Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Dr. Spencer, in our previous sessions we have established the importance of salvation and explained that we can't save ourselves. What would you like to discuss today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to review what we've covered by means of a syllogism. This will first reinforce one last time this phenomenally important point and it will also lead nicely into our discussion of the nature of salvation.

Marc Roby: Alright. For those listeners who don't know what a syllogism is, it is a formal argument that uses deductive logic to arrive at a conclusion based on two or more premises.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And syllogisms are useful because they have been studied extensively since the time of Aristotle and if you construct one properly the conclusion necessarily follows if the premises are true. The classic example used in a logic course goes like this. The first premise is that all men are mortal. The second premise is that Socrates is a man. And the conclusion is that, therefore, Socrates is mortal. This syllogism is a valid syllogism, meaning that the conclusion is true if the premises are true.

Marc Roby: And I think it is obvious that the premises are true in this case.

Dr. Spencer: That they are. And a valid syllogism with true premises is called a sound syllogism, or a sound argument. If I have made a sound argument, then the conclusion I have reached is guaranteed by the rules of logic to be true.[1]

Marc Roby: Alright. So what is the syllogism that you have in mind to review what we've covered so far?

Dr. Spencer: My syllogism is more complicated than the simple example I just gave, but it is still relatively easy to follow, it has four premises. The first premise is that every human being will be judged by Christ. This premise is supported by 2 Corinthians 5:10, which says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."[2] The second premise is that based on that judgment, every human being will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. This premise is supported by Matthew 25:46, where Jesus tells us that the wicked "will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Marc Roby: And by "eternal life" Jesus means heaven.

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[1] V. Poythress, *Logic – A God-Centered Approach to the Foundation of Western Thought*, Crossway, 2013, pp 48-49

[2] All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he does. It is the only alternative to hell, which is eternal death. The third premise in my syllogism is that you must be perfectly righteous to be in heaven. This premise is supported by 2 Peter 3:13, which says, "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." We could supply other verses to buttress this argument, but the righteousness spoken of there is absolute; there will not be *any* sin in heaven. And the fourth and final premise is that no human being is righteous. This premise is supported by Romans 3:10, where Paul tells us, "There is no one righteous, not even one".

Marc Roby: Now, let me restate all four of your premises without the biblical support just so that we can have them clearly in mind. First, every human being will be judged by Christ. Second, based on that judgment, every human being will spend eternity in heaven or in hell. Third, you must be perfectly righteous to be in heaven. And, fourth, no human being is righteous.

Dr. Spencer: And the resulting conclusion from these premises is that no one will make it to heaven, or alternatively, everyone will go to hell.

Marc Roby: I don't like that conclusion.

Dr. Spencer: And neither did God. But God is the God of logic and reason. He is not bound by them as though they were some external authority whom he must obey, but he himself is logic and reason and will not do anything contrary to them because it would violate his nature. As the theologian John Frame wrote, "The laws of logic are an aspect of his own character."[3] And so, God had to solve this problem. From a human perspective, the syllogism I gave is sound. If God doesn't intervene in some way, we are all bound for hell.

Marc Roby: But, praise God, he did intervene.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he did. He made a way for us to be saved and he did it without violating his own nature, which is perfectly holy and just and therefore requires both that we be perfectly holy and that our sin be punished.

Marc Roby: Those are the two problems you mentioned last time. We need our sins atoned for and we need perfect righteousness.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. And God solved that problem by allowing our sins to be imputed to Christ and his righteousness to be imputed to us.

Marc Roby: Which is the double transaction we have mentioned a number of times and about which Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:21 when he said that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Dr. Spencer: That's exactly right. Paul also tells us about God's solution to the problem in his letter to the Romans. First, in Romans 1:17 he wrote, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" This verse tells us that there is a righteousness that comes from

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[3] John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P&R Publishing Company, 2002, pg. 518

God, which means it is a perfect righteousness, and that it is "by faith", which refers to the fact that we appropriate this righteousness in some way by faith.

