

Marc Roby: In these podcasts, we have now covered two of the six classic loci of reformed theology; theology proper – in other words, the study of God, and anthropology, which is the study of man. We still have four more loci to cover: Christology, which is the study of Jesus Christ the Redeemer; Soteriology, which means the study of salvation; Ecclesiology, which means the study of the church; and Eschatology, which means the study of last things. And so, today we are going to begin to examine biblical Christology. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to start?

Dr. Spencer: I'd like to begin by pointing out the logic behind the order of presentation we are using. We began our podcast series with some preliminary material: why people should be interested in what the Bible says, a brief outline of what the Bible teaches, and a presentation of external evidence that corroborates the truthfulness of Bible. We then went on to present a case that the Bible is sufficient, necessary, authoritative and clear, which can be represented by the acrostic SNAC.

Marc Roby: And when we say the Bible is sufficient and necessary, we mean that it is sufficient and necessary for salvation.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And we then made the case that the Bible is infallible, which is what one would expect since it is the Word of God. And we closed our preliminary material by discussing hermeneutics, the science of how to properly interpret the Bible.

We then began looking at the six loci of reformed theology, which you noted at the beginning of today's session. We started by examining theology proper, the study of God. And we did that first because true biblical Christianity is theocentric, meaning it is God centered. The purpose of creation is the manifestation of the glory of God. He is the only eternal, self-existent, necessary reality. Everything else exists only because God chose to create it and chooses to sustain it.

Marc Roby: And we have made the point many times that we must always keep the Creator/creature distinction in mind.

Dr. Spencer: That distinction is critically important. The universe does not revolve around us. We do not exist necessarily, only God does. We then moved on to discuss anthropology, which is the study of man. Now it might at first seem strange that we would cover anthropology second. Why not, for example, discuss Christology first?

Marc Roby: Yes, that's a good question. Especially since Jesus Christ is God incarnate and we began with theology proper. So continuing with Christology would make sense.

Dr. Spencer: It would, but we must ask the question, "Why did Jesus Christ become incarnate?" Why, in other words, did God become man?

Marc Roby: And the short answer of course is that God became man in order to save his people from their sins. We are told in Matthew 1:21 that before Jesus was born an angel appeared to Mary's fiancée, Joseph, and said, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name

Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”<sup>1</sup> This is the good news God offers to us, we can be saved.

Dr. Spencer: That is the best possible news. And notice that we can't fully understand who Jesus Christ is and what he has done without first understanding the problem he came to solve. In other words, the gospel, which simply means good news, makes no sense unless we have first received the bad news that we are by nature justly subject to God's wrath and headed for eternal hell. The solution makes no sense if you don't understand the problem.

**Marc Roby: But, of course, many people do not believe that they are sinners, or that there is an eternal hell.**

Dr. Spencer: And that is why we must always begin by presenting people with the problem. The reality is that everyone knows in their heart that God exists. Paul tells us this in Romans Chapter 1. Many people won't admit that fact, but it is true nonetheless. And the universality of sin is also obvious. Why do we need keys? Why do we need passwords for our bank accounts? Why do we read about crime every single day? And why don't we do exactly what we know we should do every minute of every day?

**Marc Roby: And the answer to every one of those questions is that we are all sinners.**

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. Jesus himself told us in Mark 2:17 that “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” And so the bad news is that we are all sinners and God is a perfectly just and holy God and must punish sin. In particular, he must punish *my* sin! But the good news is that Jesus came to save sinners.

In Session 108 we made the case for the doctrine of Total depravity, which says that there is no aspect of our being that is unaffected by sin. We are born enemies of God and subject to his eternal wrath. And because we are his enemies, we are incapable of doing anything to save ourselves from his just wrath. We need help. But there is a very fundamental problem that needs to be overcome for anyone to be able to help us.

**Marc Roby: What problem is that?**

Dr. Spencer: The price that needs to be paid to redeem us from our sin is too great for any mere human being to ever pay. Because our sin is rebellion against God himself, the infinite, eternal, self-existent Creator of all things, it warrants an infinite punishment. I mentioned this way back in Session 13, where I pointed out that the great American theologian Jonathan Edwards

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correctly argued in his famous sermon “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners”,<sup>2</sup> that the heinousness of our sins is proportional to the dignity of the one against whom we sin.

