

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine Christology. Dr. Spencer, last week we discussed a number of passages in the New Testament to make the case that if we have been born again, we will obey Jesus Christ our King. True Christians do walk in the obedience of faith. How would you like to proceed with this topic today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, first I want to again note that we are *not* saying that a true Christian will obey perfectly. We all sin. But all true Christians *have* been born again, which is a very serious statement. We've noted several times that Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"¹

We need to realize how radical that statement is. We are new creations. It is inconceivable that the new creation will behave exactly the same way as the old one did. Paul also wrote, in Romans 8:29, "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." Now we are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, who perfectly obeyed the Father.

Marc Roby: That is an incredible truth to sit and meditate on for a while. But this radical transformation takes time, it doesn't occur overnight.

Dr. Spencer: Oh, it certainly does take time. In fact, it takes more than a lifetime. We will not be perfected in this life. We only reach perfection when we die. Nevertheless, there is also an instantaneous change that occurs when we are born again. The fact that that change is not total doesn't negate the fact that it is radical, meaning that it affects every aspect of our being. We are, as Paul wrote, new creations, even though we also still have the old sinful nature hanging around to trip us up, which the New Testament frequently refers to as the "flesh" in the Greek.

Marc Roby: I'm sad to say that I'm very familiar with the flesh. We have to wage war against it every single day as Paul wrote in Colossians 3.

Dr. Spencer: And you're not alone. Every Christian has to fight the flesh every single day. And Colossians 3 is a great chapter. I think it will be well worth our while to take a look at an extended section of it. The first four verses speak about what theologians call our union with Christ.

Marc Roby: Which is a glorious topic indeed. Let me read Colossians 3:1-4, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

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Dr. Spencer: Isn't that wonderful? We are not to be focused on this life because this earth is not our eternal home. We are to have our hearts and minds set on things above. In other words, on heaven. And we are reminded that Christ is there, seated at the right hand of God. He is seated because his work of redemption is finished. And Paul speaks about our union with Christ in this passage. He says that we died, which is very strong metaphorical language, meaning that our old sinful nature no longer rules. He is even more explicit about this in his letter to the Romans.

In Romans 6:5-7 we read; "If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin." And it is this union with Christ that Paul is speaking about in Colossians 3:3 when he says that "your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

Marc Roby: And as a result of this union, Paul draws the amazing conclusion I read a moment ago in Colossians 3:4, that "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a marvelous conclusion. And notice that Paul started, in Colossians 3:1, by saying that we have been raised with Christ even though we are still here on earth, in this body, with sin still present. He also wrote in Romans 6:2-4 that "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Christian baptism is a wonderful symbolic representation of our union with Christ. When we are immersed in the water the symbolism is that of dying with Christ. And, of course, his death paid the penalty that we owed because of our sins. And then, when we are raised up out of the water it symbolizes our union with Christ in his resurrection. And note carefully what Paul wrote. He wrote that "just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

Marc Roby: And so again we see this idea of a new life. New creations live new lives. The fact that there will be significant change in behavior is inescapable.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. And so, getting back to the passage in Colossians 3, the next six verses talk about the process that all Christians are called to go through in this life. We are to fight against our old sinful nature and to be transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ.

Marc Roby: Yes, let me read those six verses. In Colossians 3:5-10 we are told, "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other,

since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Dr. Spencer: I love that passage. It illustrates both the reality of the radical change that has already occurred and the need for further change. We are to put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature, and we are to rid ourselves of such things; which clearly indicates we are not yet perfect. There is still work we need to do. But then we are also told that we have taken off our old self and have put on the new self, which speaks about something that is already accomplished. There has been a significant change already – that change was new birth.

Marc Roby: And we have noted before that John Murray calls the significant change that comes with new birth definitive sanctification, while the change that continues throughout the Christian life, he calls progressive sanctification.²

Dr. Spencer: I like that way of describing it a lot. But whether we use Murray’s terminology or not, it is an undeniable truth that the New Testament speaks of our sanctification in three tenses; past, present and future. *We have been* sanctified, which refers to the real, radical change that occurs when we are born again, or regenerated. We are also *being* sanctified, which refers to the continuing process of transformation that every true Christian goes through. And we *will be* sanctified, which refers to the fact that we will be perfected by God when we die.

Marc Roby: What a wonderful thing that is to look forward to.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. And now I’d like to wrap up this part of the discussion by going back to the Westminster Shorter Catechism. In Session 119 we looked at Question 26, which asks, “How does Christ execute the office of a King?”

Marc Roby: And the answer is, “Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”

Dr. Spencer: And we have now seen every part of that answer. Christ subdues us to himself by sending the Holy Spirit to regenerate us and enable us to repent, believe and thereby be united to Christ by faith. Then, because we are united to Christ, we are justified in God’s sight. When God looks at us, he doesn’t see our sin, he sees the perfect righteousness of our representative, Jesus Christ. This is the double imputation we’ve spoken of before. Our sins are put onto Christ – he bore them on the cross and paid the penalty we owed. And his perfect righteousness is imputed to us, which means it is counted as ours. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Marc Roby: What an amazing transaction! I give Christ my guilt and condemnation and in return he gives me his unimpeachable righteousness.

