

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of biblical theology today by continuing to examine the nature of true saving faith. In our last session, Dr. Spencer argued that Christianity is not a self-help program and, in fact, is not primarily focused on improving this life, but instead places its emphasis squarely on eternity—the life to come. He then explained the double imputation, wherein our sins are imputed to Christ and his perfect righteousness is imputed to us. And we then briefly discussed the doctrine of union with Christ.

Dr. Spencer, you finished last session by arguing that a true Christian, that is, someone who is united by faith to Jesus Christ, will live an obedient life. What else should we know about living in union with Christ?

Dr. Spencer: The most important thing we need is a proper understanding of the relationship. The modern church loves to talk about Jesus as my friend, or my big brother, or my helper, or my guide, or my example; all of which are true in some measure. But the one thing the modern church avoids like the plague is the most important thing that *must* be said about my relationship with Jesus Christ; he is my Lord!

Marc Roby: Many modern Christians have been raised with the idea that I can have Jesus as my Savior, but that submitting to him as Lord is an optional step.

Dr. Spencer: I am well aware of that idea, but it could not possibly be more contrary to what the Bible teaches. As we saw last time with the story about the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, the Bible does say that if we believe in Jesus Christ we will be saved. But, as I endeavored to show last time, you have to flesh out what it means to “believe in Jesus.” You must believe in the true Jesus, not some counterfeit. And the true Jesus *is* the sovereign Lord of the universe, whether we acknowledge that fact or not. And this is a critical point, our confessing Jesus as Lord does not affect reality one way or the other, he *is* Lord. So, if you look at Romans 10:9 for example, you get a slightly fuller picture of what it means to believe in Jesus. That verse says, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”<sup>1</sup>

Marc Roby: I find it interesting that this verse doesn’t just say you must believe in the resurrection, it says you must “believe *in your heart*”.

Dr. Spencer: I think that is an important point. Now when Paul talks about our heart, he doesn’t mean our emotions or something that is somehow opposed to our intellect. Nor does he mean mere intellectual assent to some Bible truths. In the Bible, the word ‘heart’ refers to the totality of the person, that which constitutes the very core of our being. Our heart includes our mind, our will, and our affections. And saving faith, that faith which unites us to Jesus Christ, is only found in a heart that God has made good by the miracle of regeneration. Such a person is the one whom

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Paul is talking about when he says, “believe in your heart.” And such a faith will produce a changed life.

But, I want to focus on the first part of Paul’s statement. He said “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ ... you will be saved.” This gives us a bit more information than we are given in the account of the Philippian jailer.

**Marc Roby: Although I’m confident that the Philippian jailer was also told about the lordship of Jesus Christ.**

Dr. Spencer: Oh, I’m quite certain that you’re right. In fact, going back to Acts 16 for just a moment, right after the jailer was told to believe in Jesus Christ to be saved, we read, in verse 32, “Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.” We should ask ourselves, what was this “word of the Lord” that Paul and Silas spoke? I’m sure it included that fact that Jesus Christ is the Lord of all and that he demands obedience. Look at the great commission in Matthew 28. In verses 18-20 Christ told his disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” So I’m confident this was part of the word of the Lord that was spoken to the jailer’s household.

**Marc Roby: Alright, we don’t call other people lord in America, and although the title is still used in England, I think it would good to explain what it means for Jesus to be called Lord.**

Dr. Spencer: Let’s go back to Romans 10:9 – where we are told “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ ... you will be saved”. The Greek word translated as Lord in that sentence is κύριος (kurios). This word has different meanings. It can, for example, be translated as “sir” or “master” as it is many times in the New Testament. In that sense it is simply a title of honor. But it can also mean far, far more! The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was in use at the time of Jesus, uses the word κύριος to translate the Hebrew name for God, usually pronounced Jehovah, or Yahweh. And there are several places in the New Testament when an Old Testament reference to Jehovah is clearly applied to Jesus Christ.

For example, in the passage we are looking at in Romans Chapter 10, a few verses after being told “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ ... you will be saved” we read, in verse 13, that “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This is a quote from the Old Testament prophet Joel, and if you look at Joel 2:32 you will see that the word Lord is in all capital letters, which means it is the Hebrew word Jehovah as we noted in Session 6. So, this passage in Romans tells us that Jesus Christ is God, he is Lord in the sense of being the Sovereign Lord of all creation.

