

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine the holiness of God. Last time we looked at the fact that God's holiness is emphasized in Isaiah 6:3, where the seraphs were crying out, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty".¹ In particular, this emphasizes the fact that God is separate from his creation, he is transcendent. That led us to discussing the fact that God is the Lord of his creation. Dr. Spencer, how do you want to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to explore the practical implications for the Christian life of the fact that God is Lord or, to be more specific, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Marc Roby: Which is, of course, the basic confession of a true Christian, Jesus is Lord. Which is only two words in the Greek, Ἰησοῦς κύριος (Iēsous kurios).

Dr. Spencer: That's true. And the lordship of God is fundamental to his being. As the Creator and Judge of the universe he has made, he can't be anything other than the Lord of his creation. John Frame talks about this at length in his book *The Doctrine of God*. He makes a very strong statement about it. He writes, "The liberal theologian wants to avoid at all costs the notion that he belongs to someone else, that he must think according to someone else's standards, that he must obey someone else without question. He may be willing to use the term *Lord*, but the biblical doctrine of God's lordship is inimical to his most fundamental instincts. In this respect, liberation theology and the other modern theologies are not new. But these positions are, at this point, fundamentally anti-Christian. The central message of Scripture is that God is Lord."²

Marc Roby: Yes, that is a very strong statement, but it is also completely correct. These liberal theologians don't want to believe that they belong to someone else, but we are told in Romans 14:8 that "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." Frame is certainly correct in saying that this view is anti-Christian.

Dr. Spencer: That statement definitely is correct. In fact, by my count there are 13 places in the 1984 NIV Bible we are using where it refers to those who belong to the Lord, or belong to Christ, or belong to him or some similar statement.³

Marc Roby: That's pretty clear. And it is hard to know what it would mean for Jesus Christ to be Lord if his people did not belong to him. The liberal theologians also do not want to be told how to think as Frame points out, but Paul wrote, in 2 Corinthians 10:5, that "We demolish arguments

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² John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P&R Publishing Company, 2002, pg. 25

³ See Mrk 9:41, Jn 8:4, Rom 1:6, 7:4, 8:9, 14:8, 1 Cor 7:39, 15:23, 2 Cor 10:7, Gal 3:29, 5:24, Jms 2:7, 1 Jn 3:19

and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

Dr. Spencer: And they don't want to obey without question, but in Matthew 28:20, Jesus tells us to go and make disciples, “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”.

Marc Roby: And in John 14:15 Jesus said that “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”

Dr. Spencer: And in Luke 11:28 Jesus said that “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

Marc Roby: And Jesus also said, in John 14:23, that “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

Dr. Spencer: And in the next chapter we read, in John 15:10, that Christ said, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.” Then, in Acts 5:32, we are told that the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey God. In Romans 1:5 Paul says that “Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” And Chapter 6 of Romans is written specifically to point out that although salvation is by grace, true salvation sets us free from our bondage to sin so that we will no longer live as slaves to sin. Romans 6:2 sets the tone for the whole chapter by asking the rhetorical question, “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?”

Marc Roby: And the clear answer is that we can't.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. We could go on and on, but the fact that Jesus Christ must be your Lord, or he will not be your Savior, is an abundantly clear teaching of the entire New Testament. And the lordship of Jesus Christ is his prerogative as the Creator of the universe. In Colossians 1 the apostle Paul is speaking about Christ and writes, in Verse 16, “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

Marc Roby: We are also told in Hebrews 1:1-2 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.”

