

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine Christology. Last time we looked at a number of reasons why Jesus had to be a real man in order to accomplish his work. Dr. Spencer, what would you like to examine today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to start to look at what theologians call the offices of Christ. That may sound funny to someone who has never heard of it, but it is a good way to understand the comprehensive nature of the lordship of Christ and to develop a better appreciation for all that he has done and continues to do for his people.

Marc Roby: And by the offices of Christ you are referring to the fact that he functions as a Prophet, Priest and King.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. But before we get into the offices themselves, I want to point out that Jesus Christ is the unique God-man forever. In other words, once the second person of the Holy Trinity became incarnate, so that there are two natures in one person, that will never change. Jesus Christ did not, and will not, give up his humanity and go back to being only God. The man Jesus Christ was clearly raised from the dead with a real, physical body, albeit a body that has been glorified and has new properties fit for eternity as Paul labors to explain in Chapter 15 of his first letter to the Corinthians.

Marc Roby: And we are told in Acts 7:56 that when Stephen was being stoned to death he said, "'Look,' I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."¹ Which clearly tells us that Jesus was still the God-man after his resurrection.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And the apostle John saw the same thing in the vision given to him on the Island of Patmos. He tells us in Revelation 1:12-13, that "I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone 'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest."

It is an astounding fact that when the eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, humbled himself and became a man, it was not a temporary accommodation. Out of love and compassion for his people, and to the praise of his own glory, he became man forevermore so that he could function as the only mediator between God and man as we read in 1 Timothy 2:5.

Marc Roby: That is an unfathomable display of love. And it is all the more amazing when you consider that we are all rebellious sinners!

Dr. Spencer: Very true.

Marc Roby: And so now, turning to the offices of Christ, what do you want to cover first?

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Dr. Spencer: I want to give a little background from the Old Testament. We see prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament, although these three offices are never all invested in a single person.

Marc Roby: Although some of the kings did prophecy, for example. King David certainly prophesied at times.

Dr. Spencer: That's very true, but he was not a prophet in the sense that he was God's appointed spokesman to speak his word to the people. In fact, God often spoke to David *through* his appointed prophet Nathan.

In any event, all three offices are necessary. We have some knowledge of God and his nature available to us just from observing creation. The universe itself, including our own consciences, provides sufficient witness to the fact that God exists, that he is immensely powerful and that he expects us to live holy lives. But we need further revelation from God to know in detail how we are to live to please him. That is the function of a prophet.

Marc Roby: And the first major prophet we encounter in the Old Testament is Moses, whom God used to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt.

Dr. Spencer: And Moses is also the author of the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which are collectively called the Pentateuch, which simply means five books. Just like the Pentagon is a five-sided building.

Marc Roby: There were, of course, many more prophets after Moses and prior to the time of Christ.

Dr. Spencer: And most people are familiar with some of their names. You have Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel to name just a few of the better-known prophets. But, contrary to the claims of the Mormon church and Islam, there have been no prophets since the time of Christ. He is the last Prophet.

Marc Roby: And Moses actually told us about his coming. He told the people, as we read in Deuteronomy 18:15, "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him."

Dr. Spencer: And the apostle Peter specifically applied that verse to Jesus Christ in the sermon he gave in Solomon's Colonnade, on the south end of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. This is recorded for us in Acts Chapter 3, and in Verse 22 he specifically cites that verse as referring to Jesus. In addition, in Hebrews 1:1-2 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."

Marc Roby: It would be foolish indeed to not listen to the One who created this universe.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it would be. And in addition to needing prophets to tell us the word of God, we also need a priest, which is a person who intercedes with God on our behalf.

Marc Roby: In other words, he is a mediator.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. A priest in the Old Testament was responsible for offering the sacrifices that God required, and he did this on behalf of himself and also the people as a whole. He was also responsible for praying for the people. In 1 Samuel 12:23, we read that Samuel, who functioned as both a priest and a prophet, told the people, “As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.”

Marc Roby: And now the fact that it would have been sin for him to not pray makes it obvious that one of his duties was to pray for the people. We also see in that verse that the priest or prophet had a teaching function.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, the word of God is always teaching us. Paul tells us, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” And this would certainly also be true of anything the prophets had said in the name of God that was not recorded in the Bible for our use.

Marc Roby: And that leads us to the third category, that of a king.

Dr. Spencer: I think most everyone has heard of King David and King Solomon, but there were other Old Testament examples as well. And even today, if there isn't a king there is still some other kind of civil authority. Without authority all you have is chaos. So, in addition to the prophet and priest, we need a king.

The primary function of a king, of course, is to rule. And if a king, or any government, functions properly, he or they should rule for the good of the people. Of course God is the ultimate King. He rules over all of his creation and he doesn't need earthly kings to do his job any more than he needs a prophet or a priest. These are all concessions to us and we are to learn how to humbly submit to and obey his delegated authorities.

Marc Roby: Okay, we've briefly discussed the three offices of prophet, priest and king and illustrated that they existed in the Old Testament. You also mentioned that no one person ever held all three offices prior to the time of Christ, and that Christ is the last true prophet.

Dr. Spencer: He is also the last true priest since his sacrifice was efficacious and need not ever be repeated and he always lives to intercede on behalf of his people. And he is also the King of kings, he rules over all human rulers. But I'd like to begin by discussing his role as a prophet.

Marc Roby: Very well, please go on.

Dr. Spencer: As we noted, the primary function of a prophet is to relay to us the word of God. And when you look at the first chapter of John's gospel, what do you find?