Dr. Spencer: But that isn’t all that God does, there is even more. We are also brought into the kingdom of God and he begins ruling and defending us. And at the end of the answer in the Catechism we see that through the process of sanctification Jesus our King conquers all our

² John Murray, *Collected Works*, Vol. II, Banner of Truth Trust, 1977, Chap. 21

enemies. This includes our sin, which is our greatest enemy. In addition, although we haven't spent any time discussing this yet, he also conquers the world and Satan, our other two enemies.

Marc Roby: That is wonderful news. But, even though this victory is already won in a sense, there is still work that we need to do.

Dr. Spencer: That's very true. The victory is certain, but it is not yet completely evident in our lives. We have to fight our battles every day as we noted earlier. And the great news for a Christian is that we do not have to fight these battles in our own strength. In fact, if we try to fight them in our own strength, we are guaranteed to fail.

Marc Roby: The apostle Peter learned the hard way that he couldn't stand in his own strength. In Matthew 26:35 we read that he declared to Jesus, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And then, on the night before Jesus' crucifixion, Peter denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Dr. Spencer: That is a great example not only for showing how we will fail if we try to do things in our own strength, but also for showing how God guarantees the ultimate victory of his people. We are told more about this episode in Luke 22:31-32 where we read that Christ told Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Notice first of all that Satan had to ask permission to tempt Peter. Satan is far more powerful than we are, but he is a creature and is completely under God's control. God allows him a great deal of freedom to attack the church at this time, but Satan can never go further than God allows.

Marc Roby: Well, that certainly is part of what the Catechism is referring to when it says Christ restrains and conquers our enemies. Satan is already defeated and is severely restrained by God.

Dr. Spencer: That's true. We also see however in that passage, Christ praying for Peter, and we are told in Hebrews 7:24-25 that "because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Jesus is in heaven right now interceding for his people. This is part of his functioning as our great high Priest. And his intercession is always effectual, which is why he said to Peter, "*when* you have turned back", not "*if* you turn back". He knew that even though Peter would fail temporarily, his faith would not be utterly destroyed.

Marc Roby: That is a great comfort to us all. It is amazing to think that Jesus Christ cares about me and is interceding on my behalf even now.

Dr. Spencer: It is amazing, but true. That is why Paul could write to the Christians in Philippi that he was confident that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus", as we read in Philippians 1:6. God will never fail to accomplish his purposes. And he has purposed to save his people. Therefore, if we have been born again and Christ is our King, we are eternally secure.

As I mentioned a couple of minutes ago, we have three enemies – our own sinful natures, or flesh, Satan, and the world. The example of Peter shows that Satan will be defeated.

Marc Roby: And we also have the promise of our Lord's brother, James. He wrote in James 4:7 that if we submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, he will flee from us.

Dr. Spencer: That is a great promise. We also know that God will always provide a way for us to overcome our own sin. There is no temptation that a true Christian cannot resist. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

Marc Roby: That is, again, a great comfort. We are enabled by God to stand up under any and every temptation.

Dr. Spencer: And we are also given victory over our third enemy, the world. We read in 1 John 5:3-4, "This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."

Marc Roby: That's an interesting passage. It again mixes a past tense and a present tense. It says that this is the victory that *has* overcome the world – in other words, it is an accomplished fact. And yet it also says that everyone born of God overcomes the world, which is speaking about our continuing need to walk in holiness and fight the daily battle.

Dr. Spencer: And notice that overcoming the world is linked with obeying God's commands, which are not burdensome to someone who has been born again. If we have been born again, we are part of God's family, we share in his nature, and so we delight in his commands. We desire to walk in his ways and please him. And yet, we still have our old sinful natures hanging around to drag us down. We are told in Galatians 5:17 that "the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." The Spirit in this verse is capitalized, indicating that it is referring to the Holy Spirit, who dwells in every true believer.

In his commentary of 1 John, the Rev. P.G. Mathew notes that this internal opposition, which every believer experiences, "is proof that we have been born of God ... If we are children of God, there will be deep conflict within us until the day we die. We are like live fish who swim upstream against the cultural flow. It is the dead who float with the current."³

Marc Roby: That's a great illustration. The world, our flesh and the devil are all trying to drag us down, but if we are alive in Christ we will fight upstream, endeavoring to live obedient lives for the glory of God.

Dr. Spencer: And the Holy Spirit is our powerful aid as we do so. Jesus himself was filled with the Holy Spirit without limit we are told in John 3:34 and was thereby enabled to do all the work God had called him to do in his human nature. We have that same Holy Spirit available to us as Christians. All we have to do is ask. Jesus told us in Luke 11:13, "If you then, though you are

³ P.G. Mathew, *The Normal Church Life*, OM Books, 2006, pg. 248

evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

Marc Roby: We should all ask for the Holy Spirit so that we can lead lives that are pleasing in God’s sight, walking in the obedience of faith.

Dr. Spencer: We should. And with that I think we have completed all that I wanted to say about Christ as our King.

Marc Roby: And so this is a perfect place to finish for today. I’d like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org, we would love to hear from you.