Dr. Spencer: I think we have clearly established that this universe was created by Jesus Christ. He is God. And God is holy and he is lord. I want to move on to examine the implications of his lordship for us as Christians. Let me quote John Frame again to begin the transition. He writes that “Holiness, then, is God's capacity and right to arouse our reverent awe and wonder. It is his uniqueness, his transcendence. It is his majesty, for the holy God is like a great king, whom we dare not treat like other persons. Indeed, God's holiness impels us to worship in his presence.”⁴ And, finally, he notes that “Holiness, then, is a very rich concept. It speaks of God's transcendence and separation from finite and sinful creatures. But it also speaks of how God

⁴ Ibid, pg. 28

draws them to himself, making them holy. Holiness marks God's transcendence, but also his immanence, his presence to redeem us. He is not only 'the Holy One,' but 'the Holy One among us,' 'the Holy One of Israel.'"⁵

Marc Roby: Those are marvelous quotes. It is hard to grasp both God's transcendence and immanence. And we should probably explain that when we mention immanence in this context, it is important to note that it is spelled with an 'a', not an 'i'. Imminence spelled with an 'i' refers to something that is going to happen soon, but immanence with an 'a' is the opposite of transcendence. While transcendence refers to something that goes beyond normal limits or is beyond comprehension, or is not subject to the limitations of our physical universe, to be immanent means to indwell or to be inherent or to operate within.

Dr. Spencer: That is a very important point since the words are pronounced the same. And the prime example of God being both transcendent and immanent is Jesus Christ himself. In telling us about the birth of Jesus, the apostle Matthew wrote, in Matthew 1:22-23, that "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us.'" And Matthew is quoting the famous Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah 7:14. So Jesus Christ is not only God, the Creator of the universe as we just noted, he also came down to dwell with us, he walked among us, and he gave his life as an atoning sacrifice to pay for our sins. He is God with us.

Marc Roby: And when he ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to be with us to guide us and strengthen us. He gave this promise to his disciples. In John 16:7 we read that Jesus told them, "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." And Jesus clearly says that this Counselor is the Holy Spirit in John 14:26 where we read, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."

Dr. Spencer: And at the end of the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:20, Christ promised us, "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." So it is clear that God is both transcendent and immanent. But Frame said something else that is critically important. He said that "Holiness marks God's transcendence, but also his immanence, his presence to redeem us." It is the redeeming that I want to talk about now, because God's holiness plays a major role.

Marc Roby: How so?

Dr. Spencer: Well, God's purpose in redeeming us is to make us into a holy people, fit to be his adopted children, brothers and sisters of Christ, and to spend eternity in heaven with him. As we noted last time, in 1 Corinthians 1:2 the apostle Paul describes those to whom he is writing as "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy". And in Hebrews 12:14 we are told that "without holiness no one will see the Lord." In 2 Peter 3:13 we are told that "in keeping with his

⁵ Ibid, pg. 29

promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” In Hebrews 12:23 we read about the souls, or spirits, of those who have already died and gone to heaven and they are called, “spirits of righteous men made perfect”. We could go on citing Scriptures, but the message is abundantly clear, heaven is a place of perfection. God is perfect and all who dwell with him must be perfect, they must be holy. God’s purpose in saving us is not just to pardon our sins and then leave us the way we are, his purpose is to transform us. As Paul 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.”

Marc Roby: That is a glorious thought, that someday we will be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spencer: And in our final, glorified state, we will see him face-to-face and dwell with him and all the other saints in perfect fellowship for ever and ever. But perfection does not happen in this life. Our transformation begins with new birth, which is necessarily followed by repentance and faith, which then leads to our being justified and adopted as God’s children. We then go through a process of sanctification in this life. When we die, our souls are perfected, as we just read, and go to be with God. Then, when Christ comes again, God will raise up our bodies and we will receive glorious new resurrection bodies. In that final glorified state, we will dwell with God forever.

Marc Roby: It doesn’t matter how many times you hear about or think about God’s ultimate plan for us, it always leaves me utterly speechless and longing for Christ’s return.

Dr. Spencer: It is an amazing thing to think about. And the holiness of God, or to be more precise, Jesus Christ, is our pattern. During this life we participate in the process of sanctification. We are called to put to death the sin that remains in us and put on righteousness. We are to strive for moral perfection, which is the aspect of God’s holiness in which we can share. As we noted, there are two aspects to the holiness of God, one is his transcendence, his separateness from his creation. And we can’t become holy in that sense. But the second aspect to God’s holiness is his moral perfection and we can share in that.

