

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine Christology. In our last session we started to examine Christ as King. He is the ruling sovereign of the kingdom of heaven. We noted that the first thing he must do for his subjects is to bring them into the kingdom, which requires that they be born again. We ended by noting that the next thing Jesus does is to rule his subjects, and he does that, in part, by giving them his Holy Spirit. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to spend some time looking into the very practical issue of how Christ rules in the life of every true believer.

Marc Roby: Well, that is certainly a challenging topic. We are told in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that “whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God”¹, which is an amazing statement. By mentioning mundane daily activities like eating and drinking, Paul was illustrating the comprehensive nature of the lordship of Christ.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a very challenging verse indeed when you take it seriously, as all believers should. But there are other verses that are equally challenging. For example, in 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul tells us that we should “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” So we aren’t even free to think what we want to think. Jesus is the Lord of my thoughts just as much as he is of my actions.

Marc Roby: We could also say that he is the Lord of our emotions. In Ephesians 4:31 we are told to, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”

Dr. Spencer: That’s true, and perhaps even more surprising to people, God also commands us to love. Biblical love is not a mushy feeling, it is a determination to do what is best for someone. When Christ was asked which commandment is the most important, we are told in Mark 12:29-31 that he responded by saying, “The most important one, is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Marc Roby: It’s interesting to note that there is nothing new about those commands, Jesus was quoting from the Old Testament.

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. But we must again pause to think and be serious about the meaning of these words. We are commanded to love the Lord our God with *all* of our heart, soul, mind and strength. No one does that. And we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, no one

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does that either. We are all guilty of violating the two most important commandments every single day.

Marc Roby: That's a bit disconcerting.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. But it is important for us to see just how far short of meeting God's requirements we fall. Sin is not a little problem. It is immense. And we are utterly incapable of solving it ourselves. As a result, Christians need to realize how serious the kingship of Christ is. We have been saved, but we are in the process of *being* transformed. If that is not a present reality in your life, then you have not been saved. And our transformation is serious work that occurs under the rule of Jesus Christ the King.

Marc Roby: And the fact that we are in the process of being transformed is clearly stated in the Bible. For example, in Romans 8:29 we read, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." And in 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul wrote that "we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

Dr. Spencer: Those are both great verses, and it is a very important point. Modern Christians often seem to think that once you are saved the work is over and you just go on living your life the same old way. But that is not at all the biblical model. Our lives are to be controlled by God and lived for a purpose. We should be constantly changing, not standing still.

Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings". But then he wrote about the constant effort that's required to know Christ this way. He went on to say, in Verses 12-14, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Marc Roby: It is amazing that even the apostle Paul did not consider himself to have attained this knowledge! He also wrote about being transformed in Romans 12:2, where we read, "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."

Dr. Spencer: And we see in that verse that our minds must be transformed. As I said earlier, we can't think whatever we want to think. We must learn to think and act biblically.

And this transformation, which is called being sanctified, is not optional. There is a very common but completely unbiblical idea out there that you can accept Jesus as your Savior, but not have him as your Lord. People who hold this view would say that it is good to have Jesus be your Lord, but that isn't essential to salvation.

Marc Roby: That's been called the Lordship-Salvation controversy.

Dr. Spencer: It has, and we will spend more time on it at a later date. But it is an incredibly important point and we need to talk about it now to some extent because far too many people have accepted the idea that you can pray a prayer and be saved no matter how you then live. But praying a prayer doesn't save anyone. Only Jesus saves. But Jesus only saves in the way the Bible describes. You must be born again. And if you are born again, you a new creation and your life will be different. You won't be perfect, and you cannot earn any part of your salvation. But if you haven't been changed at all, then you haven't been saved. And praying a prayer does not, in and of itself, change you.

Marc Roby: I would say that even one person being deceived by this false gospel is one too many.

Dr. Spencer: And I would agree. Now you mentioned earlier that Christ was quoting the Old Testament when he spoke of the two greatest commandments, and I think it will be instructive to look at the Old Testament to get a better understanding of the comprehensive and serious nature of the lordship of Christ. Christ actually quoted from two Old Testament passages, and I want to look at just the first because it is the most important.

Marc Roby: I'm sure that you're referring to Deuteronomy 6:4-5 where Moses commanded the people, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Dr. Spencer: That's right. The Jews consider this passage to be one of the most important of all in the Old Testament. They refer to the first verse, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." As the "Shema", which is the first word in the Hebrew text for that verse. The word means "to heed, listen, and obey."²

Moses said this to the people after he had given them the Ten Commandments, which we read in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The people were terrified by the sight and sound of Moses meeting with God on top of Mount Sinai and we read in Deuteronomy 5:27 that they told Moses, "Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey."

Marc Roby: And Moses did tell them everything God commanded him to say, but the people did not listen and obey as they said they would.