Paul then speaks about this righteousness from God again in Chapter Three.

Marc Roby: Which is the chapter where he lays out the devastating argument that we are all sinners and do not seek God.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And he concludes that argument in Romans 3:20 by saying, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."

Marc Roby: And when we become aware of our own sinfulness we also know, as Paul wrote in Romans 6:23, that "the wages of sin is death". And that sounds just as bad as the conclusion from your syllogism.

Dr. Spencer: It is just as bad. But the very next verse begins in the English with a most wonderful word, the conjunction "but", which introduces something that contrasts with the conclusion just reached. In Romans 3:21-22 we read, "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 we have to appreciate how significant that opening conjunction, "but" is! In spite of the universal condemnation logically required by our sin and God's holiness, Paul says "But now". This is wonderful news! "But now" God is giving us his divine solution to our unsolvable problem. And he tells us again that there is a righteousness from God and that it comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Marc Roby: And so we see the truth of what Jesus said in Luke 18:27, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."

Dr. Spencer: And in Romans 3 Paul explains this further. Let me read Verses 22-26. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."

Marc Roby: Those verses say a lot!

Dr. Spencer: They most certainly do, but for the moment let's focus on the last thing Paul wrote. He said that God did this "so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." In other words, God has not denied himself, he stays faithful to his own nature as the just God, and yet he is able to justify those who have faith in Jesus, even though there is no difference, they have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He preserves his justice

because our sins are punished. But it is Jesus Christ who receives that punishment. He is, as Paul wrote, our "sacrifice of atonement". Or we could say he is the propitiation for our sins.

Marc Roby: That is a beautiful solution to our humanly insoluble problem, but it is very sobering that it required the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ to accomplish it.

Dr. Spencer: And exactly how this all works is the topic of soteriology. We've already said a lot about how we are saved, but I want to begin really looking at the doctrine very carefully, piece by piece. And I want to start by asking an answering a very basic question; namely, "What is the ultimate cause of our salvation?"

Marc Roby: And how would you answer that question?

Dr. Spencer: I would say that the ultimate cause of our salvation is the love of God. "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." John tells us in John 3:16.

The theologian John Murray gives a very brief outline of God's plan for salvation by making three points. First, "God set his love upon men." Second, "In consequence he decreed their salvation." And, third, "In order to achieve this end, he decreed to send his Son to secure their salvation."[4]

Marc Roby: That's a very broad-brush overview of salvation, which requires a great deal of fleshing out.

Dr. Spencer: I agree, but it is sufficient to make a very important point. Murray notes that "Historically speaking, the distinguishing features of the various theologies appear in their respective constructions of the plan of salvation." He then goes on to describe four broad categories of theology. The first theology is called "sacerdotalist". Now sacerdotalism is the belief that priests are needed as mediators between God and man and includes the idea that we are saved through the efficacy of the sacraments. The most prominent example of a sacerdotalist theology is Roman Catholicism. Murry wrote that "The sacerdotalist conception [of salvation] is governed by the thesis that the church is the depository of salvation and the sacraments the media of conveyance."[5]

Marc Roby: And by "media of conveyance" he means that the sacraments are means by which we obtain salvation. We should point out that this was not the original view of what is now the Roman Catholic church. The church's view of salvation, as expounded by St. Augustin, agreed with the reformed view, but the view of the church evolved into sacerdotalism over time.

Dr. Spencer: And that movement away from the truth led to the Protestant Reformation. We may discuss both the reformation and the Roman Catholic view of salvation in more detail at a later time, but it will suffice for now to note that the Roman Catholic view of salvation is unbiblical and the Roman Catholic church is not a true church. I'm not saying it is impossible for someone

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[4] J. Murray, *Collected Works*, Vol. II, Banner of Truth Trust, 1977, pg. 124
[5] Ibid

to be saved in the Roman Catholic church, after all, the reformers themselves were all Roman Catholics first. But, if someone is truly saved in the Roman Catholic church, he or she will eventually want to get out of that church and find a church where the true gospel is preached and practiced.

