

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine biblical anthropology.

This podcast will be released on Thursday, April 18, 2019, which is the day before Good Friday and three days before Easter, which is, of course, the day that Christians celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ from the dead. Dr. Spencer, I understand you have a special message for Easter, how does that fit with our study of anthropology?

Dr. Spencer: I think it that it fits perfectly as you'll see. In fact, I was tremendously encouraged as I sat down to prepare this session because I hadn't planned the timing out in advance, but God obviously had, which is a great example of his providence.

In our last session, we answered the question, "Where do we come from?" And in today's session I want to answer the question "Where are we going?" You could view these questions as bookends for the human life. But the second one, "Where are we going?", is the far more important one from our perspective.

Marc Roby: Now, why do you say it is the far more important one?

Dr. Spencer: Because where I came from doesn't change where I am now or what my life is like now. That doesn't mean the answer to that question isn't of great importance of course, it is. But the answer to the question of where I came from doesn't change anything except, hopefully, my perspective on what is important. But the question of where I am going has eternal significance for me personally because we all have an eternal destiny, you, me and every one of our listeners included.

This life is short, but eternity is unimaginably long. So, where we are going is far more important to us personally than where we came from. We are told in Hebrews 9:27 that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,"¹

Marc Roby: I see your point. The question is of ultimate and eternal significance. And, I might add, once we have entered that eternal destiny, it cannot be changed.

In the parable Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham, who is in heaven, is speaking to the rich man, who is in hell, and we read in Luke 16:26 that Abraham tells him, "between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's a very important point. As we noted last time, the first purpose of this life is to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. And that is what Jesus was speaking about when he said to Martha in Luke 10:41-42, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about

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many things, but only one thing is needed.” The offer of salvation in Jesus Christ is made to us in this life, but when this life ends, the offer is no longer there, only the final judgment. So, as the apostle Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.” None of us knows for certain that we will be here next year, or next week, or even tomorrow. So the right time to repent, believe and be saved is now.

Marc Roby: And I think the connection to Easter is now obvious. We can only be saved because the Lord Jesus Christ “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” as Paul wrote in Romans 4:25.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is exactly right. And it is my prayer, and I know yours also, that every single person who hears this podcast will be saved. But, even for those who are already saved, there is another very important connection between Jesus Christ and the answer to our question of “Where are we going?”

Marc Roby: What connection are you referring to?

Dr. Spencer: That Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of what we are to be like. God does not save his people *in* their sins and leave them there. He saves us *from* our sins and leads us to holiness.

Marc Roby: You remind me of the statement in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians where, in Chapter 1 Verse 4, we read that God chose us in Christ “before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

Dr. Spencer: And in one sense we become holy and blameless in his sight the moment we place our trust in Jesus Christ. But the Bible is clear that there is also a lifelong process that all Christians must go through to become more holy in their thinking, feeling and conduct. This is the process of sanctification, which all true believers will experience.

Marc Roby: Although we should caution that not all believers will experience it to the same degree.

Dr. Spencer: Of course not. For example, there were two thieves crucified with Christ and, initially, both of them heaped insults upon him as we read in Matthew 27:44. But eventually, one of them was granted salvation. Clearly, he didn’t have much time for the process of sanctification while he was hanging on the cross.

Marc Roby: Although he certainly had extreme suffering to focus his attention!

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. And suffering is often used by God to help us focus on what is truly important. But sanctification has two aspects; definitive sanctification and progressive sanctification, which we’ll get into more later. Right now, I want to point out that there are also multiple steps to our salvation. When we come to true saving faith and trust in Christ, we are justified, which is God’s legal declaration that we are righteous in his sight because we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to whom we have been united by faith.

Marc Roby: And justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone as the reformers taught. There is absolutely no part in it for our works.

Dr. Spencer: And it is an instantaneous one-time declaration of God. It cannot be revoked and it need not be repeated. But there is a second instantaneous, non-revocable non-repeatable aspect to salvation as well. The instant we are saved, we are changed. That is what John Murray called definitive sanctification.² This is what is being referred to when the biblical writers use the word sanctified in the past tense.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, the apostle Paul wrote, “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Marc Roby: That does clearly speak of a definitive change. You *were* washed, you *were* sanctified, you *were* justified.

Dr. Spencer: And this radical change in our being will immediately change our attitude, speech and behavior. The thief on the cross manifested this change in the short time he had available. He had been hurling insults at our Lord, but once God changed his heart, his behavior necessarily changed as well. We see in Luke 23:40-41 that he rebuked the other thief for continuing to insult Christ, saying, “Don't you fear God, since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Marc Roby: That is a clear indication of a new heart.

Dr. Spencer: It certainly is, and it was the result of definitive sanctification. But sanctification also has a progressive aspect to it. God continues to work in each one of us to put our sin to death and to walk in greater righteousness.

Marc Roby: When you say that I immediately think of Romans 8:29, where Paul wrote, “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.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is exactly my point. We are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, which is a process. And Jesus is the exemplar for a Christian. That is the connection between Easter and anthropology.

We are told in John 1:18 that “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” Which is clearly speaking about Jesus Christ. He is “God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side” and he has “made him known” to us. We're told in Hebrews 1:1-3 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

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

appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being”.

