstream evangelicalism, and dare I say, some of it into traditional Baptist movements, and it began to be talked about like this, you receive Jesus as Savior, and when you do, you're justified, sanctified, and then sometimes later if you want to, you can confess him as Lord, and that's when you get to be sanctified.

Now, I haven't heard that in our ranks in a long time, but I did hear that in the late 70s in some Baptist churches. For MacArthur, that was the common view when he wrote the book *The Gospel According to Jesus*.

That's one of those books that should be required reading before you go to heaven. And John says that I was basically arguing that that was a wrong view, that where justification occurs, sanctification occurs in the mind of God, although we do hold a progressive sanctification in our own life, but if you're being sanctified because you're justified and you die right now, you go right to heaven, where you're going to be instantly glorified.

[13:38] So in God's mind positionally, we've been sanctified. And we read in Romans 6 and 7 says that we have died with Christ, we've been risen with Christ, and we walk in newness of life.

This is MacArthur. So how did the mainstream evangelicals deal with it? They said, well, we are justified and you can't lose that, but sanctification is at the point when you decide to make Jesus Lord.

Quite honestly, I grew up with that, and I'll tell you this, John MacArthur grew up with that. That was his father's belief, and his father was a great man, but he was erroneous there.

How do you make Jesus Lord? He is Lord. He is Lord. He's been the Lord for eternity and will be. Romans 10 verses 9 and 10, if you confess with the mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved.

That was, that verse, those two verses are what prompted Dr. MacArthur to write the gospel according to Jesus and the gospel according to the apostles.

[15:08] Both great books. He's written two more, the gospel according to Paul and the gospel according to God, which is a detailed view at the fifth gospel, the book of Isaiah.

And I've got all four anytime you want to borrow. But evangelism in general all across the country, when MacArthur says, when I wrote the gospel according to Jesus, had separated those two things. That's what I grew up with. I grew up with people saying, we know you're a Christian, but you need to dedicate your life to the Lord. You need to consecrate your life to the Lord. And there was a lot of talk about consecration, dedication, and we would go to youth camp, and this is MacArthur talking, the speakers would say, we're going to have an invitation for dedication to confess Jesus as Lord, and that will be a consecration.

And you went back every year, so you did it every year. And it became a rededication, a reconsecration, and we were chasing this supposed momentary experience that catapulted into you, into the category of sanctification, sanctification, and it was really, though it was at Baptist camp, it was an offshoot from some Wesleyan theology.

There are a great many denominations that send their young people for camp, to camp. And some of you guys have been as kids, some of you have taught at camp.

[16:42] I've never been to Falls Creek, can you believe that? Of course, I wasn't raised Baptist, but I didn't go to our church camp either. I went out to see my grandmother in Mexico. And many of the camps practiced something like this.

And this is what happened at MacArthur's camp. I don't know if it happened to any of you guys. Many of those camps practiced something like this. Usually at the end of camp, they built a fire and there would be a pile of sticks.

They'd take a stick and say, this is my old life. I want to throw it in the fire. I want to rededicate my life to the Lord. And a lot of kids come up very teary-eyed and throw sticks into the fire.

And MacArthur says, I was at camp and this one kid came up and he had tears flowing down and he threw his watch into the fire. And John said to him, why did you do that?

And he said, I want to dedicate my time to the Lord. So John, they rode the bus back together and John said, what are you going to tell your mother when she says, what happened to the watch?

[17:52] I got you for your birthday. I don't know how that was ever resolved. Everything from no lordship theology to dedication, rededication, throwing sticks in the fire mentality existed because

we were not grasping justification and sanctification, but that sanctification cannot mean perfection. The Bible didn't teach that. But Paul is a believer when he writes Romans 6 and 7. And you remember all that, right?

What a wretched man am I. I do the things I don't want to do. I leave undone the things I want to do. He goes through this, pours out his heart. You know, only a believer understands that.

An unbeliever wouldn't understand it, wouldn't care. only a believer loves the moral law of God and sees it as holy, just, and good, and his inner man wants to obey it.

