

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine biblical anthropology. Dr. Spencer, in the past two sessions we have discussed the questions you called the bookends to life; where we came from and where we are going. What would you like to discuss today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to discuss the creation of man. In Genesis 5:1-2 we read a summary statement; “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them ‘man.’”¹

Marc Roby: And the Hebrew word translated as “man” in that verse is adam, the same word used for the name of the first man.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. God used the same term to refer to the entire human race, both male and female, and to refer to men in distinction from women. Wayne Grudem points out in his *Systematic Theology* that since this usage originated with God himself, “we should not find it objectionable or insensitive.”²

Now I personally think it is a good idea to use gender neutral terms when it is possible to do so without misrepresenting the Word of God or making our speech or writing awkward or ungrammatical, but no woman should take offense at being referred to as a part of mankind. The term man can be used as a generic term for human beings or as a term specifically referring to a male individual. Like many words it has more than one meaning. And, contrary to popular opinion among non-Christians, the biblical view of women is that they are absolutely equal with men in terms of dignity and worth.

Marc Roby: And no man would be here if it weren’t for a woman! We all have a mother.

Dr. Spencer: That is certainly true, and so is the reverse, we all have a father as well. We need each other in many ways. We’ll get to the biblical view of women later, but I will continue at times to use the word man to refer to human beings in general, and I certainly do not mean in any way to denigrate women when I do so.

But, let’s return to the creation of mankind. One of the first questions that most people would think to ask about creation in general, and mankind specifically, is, “Why did God create man?”

Marc Roby: While discussing the question “Where did we come from?” in Session 94, we noted the purpose of life from our perspective is, first of all, to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, and then secondly, to live for God’s glory. You could say that to ask why God created man is to examine the purpose of life from God’s perspective rather than ours.

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² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, pg. 440

Dr. Spencer: That's a good way of looking at it. And the most important point we should make at the start is that God didn't need to create man at all. Our great triune God has had perfect love and fellowship within the persons of the trinity eternally. He certainly did not need us for fellowship, or for any other reason. It was his free choice to create anything at all, and, more to the point, it was his free choice to create man. He did not need us.

Marc Roby: That fact is very disappointing to some people.

Dr. Spencer: I suppose it is, but it shouldn't be. It most certainly does *not* mean that our lives are meaningless. Quite the contrary. Our lives would be meaningless if we were cosmic accidents, but the fact that God created us for a purpose gives our lives great meaning. In addition, God takes delight in his people. We are, for example, called his treasured possession. The Hebrew word for treasured possession is *segullah*, which is used 8 times in the Old Testament. Six of those times it refers to God's chosen people. For example, in Exodus 19:5 God told Moses to tell the people, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."³

Marc Roby: That is an amazing thing to consider, that the eternally perfect God considers us his treasured possession.

Dr. Spencer: It's an astounding statement. But as a weak analogy, think of a great artist. He could take joy and receive pleasure from his greatest work of art and you could say it was his treasured possession.

Marc Roby: And to say that would not imply that the work of art was in any way necessary. The pleasure the artist had in it would be the pleasure of seeing his own handiwork, it would not be a property of the art itself.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. The fact that God does not need us in no way diminishes our worth, but the pleasure he has in us is the pleasure of a Creator, it isn't because we somehow add something. But I called the analogy of an artist and his work a weak one because it fails miserably in one way.

Marc Roby: In what way does it fail?

Dr. Spencer: It fails because as creatures we cannot create living beings. We can only create inanimate objects. But God created living beings who can, in fact, have real fellowship with him. The fact that he doesn't need our fellowship does not mean that he will never enjoy it. We read in Isaiah 62:5, "as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

Marc Roby: That is incredible to think about.

Dr. Spencer: It truly is. God doesn't need us, but he does derive joy from us. We can also add to this discussion the observation that it is a very good thing that God doesn't need us in any way.

³ The people of God are also called his *segullah* in Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2 and 26:18, in Psalm 135:4 and in Malachi 3:17.

Marc Roby: Now, why do you say that?

Dr. Spencer: Because if God actually needed us in any way to accomplish his purposes, then we couldn't be sure he would accomplish his purposes! His promises would not be certain because man is never infallibly dependable.

Our only real hope is in God. I trust his promises precisely *because* they don't depend on anything outside of God and certainly not on me. No one can thwart his purposes. We read in Isaiah 14:27, "For the LORD Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?"

Marc Roby: Yes, that is very comforting.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. And we read in Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17:24 that Jesus prayed, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." Which backs up my statement that the persons of the Trinity have had perfect love and fellowship for all eternity.

Marc Roby: All right. We have established so far that God didn't need us and that we are his treasured possession. What else do you want to say about why God made us?

Dr. Spencer: God created us for his glory. God himself says, in Isaiah 43:6-7, "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." And in Ephesians 1:11-12 the apostle Paul wrote that we were chosen in Christ, "having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory."

Marc Roby: What a wonderful purpose that is. And we should point out that we receive great joy from working to accomplish that purpose and from having fellowship with God as we do so. And our pleasure in God will be eternal. In Psalm 16:11 King David wrote, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Dr. Spencer: And there is no greater joy than having one of those moments when you are praying or meditating on God's word and you get a slight glimmer of understanding of the divine majesty and a sense of his presence with you. In Psalm 27:4 the psalmist declared, "One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."

Marc Roby: The apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:8-9, "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Dr. Spencer: I'm really glad you brought up that passage because it shows that our love for God is not just based on emotion or some mystical experience as is often assumed by unbelievers. We

have not seen God, and we don't see him now, but Peter gives the reason for our faith. He says, "for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

In other words, we have a good reason for our faith. It is not an irrational leap in the dark, it is based on truth. We have looked at the Word of God and found it to be true and we see him working in our own lives bringing about our salvation. This is an intelligent apprehension of truth.