**Marc Roby: And, of course, Romans 10:13 is not the only New Testament reference to equate Jesus Christ with the Old Testament Jehovah. We could also cite Hebrews 1:10, 1 Peter 2:3 and 3:15.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. We could go on and make a much more lengthy argument to prove that Jesus Christ is God, and we will do that in a later podcast, but right now I want to go back to consider what it means for him to be Lord. And the point I am making is that we need to take the word Lord in the highest possible sense when we use it to refer to Christ.

**Marc Roby: It makes me think of the passage in Philippians 2:8-11 where we read, "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."**

Dr. Spencer: Amen. And every knee certainly will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We can either confess now and be saved, or we can confess later and be damned, but everyone will confess.

**Marc Roby: And all of this will redound to the glory of God the Father.**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. We could also cite Hebrews 1:1-3 where we are told that, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." We see that the universe was made through Jesus Christ and that he sustains it. He is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being". In other words, he is God. When the people saw the man Jesus Christ, they were seeing the exact representation of God in human form.

John says the same thing in John 1:18 where we read, "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." Notice that "God the One and Only" is "at the Father's side"! This is a clear statement that both Jesus and the Father are God, two persons of the Holy Trinity.

**Marc Roby: So, when we declare "Jesus is Lord", we are simply acknowledging the fact that he is God, the Creator and Sustainer of everything.**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. And he will be the Judge of everything as well. He came the first time to bring salvation, but we are told in Acts 10:42 that he is also the one who will judge both the living and the dead. Therefore, when we say "Jesus is Lord", there should be some trembling. I'm afraid the modern church has lost its fear of God, which is to say that it has lost true Christianity. We are told in Proverbs 9:10 that "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom", and in Romans Chapter 3, where Paul gives a terrible list of the sins of men, he ends by saying, in verse 18, "There is no fear of God before their eyes", which is a summary statement that explains all of the sins and is, itself, a horrible sin. It is unbelief.

Right after Moses gave the people the Ten Commandments, they were terrified because of the thunder and lightning and smoke on Mt. Sinai, and Moses said to them, in Exodus 20:20, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

**Marc Roby: Fear can be a good thing!**

Dr. Spencer: Fear is often a very good thing. Fear of physical harm keeps us from many stupid mistakes in this world, but most importantly, the fear of God will keep us from sinning. As has been said many times, we would live differently if God were visibly standing next to us all of the time.

**Marc Roby: And yet, we need to remember that God *is* with us at all times.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes he is, and it is a very good thing to keep in mind. But this all comes back to realizing that he is Lord. I am but a sinful creature, he is my Creator. As we said back in Session 2, the Creator/creature distinction is central to the message of the Bible. And yet, this idea of coming into the presence of a holy, omnipotent, omniscient, absolutely just God is completely absent from most modern churches.

When I travel and visit other churches, I'm careful to look online and try to find a church that appears to be faithful to the Bible, but I am often appalled at the casual manner of most of the people who come to church. They don't act or dress any differently than they might to go out to Starbucks for a cup of coffee on Saturday morning. And yet, here they are supposedly coming into the presence of God Almighty to worship him.

**Marc Roby: I've had the same sad experience. I'm sure they would dress and act differently if they were going to see some important person here on earth.**

Dr. Spencer: I'm sure they would.

**Marc Roby: So, we've made the point that true Christians must understand that their confession includes the statement "Jesus is Lord", and they must know how serious that is.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a critical point. It isn't just that we believe in him as a good moral teacher or example of self-sacrifice, it must be that we come to him as our Lord. And that means that we are his blood-bought slaves.

**Marc Roby: Slave is a term loaded with all sorts of negative connotations.**

Dr. Spencer: And for good reason given human history. But, it is a term that the Bible uses unashamedly. Paul begins the book of Romans by introducing himself, saying, in the Greek, "Παῦλος, δούλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ" (Paulos, doulos Christou Iasou), which means, Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus. And that same expression is used elsewhere as well.