We see this principle at work in the laws of our country. For example, it is a more serious crime if you murder the president than it is if you murder me. And so, Edwards argues, since God is infinite in his greatness, majesty and glory, he is infinitely honorable and sin against him deserves infinite punishment. And since sin is the transgression of God’s law, all sin is, first and foremost, against God. All sin is rebellion against his rule.

**Marc Roby: And, therefore, no mere man would be able to pay the infinite penalty we deserve.**

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. The only one who can pay an infinite price is God himself. And yet, because it is man who sinned, it must be man who pays the price.

**Marc Roby: And, therefore, the problem is that we need someone who is both God and man.**

Dr. Spencer: And that person is Jesus Christ. We see a wonderful illustration of his dual nature in Matthew 8:23-27. We read in Verse 23 that Jesus “got into the boat and his disciples followed him.” Now this was a small fishing boat and they were heading out across the Sea of Galilee, which is famous for the violent storms that can pop up very quickly. So, in Verses 24-26 we read that “Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him, saying, ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’ He replied, ‘You of little faith, why are you so afraid?’ Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.” And then, in Verse 27, we are told how the apostles reacted. We read that “The men were amazed and asked, ‘What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!’”

**Marc Roby: I always wonder how I would respond to such an event. It is an unimaginable display of Jesus’ power.**

Dr. Spencer: It is an amazing display of both his humanity and his deity. He is truly human. He walked with his disciples, he talked with them, he got into the boat with them, and like all human beings he got tired. And because he was tired, he went to sleep in the boat. But then, when they had awakened him because of the storm, he simply commanded the storm to cease, and it did. Only God can do that. He didn’t pray and ask God to stop the storm, he simply commanded the wind and the waves and they obeyed.

**Marc Roby: That is a wonderfully clear illustration of Christ’s authority over the creation. But the dual nature of Christ, meaning the biblical teaching that he is both God and man, is obviously an extremely difficult doctrine to understand.**

Dr. Spencer: And that is why many have rejected it. Jehovah’s Witnesses for example, reject it, but in practice, even many who call themselves evangelical Christians reject it. Many of them do not truly believe that Jesus is who he said he is, God and man, and that he literally died on the

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<sup>2</sup> “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners” in The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1, Hendrickson Publishers, 2005, pg. 669

cross to pay for our sins and rose from the dead for our justification. But that is exactly what the Bible teaches. It is an absolutely essential doctrine of true, biblical Christianity.

**Marc Roby: And we have made the case before that the Bible must be the ultimate authority for a Christian. We can't use our reason to stand in judgment over what the Bible teaches.**

Dr. Spencer: That is the critical point. The issue is one of authority as we have noted before. If a person has been born again, born of the Spirit of God, that person will accept the Bible as God's authoritative Word. He will use his reason to understand the Word of God, but not to sit in judgment over it. It is obviously ridiculous to use our reason as the ultimate arbiter of truth. We are finite sinful creatures and our reason is so limited and subject to error. We should never accept a true contradiction of course, but we should not reject something as being true just because we can't fully understand it. If it is a clear teaching of the Bible, we must accept it.

**Marc Roby: And there is no contradiction in the statement that Jesus Christ is both God and man.**

Dr. Spencer: No, there isn't. There is great mystery of course, and the church struggled mightily for many years in coming up with a statement about the nature of Christ that is completely consistent with the Bible's teaching, but there isn't any contradiction involved. As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, "two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only mediator between God and man."<sup>3</sup>

**Marc Roby: That is a carefully thought-out statement. Jesus Christ is one person, but with two distinct natures. He is simultaneously God and man.**

Dr. Spencer: And his humanity is real, not an illusion. He is a man just like you and me except that he is, and always was, without sin. In Philippians 2:5 the apostle Paul exhorts us to be humble and says that our "attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus". He then goes in in Verses 6-11 to give us one of the most important statements about Christ. Verses 5-11 together say, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 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."

