

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine God's communicable attribute of truthfulness.

Before we begin I'd like to let our listeners know that we have added a new feature to the website for this podcast. At the top of the transcript for every session, including all previous sessions, is a link to a pdf file for the session. You are free to download, save and share these files with others. In addition, if you go to the Archive link at the top of the home page for whatdoesthewordsay.org, you will also find links to pdf versions of three indexes. An index of references, an index of topics, and an index of Scriptures. These are updated with each new podcast. And now, let's get back to our topic.

Dr. Spencer, we finished last time by noting that God is truth in all three of the meanings of that term; that is, metaphysical, propositional and ethical. What do you want to look at today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to discuss the topic of ethical truth a little more. Remember that ethics refers to the set of moral rules that govern how we live. In my experience, most people seem to agree with the idea that morality is absolute. They may say that morality can be different in different cultures, but then they will strongly denounce and even work to change practices they disagree with, even practices in other countries with completely different cultures.

So, for example, I doubt that very many women in the United States would have said that it was just a matter of culture and not a problem when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan and prevented women from working, attending school, or being in public places without a male family member.

Marc Roby: I'm quite sure you are right about that. Women, and most men as well, would agree that such rules are a violation of basic human rights.

Dr. Spencer: I think they would. So, independent of the politically correct postmodern notion that truth and morality are social constructs and vary from culture to culture, we see that most people prove by their actions that they firmly believe in moral absolutes. This is especially true when you discuss hot-button issues like abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriage and so on.

The problem, as I demonstrated by talking about slavery last time and Hitler in the session before that, is that without God, there is no absolute authority anyone can point to as a basis for these moral absolutes. Therefore, if atheism were true, morality would be determined solely by the group with the power to enact and enforce the laws in a given time and place and we would have no basis for saying that the laws put in place by the Taliban were wrong.

Marc Roby: And, even within one culture, laws change over time.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they do. Is that because what is moral changes over time? I think most people would say it does not. But, when you and I were young, it was illegal to be a practicing homosexual in this country, it was illegal to get an abortion, and it was out of the question for same-sex couples to get married. And yet, a large percentage of our population, including some who call themselves Christians, now approve of such practices and they are legal. In fact, if you disagree with these practices, the so-called progressives will call you hateful and send you to sensitivity training to try and correct your socially aberrant views.

Marc Roby: It is really difficult to believe how much has changed since the 1950's.

Dr. Spencer: It is unbelievable how much they have changed. But, independent of what any of our listeners may think about such changes, I challenge them, as I did when we talked about slavery, to explain – without reference to God – on what logical basis someone could say that we are right now and the people were wrong 60 years ago? Or that the people were right 60 years ago and we are wrong now?

Marc Roby: I don't think that's possible without reference to God.

Dr. Spencer: And that is my point. Without God, it isn't possible. In fact man, because he is a creature, has no authority to decide for himself what is right or wrong. God alone has the authority to tell us what is sin and what is pleasing to him, and he has done that in the Bible. And, not only has God clearly told us what behavior he approves, he has clearly warned us of the penalty for disobedience. The moral laws are no different than any other laws in the sense that there is a penalty to be paid for violating them.

Marc Roby: But, there is a huge difference between God's enforcement of his laws and the state's enforcement of our civil laws.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, there is. In fact, there are at least three major differences I can think of.

Marc Roby: What are those?

Dr. Spencer: The first is that God does not always enforce his laws immediately, or even in this life. For his own purposes he sometimes allows people to do wicked things without being justly punished in this life. Of course the state also fails to punish people sometimes, but only because the state is incapable of perfectly enforcing its laws.

But, even though God may choose to not enforce his laws immediately, the second major difference I see is that God does, ultimately, enforce his laws absolutely perfectly. He has perfect knowledge of everything and everyone, including our thoughts and motives and he is absolutely sovereign, so no violation of his law will ever go unpunished. Every single sin ever committed will receive the punishment that justice demands. Either we will be punished for our sins or, if we have accepted God's gracious offer of forgiveness based on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, Jesus will have borne the penalty for our sins on the cross.

Marc Roby: Which is absolutely amazing grace. What is the third difference you see in God's enforcement of his laws versus the state's enforcement of its laws?