Marc Roby: In other words, we can be like Jesus in his moral perfection and obedience to the will of the Father.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. A few years ago it was popular to wear bracelets that had WWJD embossed on them, which stands for What Would Jesus Do? There is a problem with this whole concept since Jesus is God and we are not, so we shouldn’t always do what he would do. But ignoring that problem for the moment, the answer to the question “What would Jesus do?” is clear. Jesus himself said, in John 8:29, “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.” Jesus was perfectly obedient. In his humanity, Jesus made his will subservient to the will of the Father. When he was praying in the garden of Gethsemane prior to his crucifixion, he prayed, as we read in Matthew 26:39, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” And, as Christians, that should be our cry as well.

Marc Roby: In fact, Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be done in the Lord's prayer.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I think it would be very instructive to look at that prayer, because if you think about what Jesus told us to pray, it is very different from the prayers of most professing Christians. Which is an obvious problem and should cause us to repent and change.

Marc Roby: We read this prayer in Matthew Chapter 6. In Verses 9-13 Jesus tells us, "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

Dr. Spencer: Very good. We don't have time to go through the entire prayer, but notice that it begins with a preface, "Our Father in heaven". The Westminster Shorter Catechism does an outstanding job of analyzing this prayer. And Question 100 asks, "What does the preface of the Lord's Prayer teach us?" And the answer given is, "The preface of the Lord's Prayer, which is, Our Father in heaven, teaches us to draw near to God with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father, able and ready to help us; and that we should pray with and for others."

Marc Roby: In other words, we are to focus on the transcendence of God. He is in heaven and we must revere him, and he is able to help us.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And then comes the first petition, which is, "hallowed by your name."

Marc Roby: Perhaps it would be good to define the word 'hallowed' since it is not at all common. To hallow something means to honor it as holy, to consecrate it.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that does help. And the answer to Question 101 in the Catechism says, "In the first petition, which is, hallowed be your name, we pray that God would enable us, and others, to glorify him in all that whereby he makes himself known; and that he would dispose all things to his own glory."

Marc Roby: That again is a magnificent answer.

Dr. Spencer: It is. And I'm quite confident that it is very different from the prayers of most professing Christians. Our chief concern should be the glory of God. And we glorify him the same way Jesus glorified him, by being obedient subjects of our heavenly Lord and King.

The prayer goes on though and I really want to focus on the next two petitions. The answer to Question 102 of the Catechism says, "In the second petition, which is, your kingdom come, we pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed; and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened."

Marc Roby: And when we request that God's kingdom come, we are asking for him to rule, and especially that he would rule *us*.

Dr. Spencer: That is precisely the point I wanted to make. A kingdom has no real meaning unless there is a king who rules. So people who think that they can be Christians and not come under

the rule of God need to think again. The Lord's prayer tells us differently. And the next petition is similar. The answer to Question 103 of the Catechism says, "In the third petition, which is, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, we pray that God, by his grace, would make us able and willing to know, obey, and submit to his will in all things, as the angels do in heaven."

Marc Roby: There are two words most modern people despise in that answer, obey and submit.

Dr. Spencer: And, again, that is precisely my point. Jesus Christ submitted his will to the will of the Father and lived a life of perfect obedience and we are called to be conformed to his image. The dominant characteristic of his life is his submission and obedience. Therefore, the dominant characteristic of the life of a Christian should be submission and obedience to our gracious, loving, merciful, just and holy Lord, Jesus Christ.

We will always be creatures, even when we are glorified in heaven, so we cannot be holy in the sense of being set apart from creation. But we can, must and will be holy in the moral sense if we are truly God's children. The holiness of Jesus Christ is the pattern for us as Christians. That is the practical significance of the holiness of God to us.

Marc Roby: And that is a great place to end for today. I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org and we will do our best to answer.