Well, one of the great men of history was J.C. Ryle, an Englishman. He was a bishop in the Anglican Church, but he had his head on straight. I have, he wrote a marvelous book in 1879 titled Holiness.

[19 : 11] I've got that book. This is what he says in that book, which is quite thick. Sudden instantaneous leaps from conversion to consecration I fail to see in the Bible.

Where you just have this sudden leap. He knew what all accurate Bible teachers know that justification and sanctification are inseparable. They occur at salvation, but at some point they become sanctified, and you can actually then, in some theologies, go from there to perfection.

When you are saved, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we are told that Jesus has become to us our justification and our sanctification. It's His. He gives it His people.

1 Corinthians 1, 26, For consider your calling, brothers and sisters, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

And God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the insignificant things of the world and the despised God has chosen the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no human may boast before God.

[20 : 41] But it is due to Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God. Jesus became wisdom for us. He became our righteousness and our sanctification and our redemption so that just as is written let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.

That's who we boast in. Now we need to understand there are some similarities between justification and sanctification. Both originate from the free grace of God.

it is only because of God's grace that we are justified and sanctified. Both are part of Christ's redemptive work of salvation. He grants us justification.

He grants us sanctification. Both will be present in the same person. Both begin simultaneously. Both begin at the moment of justification.

Both are necessary to glorification. All these are imputed to us and that's why God can say without holiness no man will see the Lord.

[21 : 56] Boy, that used to trouble me until I found out it was God's holiness. It was Christ's holiness. It was His holiness. Those who reach heaven have not only been forgiven their sins, they've been transformed and renewed in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

Now, we're not pretending and there aren't differences in justification. The sinner is counted righteous because the righteousness of Christ is credited to the sinner.

In sanctification, the sinner is actually being made righteous by the work of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The righteousness of sanctification is not our own.

It is Christ's righteousness credited! to us and that's the righteousness of justification. The righteousness of sanctification is our own, though mixed with failings and imperfection, but it too is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit in sanctification according to the Scriptures.

We are working out the salvation that God has already wrought in us. And we're to work that out in fear and trembling. Justification is an instantaneous, complete, and finished act of God, totally complete the moment the sinner believes.

[23 : 23] Belief there is the Greek word *pastuo*, meaning have faith, saving faith. Guys, you are not going to get more justification than you got at the moment you were saved.

You got a full tank of justification. It's not going to grow. And while in God's mind we are sanctified, we can also say it is a progressive work, lasting the rest of this life and not complete until glorification.

Well, when's that going to happen? You either got to die or get raptured out of here. And for the believer, your death's a miniature rapture. And then we will be glorified.

justification doesn't increase, it doesn't develop, it doesn't grow. The sinner is as justified the moment the sinner believes as he will be in heavenly glory.

That's amazing, isn't it? There was greater change in every man in here that's been saved than there will be change at our death.

[24 : 32] There's greater change when you get saved. Death, you just change addresses. You join the church in heaven, we take you off our role here. And now you're in the heavenly church.

But sanctification is progressive as believers grow in their spiritual life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thomas Watson was one of the great English Puritans.

I've got several of his books. And he said this, and I fell in love with this. Saving faith lives in a broken heart.

Always grows. Saving faith always grows in a heart humbled by sin. It grows in a weeping eye and in a tearful conscience.

That's great words from a man that lived hundreds of years ago. the Puritans in his day could never imagine any believer thinking himself free from sin in this life.

[25 : 39] Paul didn't think it. You can see that. Back briefly to Charles Finney, then we'll be done with him. We'll leave him in his own personal trash bin of history.

Finney ministered, I've got those in quotes, in the area we know as New England. To this day, that is the most difficult area in America for evangelical theology to take root and grow.

And I lived there seven and a half years. Yet Finney is still lauded and praised as a great theologian.

And he's referred to as the father of the second great awakening in America. And he's neither. Finney's works are glowingly displayed in the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College.

And Dr. Graham, he was fond of praising Finney for his great contributions to the church. Jerry Falwell called Finney one of his heroes.

[26 : 49] Many leaders of various groups use Finney as the blueprint for their work. And that includes various televangelists, youth with a mission, promise keepers, modern Pentecostalism, and so on.