Dr. Spencer: God's penalty for disobedience is far more severe than the greatest penalty man can mete out. People don't like the doctrine of hell, but it is a clear teaching of the Bible. If you are a Christian, you really have no option but to believe that hell exists. You don't have to take my word for it, read your Bible. Jesus Christ himself spoke of eternal hell more than anyone else. You have to do exegetical backflips, or simply not believe God's Word, to not believe in eternal hell.

Marc Roby: But, of course, different sins will not all receive the same punishment.

Dr. Spencer: No, they won't. The Bible indicates that there are different levels of punishment in hell. But no matter the level of punishment, hell is a terrible place, and it is eternal, with no hope of escape.

Marc Roby: Which is, of course, one of the main reasons many people reject the doctrine; it seems completely unfair to punish people eternally.

Dr. Spencer: Well, I don't personally *like* the doctrine either. But God didn't ask me, and he isn't going to, and, more to the point, what I think doesn't matter. I am a sinner and don't fully grasp God's holiness and the depth of sin. What does matter is that we grasp the fact that even the smallest sin you can imagine is motivated by a rebellious heart, and that rebellion is against the infinite, almighty, all holy, perfectly just Creator, so it deserves eternal punishment. Not only that, but people in hell do not repent and seek God's forgiveness. Without his saving grace they cannot do so. Therefore, they continue to hate him and rail against him in their hearts, which increases their guilt every day.

Marc Roby: Hell is an unpleasant topic to say the least, but I think we have said enough about God being the one who has authority to establish moral law, that he will, ultimately, judge everyone, and that we will all either receive mercy based on the merit of Jesus Christ, or be eternally punished for our sin.

So, we have now established that God is truth in all three biblical senses of the term: he is metaphysical truth because he is the genuine God, he is epistemological, or propositional, truth because all that he says is perfectly true, and he is ethical truth because he establishes and enforces the moral law. What else do you want to say about God's truthfulness?

Dr. Spencer: It is important to point out that God's moral law is not arbitrary. It is based on God's own character, it is a reflection of his perfect character. And we are made in God's image and are made for fellowship with him. So, obeying God's moral law is what is best for us. A Christian should delight in God's moral law, even if it goes against what the person has believed all of his or her life prior to becoming a Christian. Romans 12:2 commands us, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."¹

Marc Roby: And our minds are renewed by meditating on God's Word and submitting to it as our ultimate authority.

Dr. Spencer: That's exactly right. Our minds are very important. Christianity is not all about feeling. Feelings are there of course, and they are important. But our emotions are not to rule us in any way. Our minds – which really means our spirits – are to rule us, and our minds are to be

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submitted fully to the Word of God. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 the apostle Paul tell us, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Therefore, it doesn’t matter what I think about homosexuality for example, nor does it matter what society says. God says it is sin. And unrepentant sinners will go to hell. Therefore, the only loving thing for me to do with a homosexual is to tell that person of God’s law and of the consequences for violating that law, and then to tell him or her that Jesus Christ has provided a way to be saved.

Marc Roby: But, that salvation requires true biblical repentance.

Dr. Spencer: Yes it does, and true biblical repentance requires forsaking our sin and walking in holiness. It does not, praise God, require perfection or none of us would be saved. But when we sin, we must repent and ask for forgiveness and, as Paul said in Acts 26:20, prove our repentance by our deeds.

Marc Roby: And praise God that he has made salvation possible. Do you want to say anything else about God’s truthfulness?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I have a three more short points make. First, in examining God’s truthfulness, we again see God’s simplicity.

Marc Roby: We should remind our listeners that by God’s simplicity we mean the fact that his attributes cannot be thought of separately, they all work together.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s right. And with regard to God’s truthfulness, we have argued that he is truth in the propositional sense precisely because he has the power necessary to make what he thinks is true actually *be* true. And, even more than that, when you look at the different possible meanings of the word true, you see that God’s truthfulness also includes his perfect knowledge in knowing what it means to be the only true God, his faithfulness in always keeping his word, his unchangeableness in not changing his word, his moral perfection in establishing and enforcing the moral law and so on.

Marc Roby: It is clear that his attributes all work together. And it makes me remember Question 4 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, which we have mentioned before. The answer to that question says, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” But, you said you had three more points to make, what is the second?