Dr. Spencer: No, they didn't. And their disobedience brought great trouble. But I want to emphasize what Moses said to them. Right after telling them to Love the Lord with all their heart, soul and strength, we read the following in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

² Hebrew-Greek Keyword Study Bible, New International Version, AMG Internation, 1996, pg. 215

Marc Roby: That certainly makes it clear that God's commands are important and we are to be very serious about knowing them, keeping them and passing them on to our children. This also reminds me of one of the last things Moses told the people before God called him home. In Deuteronomy 32:46-47 we read that Moses said, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

Dr. Spencer: And it is extremely important for Christians to understand that God's law is *still* important for us today. We must properly balance two biblical strands of teaching. First, we must boldly proclaim that no one will be saved by keeping the law as Paul clearly tells us in Romans 3 and elsewhere. For example, in Galatians 2:16 Paul wrote that we, "know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

Marc Roby: And so the rallying cry of the Reformation was that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Dr. Spencer: And that statement is absolutely correct; which is to say, it is biblical. The biblical view is opposed to the Roman Catholic view of salvation and all other views that give man any of the credit for his own salvation.

But there is, as I said, a second strand of biblical teaching that has to a very significant extent been lost in the modern protestant church world. That strand is that obedience is absolutely essential to salvation; but before everyone turns us off for being heretical, let me point out that I said obedience is essential for salvation, not justification.

Marc Roby: Well, those two words are often used more or less synonymously.

Dr. Spencer: They are, but salvation is a more general term, which refers to the whole process, while justification is quite specific and refers to a single event. In a theological sense, to be justified means that God has declared you to be just based on your being united to Christ by faith. Our justification is based on Christ's merits alone, not ours. But the only way we can be united to Christ by faith is if we have been born again, which is what enables us to believe. And, if we have been born again, then we are new creations as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, we are not the same old person and we will not, therefore, behave the same old way.

Marc Roby: That seems like a perfectly obvious statement.

Dr. Spencer: I think it is, yes. And if we have been born again, we love Jesus Christ. And we are told in John 14:15 that Jesus said "If you love me, you will obey what I command." Our obedience is not in any way meritorious. In other words, our obedience is not in any way a reason for our justification. We are *not* justified because we obey. We obey because of our new nature, which is also why we believe and are justified. The cause of our faith and the cause of our obedience are the same. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:10 that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Marc Roby: And Jesus Christ himself said, as we read in Matthew 7:21, that “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a clear statement that just *saying* Jesus is Lord will not save you. Your life must demonstrate that it is a true statement. You must demonstrate that you are, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “a new creation”. In other words, you must do the will of the Father in heaven.

Look at what is often called the great commission. In Matthew 28:18-20 we read that Jesus 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.” We are to teach people to obey *everything* Jesus commanded. No one will earn his salvation by doing so, but anyone who has truly been saved *will* do so. If we say that obeying Christ is somehow optional, that he can be your Savior without being your Lord, then we eviscerate every command in the New Testament. They all become mere suggestions.

Now, our obedience is never perfect of course, but if our new nature doesn’t manifest itself in new behavior, then our nature isn’t really new at all. We are the same old sinner headed for hell.

Marc Roby: I’m reminded of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:28, that “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” Paul clearly expected true believers to lead changed lives.

Dr. Spencer: And getting back to Jesus serving as our King, that changed life is characterized by obedience to our King. We are to obey everything he commanded. Martin Luther wrote that “Our faith in Christ does not free us from works but from false *opinions concerning works*, that is, from the foolish presumption that justification is acquired by works.”³

Marc Roby: That’s a great quote. I think people often have the mistaken idea that Martin Luther was opposed to saying anything about Christians having good works. But that quote makes it clear that he was only opposed to thinking that works were in any way the basis for our salvation.

Dr. Spencer: That is the critically important point. We will talk much more about salvation later when we get to the topic of soteriology, but I think we’ve said enough for now and I want to get back to looking at Christ as King.

As Christians, we are to live obedient lives. And God provides the Holy Spirit to help us do that. First, of course, the Holy Spirit is primarily responsible for causing us to be born again as we read in John 3:7-8, where Christ said, “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be

³ Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, Translated by W.A. Lambert, Revised by H.J. Grimm, Fortress Press, 2003, pg. 65

born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Marc Roby: That is the essential first step in our being saved. As we've said, we must first be brought into God's kingdom for Christ to truly be our King.

Dr. Spencer: And the second thing the Holy Spirit does for us is to enable us to understand the Word of God. Not perfectly or without any work on our part of course, but without the Holy Spirit there is no hope of properly understanding the Word. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Marc Roby: That reminds me of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:17. He said, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

Dr. Spencer: The Holy Spirit dwells in every true believer, to give us greater knowledge of God and his Word, and to enable us to obey. We are told in Romans 8:14 that "those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." The Greek verb translated here as "led" is a present-tense verb, meaning that the action continues, which is why the Rev. P.G. Mathew renders the verse, "those who are being led by the Spirit of God, they and they alone are the sons of God."⁴

Marc Roby: But even true Christians do not always follow this leading perfectly.

Dr. Spencer: No, regrettably, we don't. The Holy Spirit illuminates our minds to understand the Word of God, he provides an internal rebuke when needed and he gives us the power necessary to obey, but he doesn't force us. Paul warns us in Ephesians 4:30 to, "not grieve the Holy Spirit of God", which of course implies that we *can* grieve the Spirit.

Marc Roby: And while I look forward to examining further how the Holy Spirit leads God's children, this seems like a good place to break for today, so I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org, and we would love to hear from you.

⁴ P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, 2011, pg. 536