Marc Roby: Yes, I agree. But you said Murray described four types of theology in terms of their view of salvation. What are the other three?

Dr. Spencer: The other three all came out of the Reformation and while I think that one of them is the correct biblical view, and that the differences are important, I want to be clear up front that a person can be truly saved and be in any one of these three groups.

Marc Roby: Alright. Well, what are the three groups?

Dr. Spencer: Well, Murray writes, "Among evangelicals there are the Lutherans, the Arminians, and Reformed. The Lutherans and Arminians orient their construction of the plan of salvation to the contention that what God does looking to salvation, he does on behalf of all equally, and the diversity of the issues" and I should say that by "diversity of issues" Murray means the diversity of results. In other words, the obvious fact that not everyone is saved. So, now let me read that last sentence again and complete it this time; "The Lutherans and Arminians orient their construction of the plan of salvation to the contention that what God does looking to salvation, he does on behalf of all equally, and the diversity of the issues depends upon the differences of response on the part of men. The Reformed, on the other hand, maintain that *God* makes men to differ, and that the diversity of the issues finds its explanation ultimately in God's sovereign election of some to salvation."[6]

Marc Roby: And although I'm sure it is obvious to anyone who has been listening to these podcasts, we take the reformed position. Although the Arminian position is, without a doubt, the most common one in the church.

Dr. Spencer: There is no doubt that it is the most common view today. And it is the view that I think virtually everyone likes the best when they first hear about the differences because it appears to be fair, it treats everyone the same.

Marc Roby: And we all like fair play.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we do. But we need to be careful. If we think about it for a minute, it should be clear that we don't want God to deal with us fairly. If he deals with us fairly, we are back to the syllogism I gave; we are all doomed to go to hell. God is just and holy, and while I certainly don't want him to stop being just and holy, which is impossible anyway, I do *not* want him to treat me with justice. I want him to treat me with mercy.

Marc Roby: I see your point. Justice would demand that we all pay the penalty for our own sins, which we can never do.

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[6] Ibid

Dr. Spencer: No, we can't. We can spend all eternity in hell and the debt is still not paid; in fact, it will have increased because we will have continued to be rebellious toward God. But that would be fair. The critical thing that many don't seem to think through is that we don't want God to be fair and just when it comes to our salvation. We want him to be merciful.

Marc Roby: But the Lutheran and Arminian positions certainly agree that God's saving us is a merciful act. They agree that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone.

Dr. Spencer: They do agree on those important points, and that is why I said a person can hold to those positions and be saved. But, think about it for a minute carefully. If God truly makes salvation equally possible for every person, but not every person is saved, then we can conclude that there must be something the people who are saved did that gained their salvation.

Marc Roby: Well, that logic seems sound, but I know that Lutherans and Arminians will agree that they did nothing to earn their salvation.

Dr. Spencer: They will agree with that statement, but there is a problem. They will usually say something like this; "God freely offers salvation to every person and only those who steadfastly reject it will be lost." Now that sounds like those who are saved haven't done anything positive to gain their salvation, but notice that they *did* avoid doing something negative! They did *not* steadfastly reject the offer. So they did, in fact, do something to gain their salvation. What they did was to *not* reject it.

In the end it doesn't matter whether we word it in a positive or negative way, the conclusion that Murray stated is true. He said that "the diversity of the issues depends upon the differences of response on the part of men." In other words, our salvation depends on our response. It depends on us. We would have something to be proud of. But Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9 that "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." And given that this podcast will appear on Thanksgiving day, it is particularly appropriate to give thanks to our glorious God for his gift of salvation.

Marc Roby: I agree, we should be and are eternally thankful. But we need to explain how it is we can be saved and not have it depend on our response. We don't have time today to start a new topic, so we had better stop now. Therefore, let me first take this opportunity to join you in wishing all our listeners a very happy and blessed Thanksgiving, and then remind them that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org, and we will do our best to reply.

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