Dr. Spencer: The second point I want to make is that God’s truthfulness was what Satan challenged when he first tempted Eve. We read about this in Genesis Chapter 3. The serpent came to Eve and asked, in Verse 1, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” Of course, that is *not* what God had said. God had said that they *could* eat of any tree in the garden with the sole exception of one tree. But, as James Boice points out in his

commentary on Genesis, Satan's question was meant "to suggest that God is not benevolent and that His word cannot be trusted."²

Marc Roby: Now, we must say that Eve didn't completely accept Satan's suggestion. She answered, in Verses 2 and 3, that "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

Dr. Spencer: Yes, you're right, she didn't accept Satan's lie completely, but notice that his lie had already borne some fruit; she added to God's word by saying "you must not touch it". God had not said that. He had said that the day you *eat* of it you will die, not that you will die if you touch it. In any event, Satan then goes on to directly contradict God. He says, in Verse 4, "You will not surely die". And then he gives his false explanation for God's prohibition. He says, in Verse 5, "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." John Murray explains that at this point, Satan "accuses God of deliberate falsehood and deception. God has perpetrated a lie, he avers, because he is jealous of his own selfish and exclusive possession of the knowledge of good and evil!"³

Marc Roby: And, sadly, Eve believed Satan. We read in the first part of Verse 6 that "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."

Dr. Spencer: That is the sad truth. Paul writes about this in 1 Timothy 2:14. He wrote that "Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." But Adam is a different story. He was not deceived, his sin was far worse for at least two reasons. First, it was worse because he was the one put in charge by God and he was the representative for the human race. Greater responsibility always implies greater culpability. And secondly, he sinned out of pure rebellion against God as James Boice notes.⁴ This is why Scripture always lays the blame for the fall on Adam, not on Eve. In Romans 5:12 we read that "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" and Verse 14 clearly tells us that one man is Adam.

Marc Roby: Paul also tells us this in 1 Corinthians 15:22 where he says that "in Adam all die".

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's right. But, let's get back to the point I wanted to make about God's truthfulness, which is simply this; it is an absolutely essential aspect of the being of God. If God were not truthful, then having his infallible word would be of no real value. How would we be able to tell which parts were true and which were lies? And his threats and promises would have no value either, how would we know that they were true? Now, it must be said that God's other attributes are essential too. For example, if he were not omnipotent we couldn't be sure that

² James M. Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, Zondervan, 1982, Vol. I, pg. 134

³ John Murray, *The Principles of Conduct*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957, pg. 126

⁴ Boice, op. cit., pg. 136

he had the power to keep his threats and promises. But his truthfulness somehow seems to more directly impinge on his holiness, justice, goodness and so on.

That is why Satan didn't question God's power to bring death, nor did he question God's knowledge about the tree, instead he directly questioned God's truthfulness. A God who is not truthful is no god, he is a devil.

Marc Roby: Jesus Christ himself said to the Jews, as we read in John 8:44, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Dr. Spencer: And, a little earlier in the same discourse he had said that "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Marc Roby: I see your point. Truth is an essential characteristic of the true and living God and is essential for salvation. Lies destroy, truth saves.

Dr. Spencer: We see that even in more mundane matters. If you go to see the doctor and he determines that you have cancer, that isn't something you want to hear. But if he lies and says you're fine, you'll die. If he tells you the truth, then perhaps it can be treated and you may live.

Marc Roby: Very well. You said you had three points to make, what is the third?

Dr. Spencer: It is that because truth is so important, and lies are the "native language" of the devil, we, as Christians must be zealous to know and speak truth. John Murray, in his *Principles of Conduct*, wrote, "This is why all untruth or falsehood is wrong; it is a contradiction of that which God is."⁵

Marc Roby: Being truthful is not a common characteristic in this day and age.

Dr. Spencer: No, it isn't. But a Christian must be. That does not mean that we have to tell everyone all of the truth all of the time of course, but when we do say something, we must seek to convey truth.

Marc Roby: I notice you didn't simply say that when we do say something it must be true, you said we must seek to convey truth. I assume you have a reason for the more complex statement?

Dr. Spencer: I do. You can tell something that is completely true with the intent of leading people to believe something that isn't true. But, when you do that, you are lying. The classical biblical example is Abraham telling people that Sarah was his sister. That statement was true, but he said it to make them think that she wasn't his wife. In other words, it is the best possible kind of lie! If you're caught, you can always say that what you said was true, even though your purpose was to deceive.

⁵ Murray, op. cit., pg. 125

Marc Roby: Alright. Are we done discussing God's truthfulness?

Dr. Spencer: I think so.

Marc Roby: Then let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We are out of time for today.