Recently in a speech, the past president of Wheaton College closed by yelling out to the audience, Finney lives on. And the audience went wild with applause.

Well, what exactly did Finney accomplish? He shifted many churches denominations away from their mooring in the reformation of Luther and Calvin.

And that's what led to the Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards and Whitefield. That was the Great Awakening. And I just, I tell you, I've studied the Second Great Awakening.

I think it was false and fake. It didn't take root. It's where we had the preaching of the social gospel introduced to the American church.

[27 : 51] Now, how should we look at perfectionism in this life? In the words of John Owen, indwelling sin always abides while we are in this life. We battle it every day, don't we?

Our view of being perfected in this life should be the same as what the Bible says. So what are the scriptures say about perfectionism? Another word for that is entire sanctification in this life.

Proverbs 20 verse 9, Who can say, I have cleansed my heart? I am pure from my sin. 1 John 1 8 and 10, very famous, you probably got it memorized.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and His word is not in us.

Galatians 5, 17, for the desire of the flesh is against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, for these are in opposition to one another.

[29 : 04] And James 3, 2, for we all stumble in many, many ways. I heard Dr. Sproul a few years before his death say this.

He said, look, we live in continual need of a Savior. There's never a moment when we're not in sin, so we need a Savior.

And I said, well, that's pretty extreme, you know. I wouldn't challenge him, but he said, have you ever fulfilled the greatest commandment perfectly? For one second, love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

Have you ever fulfilled the second commandment? Love your neighbor as yourself. He said, that's why we need a Savior. I wish our life was as simple as Lazarus.

We talked about him last week, getting rid of his grave clothes. I want to close with this, and I must confess, in all my years, I never realized this fact.

[30 : 03] Never. We do know that Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in all the Bible. It is an amazing testimony to the divine inspiration of the Word of God.

Only God could come up with this, God the Holy Spirit. We don't know the identity of the human author. there's a lot of speculation about it.

But for 175 verses, there is nothing but praise for God. Every verse is a praise verse.

And let me tell you something. Every praise verse is a new praise. He doesn't ever repeat himself. God that's phenomenal.

That's phenomenal. Only the Holy Spirit could accomplish that. Certainly no mere man could do that. But there is a problem.

[31 : 13] Psalm 119 does not have 175 verses of inspired scripture. it has 176 verses. After 175 verses of pure praise, this unknown author, whoever he is, closes with this reality, I have gone astray.

This is after 175 verses of praise. I have gone astray like a lost sheep. And he cries out to God, seek thy servant.

That's just phenomenal. He wrote what we should all feel and express from time to time. I wonder how many of us know the name Moro Coffey Graham.

I didn't. She was the mother of Billy Graham. And actually was called Mother Graham to those around her. She was born in 1892 and died in 1981.

She died in her home, the home of her husband, William Franklin Graham Sr. It was built on the Graham dairy farm near Charlotte, North Carolina. It's where the Billy Graham library is at now.

[32 : 33] As death approached, she was surrounded by her large family. I mean, children and grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and they were all there. Billy was there and he had his well-worn Bible and he opened it up and he began to read the opening words of Psalm 119.

I don't know how long he was going to go, but after five words, Mother Graham took over, laying on her deathbed, looking up at the ceiling, she took over, and she quoted verbatim all 176 verses of Psalm 119 from memory.

I mean, I've gotten to the point I remember Jesus wept. That's the two I know for sure. And it's somewhere, John, Genesis, somewhere like that. Anyway, when she finished, she looked up at Billy.

She just minutes from death. And she said, Son, have you forgotten that when you were a child, you and I memorized that complete Psalm together? Can you imagine?

And a few minutes later, Mrs. Graham passed into the arms of her Savior. Oh, that I could die that well. Wow. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[34 : 08] Father, we thank you for the day and your grace and your mercy. And we thank you, Lord, that we're creatures who need the very thing you provide, grace and mercy, justification and sanctification, one day glorification.

We need that. And Lord, you're the great Jehovah Jireh, the God who provides. So we thank you for those provisions, Lord. May we live on this earth telling others about them.

We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen.