

**Marc Roby:** We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine Christology. Last week we discussed the fact that Jesus Christ is our example and we are to imitate his life of perfect obedience to God. Dr. Spencer, what would you like to cover today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to finish our study of Christology and transition into a study of soteriology.

**Marc Roby:** Which is the doctrine of salvation.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. Last time we discussed Jesus Christ as our example, which is a completely biblical idea. For example, Paul commands us in Ephesians 5:1-2 to "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."<sup>1</sup>

**Marc Roby:** And when you say that Paul commands us, it is because the verbs used in the original Greek are, in fact, in the imperative mood. He is commanding us to imitate God and to live a life of love as Christ did.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And in the Greek the second of those commands actually says to *walk* in love as Christ did, which I think is a more vibrant and active way of putting it.

**Marc Roby:** Yes, I agree.

Dr. Spencer: But, even though this idea of imitating Jesus Christ is biblical, it can be a dangerous concept if it is absolutized. In other words, if we reduce Christianity to nothing *more* than the modern-day bracelet with the initials WWJD, standing for "What Would Jesus Do?," we completely miss the true gospel message. This is an example of the fact that you don't have to say anything that is unbiblical to preach a heretical brand of Christianity. All you have to do is leave out certain parts of God's Word.

**Marc Roby:** Yes, like sin, wrath and hell.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's right. People don't like hearing about sin, or wrath, or hell, but they are essential to the true gospel. Many professing Christians today think of Jesus Christ as nothing *more* than an example. But that ignores his greatest work, which is that of being our atoning sacrifice.

**Marc Roby:** You noted last time that it was not appropriate for us to emulate Christ in everything he did. And, in the case of his sacrifice, we can say something even stronger. It is not *possible* for us to emulate that work, at least not in the ultimate sense.

Dr. Spencer: That is completely true. We may be called to die for the gospel, but the death of any mere human being cannot atone for the sin of anyone. We can't take care of our own sin

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problem, let alone the sin problem of anyone else. Whereas, we are told in 1 John 4:10, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” What is impossible with man is possible with God.

**Marc Roby: And, as we labored to show in Sessions 114 and 115, Christ is the unique God-man, the only one capable of being an efficacious sacrifice.**

Dr. Spencer: Which is a critically important point. But getting back to the modern view of Jesus as nothing more than a good example, such a view completely eviscerates Christianity of all serious meaning, and any so-called gospel based on this minimization of Jesus is not good news, it is terrible news, because it leaves people unsaved.

**Marc Roby: In other words, it leaves them subject to God’s eternal wrath in hell.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is the terrible truth. We are told in Matthew 1:21 that an angel told Joseph that Mary “will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” But we need to understand what that means. We are told in Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death”, and we read in Hebrews 9:27 that “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”. We are all sinners. We have all rebelled against God. In the language of the Bible, we are all under a curse because of our sinful rebellion. And Jesus himself said in Matthew 25:46 that the cursed “will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

**Marc Roby: And, as Paul wrote in Romans 3:10, “There is no one righteous, not even one”. It would, therefore, seem as though eternal life is unattainable for human beings, since only the righteous receive eternal life.**

Dr. Spencer: That would be a logical conclusion, but once again, what is impossible with man is possible with God. We must first acknowledge however, the bad news. We are all sinners. We all begin life cursed. No one is righteous in himself. We begin life destined for eternal hell. But, praise God, the story doesn’t end there. In Romans 3:21-22 Paul wrote, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” And that is the gospel in a nutshell.

No one is righteous in himself. So no one will receive eternal life if he is judged on his own merits. But there is a righteousness from God that is available to us. It comes through faith in Jesus Christ. He is not just our example. He is our Savior. He is our Lord. He is our God.

**Marc Roby: And if someone preaches a so-called gospel that does away with sin, wrath and eternal hell, he is preaching a false gospel.**

Dr. Spencer: And he is preaching a false Jesus. Because he is preaching a Jesus who *is* nothing more than a good example. There is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. We are told in Acts 4:12 that “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” And in John 3:18 we read that “Whoever believes in [Jesus

Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”

**Marc Roby: You often hear something to the effect that Jesus came down to show us what true love and sacrifice look like. God is all about love and the whole Christian life and gospel are summarized by love.**

Dr. Spencer: Which is in one sense true of course. And that is what makes the lie all the more dangerous. We *are*, in fact, told in 1 John 4:8 and 16 that “God is love”. And we also read in Matthew 22:37-40 that Jesus Christ himself told us, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” But we create a completely heretical view of Christianity when we divorce these statements from the rest of Scripture and impose our own definition of “love” on them.

**Marc Roby: As always we should use Scripture to interpret Scripture, which is the first rule of hermeneutics.**

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly right. God is love. But he is also holy and just. He is too pure to look on evil. He is angry with sin and he must punish it. That is why Jesus had to come and die a terrible death on the cross, and endure the wrath of the Father for our sins. I read 1 John 4:10 a few minutes ago, which gives us the biblical definition of love. It says, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” Love is *not* what we define it to be. It is *not* that we loved God. God’s love required that the second person of the Holy Trinity become incarnate, live a perfect life of obedience, and then take our sins upon himself, be nailed to the cross, bear the wrath of God on our behalf and *die*. That is love. It must be defined in light of God’s hatred of sin and the need for sin to be punished. Love is self-sacrifice for the benefit of another.

**Marc Roby: And it is all the more amazing when you consider who Jesus died for. It was not for people who loved him, or were noble and worthy in some way, it was for his enemies. As Paul wrote in Romans 5:10, “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”**

Dr. Spencer: That is an amazing truth to consider. Perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16, which says that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” The verse is so familiar that I think we often fail to be astounded by what it says. God *gave his one and only Son!* In other words, Jesus bore God’s wrath and died so that we might have eternal life. That fact alone tells us all we need to know about how horrible our sin is. It required the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to take away our curse. God hates sin. The same God who is love also hates sin. We can never forget that.

**Marc Roby:** And a so-called gospel that only speaks about God's love, while not necessarily saying anything unbiblical, can be completely heretical by *not* saying all that must be said. It makes me think of Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders. We read in Acts 20:26-27 that Paul said, "I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God." The clear implication is that he *would* have been guilty of the blood of others if he had not proclaimed the *whole* will of God.

Dr. Spencer: That is a clear implication. And a bit later in his address to these elders, we read in Verses 29-30 that he said, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." This is what we see happening today in many churches. They are so interested in church growth, in having large numbers, that they water down the gospel to do away with the offense of the gospel. But, in the process, they also do away with the power of the gospel to save.

**Marc Roby:** In fact, if you never present the bad news that there really is an eternal hell and that by nature we all deserve to go there, you have to wonder what it is that we need to be saved from.

Dr. Spencer: That is precisely the problem. You end up with a social gospel. All it can "save" me from is feeling bad about myself. It can make me feel good about myself, it can encourage me to be kind to other people and to help feed the poor and so on, but it can't save me from the guilt and power of sin.

J. Gresham Machen was a great 20<sup>th</sup>-century theologian who left Princeton Seminary when it got taken over by liberalism and he founded Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia in order to continue to proclaim biblical truth. He wrote a marvelous book called *Christianity & Liberalism*, which even though it was first published in 1923, is extremely relevant today. In that book he wrote the following: "Liberalism finds salvation (so far as it is willing to speak at all of 'salvation') in man; Christianity finds it in an act of God."<sup>2</sup>

**Marc Roby:** Yes, that's a great statement. My salvation requires an act of God. If I could be saved by doing my best to follow the example of Jesus Christ, then I would, in the end, be responsible for saving myself.

Dr. Spencer: And that would be impossible according to God's infallible Word. Machen went on to say that "According to Christian belief, Jesus is our Saviour, not by virtue of what He said, not even by virtue of what He was, but by what He did. He is our Saviour, not because He has inspired us to live the same kind of life that He lived, but because He took upon Himself the dreadful guilt of our sins and bore it instead of us on the cross."<sup>3</sup>

**Marc Roby:** He paid the penalty that I owed and could never pay. Praise God!

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<sup>2</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, New Edition, William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009, pg. 99

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Dr. Spencer: Machen explains in this book why we need more than just a good example. He wrote that “an example of self-sacrifice is useless to those who are under both the guilt and thralldom of sin; ... an exhibition of the love of God is a mere display unless there was some underlying reason for the sacrifice.”<sup>4</sup>

Marc Roby: And, of course, the reason for Jesus’ sacrifice is God’s just wrath toward sinners and the fact that we can’t ever pay the penalty we owe. Once God chose to save anyone, he had to solve our sin problem. Which he did through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spencer: And that is precisely what many professing Christians today find offensive. The very idea that God is wrathful toward mankind and that his wrath needs to be appeased is offensive to the natural man. Therefore, he makes up a religion that does away with that offense. He may still call it Christianity, but it is an empty shell completely devoid of truth and power.

Machen wrote, “So modern liberalism, placing Jesus alongside other benefactors of mankind, is perfectly inoffensive in the modern world. All men speak well of it. It is entirely inoffensive. But it is also entirely futile. The offence of the Cross is done away, but so is the glory and the power.”<sup>5</sup>

Marc Roby: That’s a great quote. There is power in the true gospel. I’m reminded of what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 1:16. He said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Dr. Spencer: And when Paul used the double negative – saying he is *not ashamed* of the gospel – he was using a literary device called a litotes to emphasize that he was proud of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Machen wrote that “Jesus was not for Paul merely an example for faith; He was primarily the object of faith.”<sup>6</sup>

Marc Roby: As he is for all true Christians. We place our absolute trust in him when we make the declaration that Jesus is Lord.

Dr. Spencer: And whenever anyone makes that profession truly, he or she is also giving up all pretense to autonomy. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Marc Roby: And, of course, in the context Paul was speaking about sexual immorality, but the application of the principle is much broader than that. If we have been really born again, we belong to God, we were bought at a price, the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We have no right to think or act in any way we want. We are to walk in obedience to God’s Word.

Dr. Spencer: And no one can do that in his own power. We must be born again to repent and believe and we must be born again and filled with God’s Holy Spirit to be enabled to walk in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pg. 101

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp 104-105

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pg. 70

obedience. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:5-8, “Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.”

**Marc Roby: And the only way out of that terrible position of hostility toward God is to be born again.**

Dr. Spencer: And that will be the topic of our next series of podcasts; soteriology, the biblical doctrine of salvation. But we are finished, at least for the time being, with what I want to say about Christology.

**Marc Roby: Well I look forward to getting into the glorious topic of soteriology next time. But before we sign off, I want to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org), we'd be pleased to hear from you.**