Marc Roby: That is an amazing thought. Jesus Christ has revealed the Father to us. We can't see God with our physical eyes because he is Spirit. But those to whom Jesus appeared in the flesh have seen God as Jesus himself declared. In John 14:8 we read that the apostle Philip asked Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” And Christ replied, in Verse 9, “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

Dr. Spencer: That is hard to grasp. In being conformed to the likeness of Christ, we are being conformed to the likeness of God the Father. In 1 John 3:2 we read, “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” And the theologian John Murray argues persuasively that when John wrote “we shall be like him”, he was speaking about the Father.³

Marc Roby: That is an amazing thought, that we will be like the Father.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, but Murray also gives us a necessary warning. He wrote that “it must not be thought that likeness to God is absolute. There is a sense in which to aspire after likeness to God is the epitome of iniquity.”⁴

Marc Roby: Yes, in fact, it was being like God with which Satan tempted Eve.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it was. And Murray points out that the “genius of the allegation ... consisted in confusing the false and the true in reference to likeness to God.”⁵ He then goes on to point out that as a result of this possible confusion, we need revelation from God to define what it properly means for us to be like him. He goes on to say that the law of God along with the example of Christ provide the pattern to which we are to be conformed. We must remember the Creator/creature distinction. God is the law giver, we are to be law keepers, which is what Jesus Christ in his humanity did.

Marc Roby: There you go again, speaking about obeying the law. We just said a few minutes ago that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and that our works play no role whatsoever in our justification. And now you're bringing up keeping the law as a part of the pattern. I'm sure some of our listeners will object.

Dr. Spencer: Well, I hope that any who are objecting will hear me out and then look in their Bibles and pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth to them, because our good works, while playing no role whatsoever in our justification, are absolutely essential to our salvation. If there are no good works, no obedience to God's law, then there has been no regeneration, no definitive

³ Ibid, pg. 310

⁴ Ibid, pg. 306

⁵ Ibid

sanctification and, therefore no justification. In other words, without our good works as evidence, any claim to having saving faith is false.

Marc Roby: That makes me think of James Chapter 2, where the Lord's brother wrote, in Verse 26, that "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

Dr. Spencer: That is the classic chapter to make this point. He begins that section, in James 2:14, by saying, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" And he then goes on to describe that "such faith", meaning a faith without any good works, is a dead faith, a useless faith, and it cannot save anyone.

Christians must never forget that we are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. And in John 8:29 Jesus said, "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." Remember that he is our exemplar. He always obeyed, and so should we. He also told us in John 14:15 that "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

Marc Roby: And Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" Paul doesn't say the new *will* come sometime in the future; he says it has come.

Dr. Spencer: Which refers to definitive sanctification. Christians are not perfect. We still have sin dwelling in us, but we have been changed and that change must be evident. People must see Christ in us. Not perfectly, but there must be change.

Paul wrote about himself in 1 Timothy 1:13 and said, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief." Notice the use of the past tense here, he *was once* a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man. The clear implication is that he is no longer.

Marc Roby: Paul also expected radical change out of others. In Ephesians 4:28 he wrote 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."

Dr. Spencer: And not only Paul, but God expects such change in a believer. And he expects that change because he enables that change when he causes us to be born again. It is impossible for God to give someone a new heart and for that new heart to not manifest itself in a changed life.

We were made in the image of God. But sin horribly defaced that image and we became slaves to sin as Paul tells us. We read in Romans 6:17-18, "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Notice again the past tense. We *used to be* slaves to sin. And then also notice definitive sanctification, we *wholeheartedly obeyed* the teaching we received. And then note how God is restoring the image with which we were originally made, we have become slaves to righteousness. Not perfect, but real change.

Marc Roby: The Old Testament call to holiness hasn't changed. In Leviticus 11:44 we read that God commanded Moses to tell the people, "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and

be holy, because I am holy.” And we see the same command in the New Testament. In fact, Peter quotes from this verse in Leviticus. In 1 Peter 1:14-16 we read, “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

Dr. Spencer: Perfect holiness is required for entrance to heaven and that can only come from Jesus Christ. We will make it into heaven clothed in the righteousness of Christ. But we are also called to be holy ourselves. We will never achieve it perfectly in this life, but we must be moving in that direction and there must be a discernable change from what we were like before we were saved. We are new creations in Christ Jesus.

Jesus came to live a perfect life in perfect obedience to the law. He then gave himself as the only efficacious sacrifice to pay for our sins. And God raised him from the dead to show that everything Jesus said about himself was true, that God had accepted his payment, and that death had no power to hold him because he was sinless.

As we read in John 3:16, “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.” And Jesus told us, in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”

Marc Roby: And in keeping with the fact that we are to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, he told his disciples, in John 13:34-35, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Dr. Spencer: And that command is impossible for us to fully keep. We cannot love as Christ loved us. But that is what we are called to try and do every day. And we are to love even our enemies and tell them about Jesus Christ. He died on the cross to pay for our sins. That is unimaginable love. And he was raised from the dead on the third day, the first Easter Sunday, just as he had foretold.

I hope that all of our listeners will meditate on this unfathomable love of God as they celebrate Easter. And I pray that any who do not yet know him as their personal Lord will repent, believe, and be saved.

And remember that you can email questions or comments to us at info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We would appreciate hearing from you.

Marc Roby: And with that I think we are done for today, so on behalf of Dr. Spencer and myself I'd like to wish all of our listeners a blessed Easter.