Marc Roby: That Jesus is called the Word. The first verse says that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Dr. Spencer: That is an amazing verse in a number of ways. First, when it says “In the beginning”, it clearly harkens back to Genesis 1:1, which says, “In the beginning God created the

heavens and the earth.” Secondly, it is, as we discussed in Sessions 51 and 52, a clear statement of the deity of Jesus Christ. But I want to note today the choice of word John used. The Greek word translated as “Word” in this verse is λόγος (logos), which can mean “word”, “reason”, “rational account” and so on.² It is, for example, the root of our English word logic. And this word was a uniquely appropriate choice for John to use.

Marc Roby: Now why is that?

Dr. Spencer: James Boice called this choice a “stroke of divine genius” because the word was as meaningful to Greeks as it was to the Jewish people of the time.³ Let’s first look at what the word logos would have meant to a Jewish person at the time of Christ.

Boice first notes, as we already said, that when John wrote “In the beginning was the Word ...”, it certainly would have caused any Jew to think of the first verse of Genesis. And since the Genesis account of creation repeatedly tells us that “God said, let there be” light or whatever, and then tells us that it was so, speaking about the “Word” would immediately have conjured up the idea of God’s creative power. And so, Boice wrote that “In other words, Jesus would immediately be associated with the creative power of God and with the self-disclosure of God in creation.”⁴

Marc Roby: And I’m sure that would be quite a shock to a monotheistic Jew of the first century, whose conception of God was so transcendent.

Dr. Spencer: I’m sure it was a shock. And Boice goes on to point out that in addition to this connection to the creation account, “To a Jewish mind the idea of a ‘word’ would mean more than it does to us today. The reason is that to the Jewish way of thinking a word was something concrete, something much closer to what we would call an event or a deed.”⁵

Marc Roby: And that concept of a word is in perfect harmony with the creation account of Genesis. God spoke, and it came to be.

Dr. Spencer: And God also tells us through the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah 55:10-11, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Marc Roby: That’s a great verse for showing the power of God’s word. And so the Jewish people would have seen a great significance in the way John worded that opening line of his gospel. But

² E.g., see John Frame, *The History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, P&R Publishing, 2015, pg. 55

³ James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Revised in One Volume, InterVarsity Press, 1986, pg. 300

⁴ Ibid, pg. 299

⁵ Ibid

what about the Greek people who heard it? Boice says the word would have had great significance to them as well. What would they have thought?

Dr. Spencer: Well, at the time of Jesus, the word *logos* already had a long history of use in Greek philosophy. Boice goes through this in his book, but I think a more succinct statement is found in John Frame's book, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology*. He wrote that "In Greek philosophy, the *logos* is the principle of rationality that directs the course of the universe and makes it accessible to human reason."⁶ As a result, Boice paraphrases the meaning of the first verse of John's gospel to a Greek reader at the time of Christ in the following way. He says it was like saying, "Listen, you Greeks, the very thing that has most occupied your philosophical thought and about which you have all been writing for centuries – the Logos of God, this word, this controlling power of the universe and man's mind – this has now come to earth as a man, and we have beheld him, full of grace and truth."

Marc Roby: Yes, I see now why Boice called the use of the word *logos* a stroke of divine genius! You can see that it would have had a significant impact on all of his audience, independent of whether they were Jews or gentiles. And so we have shown that Jesus certainly functioned as a prophet, and he did that in a unique way. He didn't just tell us the word of God, he *is* the Word of God.

Dr. Spencer: And he often spoke with that kind of authority. We made the point when we discussed the deity of Christ in Session 54 that the Old Testament prophets often prefaced their sayings with something like, "This is what the Lord says", but Jesus spoke the word of God in the first person, not just as a spokesman. As I noted back then, five times in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says "You have heard" and then quotes an Old Testament passage, or in one place the Jews' misunderstanding of an Old Testament passage, and then he follows that by saying "But I tell you" and goes on to expand on what is said in the Old Testament. In other words, he adds to God's words as recorded in Scripture, which is something that only God can do. Jesus is the Prophet, with a capital 'P'. He is God incarnate.

Marc Roby: Is there anything else you would like to say about Jesus fulfilling the office of a prophet?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I'd like to look at the Westminster Shorter Catechism again. Question 24 asks, "How does Christ execute the office of a prophet?"

Marc Roby: And the answer is that "Christ executes the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation."

Dr. Spencer: And, like the rest of the Catechism, that is a gloriously compact and accurate statement. But it adds two important things to our discussion.

First, it says that Christ revealed God's will to us by his Word *and* Spirit. In John 15:26 Jesus told his disciples that "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the

⁶ John Frame, op. cit., pg. 91

Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.” And in the next chapter we read that Jesus was telling his disciples that he must go away, which was referring to his ascension, and he then says, in John 16:6-7, “Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

Marc Roby: And this promised Counselor is the Holy Spirit, who comes to dwell with everyone who commits his life to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Dr. Spencer: And the Holy Spirit continues the work of Jesus in revealing to us God’s will. And now we see the second wonderful detail that the Catechism adds to our discussion. It says that “Christ executes the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God *for our salvation*.”

God’s ultimate purpose is the manifestation of his own glory. But that is achieved, in part, by saving a people to be his very own as we read in Titus 2:14. And so, in John 20:30-31 we read that “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” And when John says we may have life, he means that we may have eternal life in heaven with God. That is the purpose of Jesus Christ coming as the final and ultimate prophet, to save his people from their sins and to purchase a people to be God’s eternal possession.

Marc Roby: That is astounding. And I also think it is a great place to end for today, so let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org, and we will answer to the best of our ability.