**Marc Roby: There is a lot of theology packed into that short passage. And we have looked at it before when we gave some of the biblical arguments for the deity of Christ in Sessions 51 through 54.**

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<sup>3</sup> From; *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter VIII, Paragraph 2 (<http://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/chapter-8/>)

Dr. Spencer: There is a lot of theology in that passage, you're right. And, as you noted, we have discussed the deity of Christ before when we covered the Trinity as part of our study of theology proper. So some of what I'm going to say about the deity of Christ here will be repetition. But the topic is so important that it certainly bears repetition. And I won't repeat everything we said then, so I would encourage any listener who is really interested in this topic to go listen to, or read, those podcasts as well.

**Marc Roby: Yes, and, we should remind our listeners that all of our past podcasts can be found, along with their transcripts and some indexes, on our website at [whatdoesthewordsay.org](http://whatdoesthewordsay.org).**

Dr. Spencer: That's a good reminder. But getting back to the passage in Philippians 2, I want to make a couple of points. First, notice that it says in Verse 6 that Jesus was, "in very nature God". A similar statement appears in Hebrews 1:3, which says that "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being". The meaning of these verses is clear. Jesus Christ is God. He is also a man of course, but he is God. It isn't just that he is God's representative, that could also be said about Adam, or Moses, but Jesus Christ was, is and always will be God.

**Marc Roby: Of course, the man Jesus did not always exist in his humanity.**

Dr. Spencer: No, of course not. And the rest of the passage in Philippians 2 deals with that. Verses 6-7 in full read, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." In other words, although he was eternal God, Jesus didn't consider his glory and status as the second person of the Trinity something that he had to hold on to. He was willing to temporarily let go of some of his honor and glory in order to become incarnate and save his people.

**Marc Roby: And he did that when he was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem. In Luke 1:35 we read that an angel told Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."**

Dr. Spencer: That is the astounding truth. God was willing to humble himself to the point of becoming a man; two distinct natures in one person. He became a poor carpenter from the backwater village of Bethlehem. And Philippians 2 goes on, in Verse 8, to say that "being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

**Marc Roby: Which is truly amazing given that being hung on a tree was considered cursed by the Jews of that time. We read in Deuteronomy 21:23 that "anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."**

Dr. Spencer: And Paul quotes that verse in his letter to the church in Galatia. In Galatians 3:13 we read that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'"

**Marc Roby: It boggles the mind that God would do that to save sinful and rebellious people.**

Dr. Spencer: It absolutely does boggle the mind, but that is the gospel. As we said, because man is the one who sinned against God, it must be man who pays the price. But no mere man can pay the price, which is infinite because our sin is against God, who is infinite. But God chose to save some people and, therefore, it became what John Murray calls a consequent absolute necessity for Jesus to be incarnate and die on the cross, bearing the wrath of God for our sins.<sup>4</sup> Because Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, he is uniquely qualified to accomplish this task. His humanity makes the sacrifice acceptable on behalf of man, and his deity makes the sacrifice of sufficient value. We are told in Hebrews 7:27 that Christ “sacrificed for [our] sins once for all when he offered himself.”

Jesus Christ was not just a good man who gave us an example to live up to. He was, and is, God and his sacrifice was a real sacrifice that was necessary to satisfy divine justice.

**Marc Roby: Many modern professing Christians are offended at the idea of a sacrifice. It sounds vulgar and primitive to them.**

Dr. Spencer: Independent of how it may sound to modern people, it is the truth. Sin is ugly and terrible and the penalty is correspondingly ugly and terrible. We can never understand who Jesus Christ is if we divorce him from his fundamental mission. Jesus Christ came for the express purpose of offering himself as a sacrifice to pay for the sins of his people. He is the unique God-man, the only possible Savior. As Peter declared before the Jewish rulers in Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

**Marc Roby: And we must give all praise and thanks to God for Jesus Christ and the salvation he brings!**

Dr. Spencer: Oh absolutely. And the best way to show our thanks is through obedience. Notice that this passage said that Christ was obedient to death. His incarnation and sacrifice were done in obedience to the will of God. We’ll come back to this point later, but if we are God’s children, we must also be obedient, just as our Lord and Savior was.

**Marc Roby: Yes, that’s a challenge to us all, but we are out of time for today, so I’d like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We’d love to hear from you.**

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<sup>4</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955, pp 11-12