

# HERESIES, ANCIENT and MODERN.

## Lecture 9 – Moralism At Its Worst – Part 2

### Introduction

Last week we looked at Pelagius and into Pelagianism. Pelagius

- Believed that if God commanded it, mankind could do it.
- Believed that God cannot hold mankind responsible for something they cannot do.
- Believed that all men are born innocent free from sin nature.
- Believed in unconditional free will.
- Believed that God's grace (inherent goodness + the Law + Christ's example) provides man with enough resources to be reconciled to God.

The lecture and notes from last week are on the Church Website:

<https://www.elkpointbaptistchurch.com/news/heresies-ancient-and-modern--39>

Pelagianism and a modified form (Semi-Pelagianism) was repudiated and condemned by 3 Church Councils and several individuals.

Today I hope, by God's grace, to cover 2 main points:

1. How is Pelagius Refuted?
2. What can we learn from Pelagius?

### 1. How is Pelagius Refuted?

Augustine was a prolific writer and used his pen to oppose Pelagian theology. Some of his works directed to this heresy include: On the Spirit and the Letter (412), On Nature and Grace (415), On the Grace of Christ and on Original Sin (418), On Grace and Free Will (427), and On the Predestination of the Saints (429). So I will make a short description of Augustine's rebuttal, but we will quickly go to the Scriptures for our authority.

#### Original Sin

Augustine taught that the fall affected all of Adam's descendants with sin. Now every part of humankind is corrupted by sin, darkening the human mind and hardening the human heart. Sin for Augustine is like a hereditary disease passed down from one generation to the next.

Paul explains the effects of Adam's sin this way: "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men"<sup>1</sup> and "as one trespass led to condemnation for all men."<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem explains: "The conclusion to be drawn from these verses is that all members of the human race were represented by Adam in the time of testing in the Garden of Eden. As our representative, Adam sinned, and God counted us guilty as well as Adam."<sup>3</sup>

The result of this means that our nature is corrupted. The Psalmist said, "*The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.*" (Psalm 58:3, ESV). We are by nature "*children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*" (Ephesians 2:3b, ESV). It also means that our natures lack all good. Jeremiah writes, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?*" (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV). We are also unable to do good. "*Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*" (Romans 8:8, ESV). When Paul's readers were unbelievers he tells them: "*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—*" (Ephesians 2:1–2, ESV). Unregenerate man cannot obey God. "*For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.*" (Romans 8:7, ESV). For a stunning description of the affects or original sin one must just consult Romans 3:10-18.

### Unconditional Free Will

Augustine taught that humans were created with free will, teaching that only Adam and Eve had real freedom. Augustine said that after the fall, humans were preconditioned to commit wrong because Adam and Eve had sinned, and that all humans were guilty of that sin.

If "free will" means that mankind has a will, is commanded to exercise his or her will and is accountable to God for what they will – then mankind has a free will. But Pelagius' idea of free will is a will that is unencumbered by any restraint. It's a will that is totally innocent and can choose one direction or another. The Biblical notion of free will is that our will is free to do whatever our nature wants. In speaking to Christians, Paul writes, "*and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.*" (Romans 6:18, ESV). The condition of the unbeliever is one of bondage. "*Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.'*" (John 8:34, ESV).

The apostle Paul refers to man's bondage when he writes to Timothy: "*and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*" (2 Timothy 2:26, ESV).

So, mankind has a will, but it is not unconditionally free. Our wills are conditioned upon 2 factors. First, we are created making us dependent upon our Creator. Secondly, we are deprave making us free to do what our nature demands.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 5:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ro 5:18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

<sup>3</sup> Grudem, W. A. (2004). [Systematic theology: an introduction to biblical doctrine](#) (p. 495). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.

## Grace

In his book, *On the Grace of Christ*, Augustine charges Pelagius with ignoring Philippians 2:12 – 13, which urges Christians to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling even though God is at work in them. For Augustine, grace is the only way to salvation. In his work: *On Nature and Grace*, Augustine argued that if it were possible for a person to live a perfectly righteous life and be saved without faith in Christ, as Pelagius alleged, then Christ “died in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

I define grace as God’s free unmerited gift of enablement. The primary condition of the unregenerate is seen as “inability”. Grace is God’s ability. It is grace because it is God’s freedom to act without any external pressure. It is free grace.

In the Bible, grace is all-encompassing. In spite of our sin nature and the affects of total depravity leading to spiritual death, we read that God in mercy “because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”<sup>4</sup> God’s grace not only wakes you up, it brings you home.

God’s grace also justifies (“*and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*” (Romans 3:24, ESV)). We who are sinners by nature and choice are enabled to stand in Christ’s righteousness before the throne of God.

The Bible also speaks of a progressive or experiential grace. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this grace: “*For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*” (Hebrews 10:14, ESV). Paul told Titus that this grace teaches Christians to say no to sin (“*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*” (Titus 2:11–12, ESV)).

We also see a persevering grace in the Bible. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*” (Philippians 1:6, ESV). And later in that epistle he calls us to persevere because there’s an enabling power working in us. (“*for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” (Philippians 2:13, ESV)).

There is also a serving grace. “*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.*” (1 Corinthians 15:10, ESV)

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Eph 2:4–6). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

## 2. What Can We Learn From Pelagius

We should take note of some things from this controversy.

1. As noted in other lectures, words are important. Defining terms like “grace”, “free will” and “depravity” are important. Pelgians, Semi-Pelagians and Arminians all define grace differently. We must get our definitions from Scripture.
2. The moral laxity of professing Christians disturbed Pelagius and ought to disturb us. The Bible teaches us that our perseverance is evidence that we are indeed united with Christ (*“For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”* (Hebrews 3:14, ESV)). For 30 years I have publicly and privately debated Arminians (Semi-Semi-Pelagians and the one thing that we both have in common is a desire to honor Christ and see holiness pursued in His people. No system of theology is correct if grace means that I can live and do whatever I want.
3. Thirdly, we should learn from the Pelagius’ dilemma that in fact God ALWAYS commands us to do what we can’t do on our own, but Jesus reinforces that *“for apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15:5, ESV). Therefore, we always need enabling grace. You’ve heard it said that God never gives you more than you can handle. Wrong! God always gives you more than you can handle, “to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”<sup>5</sup>

### Q & A.

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<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (2 Co 4:7). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.