In fact, Paul argues quite forcefully, and quite clearly, in Romans 6 and elsewhere that everyone is a slave. The only question is, who is your master? In Romans 6:16 he wrote, "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"

**Marc Roby: I'm quite confident that many, if not most, of our listeners will object that they are not slaves to anyone or anything.**

Dr. Spencer: I'm sure that you're right. But, what does it mean to be a slave? It means that you have no freedom, you are bound to someone or something as your master. And if someone is outside of Jesus Christ, meaning simply that he has not been born again and has not confessed Jesus as Lord, that person has a sinful nature handed down to him. And we are all slaves to our nature. We cannot choose to do that which we do not in any sense want to do.

We will discuss human free will in a later podcast, but it is important to note that we do not have absolute freedom. There is the obvious fact that we are not free to do things we are not physically capable of, but it is equally true that we are not free – unless we are forced – to choose things that are completely inconsistent with our nature. As a rather silly example, I would never choose a cup of coffee, because I hate coffee. And a sinner hates God, so he will never choose to obey God, which means that everything he does is sin. Even when an external action is in agreement with God's law, an unbeliever's motive is wrong and so it is still sin. There is a Latin phrase that theologians use for this condition, it is *non posse non peccare*, which means not able to not sin. That is the condition of anyone who has not confessed Jesus Christ as Lord, and who is, in other words, outside of Christ. He can only sin, and it is in that sense that we can say he is a slave to sin.

**Marc Roby: I dare say that most people have a hard time swallowing that idea.**

Dr. Spencer: I know I had a hard time, so I'm sure you're right. But, part of the problem is our definition of sin. We tend to look at gross external sins against other people; for example, murder, or rape, or stealing, or something along those lines. And most of us can say that we've never done these things, so we tend not to think of ourselves as sinners. But, as we said in Session 10, sin is properly defined by Question 14 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism as “any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” And his law requires, as just one perfectly sufficient example, that I love the Lord God with all of my heart, mind, soul and strength (Dt 6:5, Mrk 12:30, Lk 10:27). So we all stand condemned of not having kept God's law.

**Marc Roby: Alright, but what about a Christian? We still sin, and I don't think any of us can say that we keep God's law perfectly at any time – especially when I consider the command you just mentioned to love God with my whole being. So, in what sense can we be considered to be slaves to righteousness as Paul calls us in Romans 6?**

Dr. Spencer: I certainly agree that none of us keep God's law perfectly. He has not chosen to remove sin from us, so we still struggle with the sinful nature. There is a battle going on inside every Christian. There is a desire, and an ability, to obey God; but there is also a sinful nature still resident that wars against us. So, we are slaves of Christ, but we are not yet perfected. God has begun a good work in us, and we can be confident, as Paul writes in Philippians 1:6, that God will complete that work. But, in the meantime, we struggle. There is a Latin phrase for our condition too, it is *posse non peccare*, meaning simply that it is possible to not sin, and there is another Latin phrase that describes this internal conflict, we are *simul justus et peccator*, which means simultaneously just and sinner. We are just in God's sight because we are united to Christ by faith, but we still have a sinful nature within us.

Faith is called by the reformers the instrumental cause of our justification, which is one of the five causes Aristotle listed for any effect.<sup>2</sup> The instrumental cause is the means, or instrument, through which an effect is brought about. The example is often used of a statue, in which case the chisel is the instrumental cause.

So, to answer your question, I think there are two ways in which we can be considered to be righteous. First, and most importantly, we are perfectly righteous in union with Jesus Christ, his righteousness has been imputed to us. But, secondarily, there is also an imperfect, but improving, practical righteousness of our own.

Marc Roby: Alright, I think I can summarize what we've said so far by saying that a true Christian acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord both with his mouth, and albeit imperfectly, with his life.

Dr. Spencer: Well said. And, as I said, that is the most important point in living out our lives in union with Christ. He is our Lord. But, there is more, because we are also given the ability to obey. I argued a few minutes ago that an unbeliever is not able to obey God, which is true. But the ability to obey is itself a gift, it isn't something that we conjure up, it is the result of our being born again and of God's grace working in our lives.

Marc Roby: Well, that should serve as a good teaser for our next session, because we are out of time for today.

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<sup>2</sup> This comment is an error. Aristotle only spoke of four causes: material, formal, final and efficient. Thomas Aquinas and others did speak about an instrumental cause. See the topical index for more information.