Marc Roby: And the Bible commands us in several places to examine ourselves.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. In fact, Peter himself tells us in 2 Peter 1:10 to make our calling and election sure, and Paul similarly tells us in Philippians 2:12 to work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

Many self-proclaimed Christians today want a faith that doesn't need to be tested. They will tell you that they prayed to receive Christ once and so they are saved and it doesn't really matter how they live because we are not saved by works.

Marc Roby: That is a very popular view of Christianity.

Dr. Spencer: And it is a profoundly unbiblical view, that is to say it's an unchristian view of Christianity. When we are told to examine ourselves and to make our calling and election sure, there is an obvious assumption that if we have been saved there will necessarily be changes that can be observed. Otherwise, what could you examine?

But the purpose of examining ourselves is not to put us in a perpetual state of uncertainty, fear and anxiety. The purpose is that we may see God at work in our lives and draw the conclusion that we have been born again, that his word is true, and that we can have great hope, confidence and joy in knowing his promises are true and certain.

Marc Roby: Unless, of course, we see no evidence of God working in our lives. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 the apostle Paul commanded, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"

Dr. Spencer: Yes, as with any real test, there is a possibility of failure. But even failure is gracious because, if we fail the test, we clearly see our need and should be driven to cry out to God for mercy, and he will never turn away a truly repentant person. We are the beneficiaries no matter how the test turns out. Either we pass the test and have great assurance and hope, or we fail the test and are driven to seek salvation, which is the one thing we really need.

Marc Roby: Of course, all of this begs the question of how I go about testing myself.

Dr. Spencer: That's a great question. And the Bible gives us the answer. In fact, it is one theme of the apostle John's first letter. In 1 John 5:13 he wrote, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

Marc Roby: There isn't anything more important than that; knowing that you have eternal life. And knowing that brings great joy. In the same letter John also wrote, in Chapter 1 Verses 3 and 4, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with

us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”

Dr. Spencer: And it is also important to point out that the joy spoken of by John is not just a momentary feeling of happiness or pleasure. It is much deeper than that. It is the joy of the Lord, which we are told in Nehemiah 8:10 is our strength.

Marc Roby: And because it is a deep joy, not just momentary happiness, it is a joy that we can have even in the midst of suffering. Paul tells us in Romans 5:3-4 that “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Dr. Spencer: That is true, and amazing. In Romans 8:28 we are told that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” And that includes even suffering. God uses it for our good.

And now I’d like to look at a passage that puts together several things we’ve been discussing. In John 15:8-11 Jesus told us that “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 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. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Marc Roby: Yes, that’s a marvelous passage. And it does tie things together nicely. It is to the Father’s glory that we bear fruit by loving him, which means obeying his commands. If we do that, our joy will be complete.

But can we get back to John’s first letter? You noted that one reason he wrote it was so that we could know we have eternal life. What tests does he give us to use?

Dr. Spencer: Well, as the Rev. P.G. Mathew noted in his commentary on 1 John, he provides “three biblical tests of authentic Christianity: the doctrinal test, the moral test, and the social test.”⁴

Marc Roby: That makes me think of 1 Timothy 4:16 where Paul told his young protégé to “Watch your life and doctrine closely.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, both are important. How we live and what we believe. The doctrinal test that John provides is not comprehensive, he uses a few essentials as representative of the essential body of doctrine. We’ll just examine a few of them today.

Let’s begin with the first two verses of this letter. In 1 John 1:1-2 we read, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared;

⁴ P.G. Mathew, *The Normal Church Life*, OM Books, 2006, pg. 4

we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”

Marc Roby: There’s a lot of doctrine packed into those two verses.

Dr. Spencer: There certainly is. For example, we note that he speaks of “That which was from the beginning”. In other words, in his deity, Jesus is eternal. There never was a time when he did not exist. This is a necessary doctrine of the Christian faith. And, as the eternal second person of the Holy Trinity he existed as Spirit. He did not have a body.

Marc Roby: And yet, John goes on to say that this is one “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched”.

Dr. Spencer: Which clearly speaks of the incarnation. Jesus, the eternal second person of the Holy Trinity became man. He is truly God and he became truly man. He is the unique God-man. The only Savior. And the rest of that brief passage says essentially the same thing again. John wrote, “this we proclaim concerning the Word of life”, which harkens back to what he wrote in his gospel. John 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then he goes on in this first letter to say that “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.” This again clearly refers to the incarnation. This eternal life, Jesus, who was with the Father, appeared to John and others and they are declaring that to us.

Marc Roby: What other essential doctrines does John use as examples?

Dr. Spencer: Well, in 1 John 1:5 he says that “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” In context it is obvious that he is using light and darkness metaphorically.

Marc Roby: Which is a common thing for John to do, he liked stark contrasts; light and darkness, love and hate, life and death, sons of God and sons of the devil.

Dr. Spencer: He does like stark contrasts. And to flesh out the metaphor he is using here in Verse 5 we could say that God is absolutely holy, just and truthful, in him there is no unholiness, injustice, or falsehood.

Another doctrine he highlights is the pervasive sinfulness of man. He wrote in Chapter 1 Verse 8 that “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

There are more doctrines stated or implied in this letter, but for our present purposes that is enough. The main point is that while we live in a free country and anyone can call himself a Christian, our testimony about ourselves is irrelevant on the day we appear before the judgment seat of God. All that will matter on that day is what Jesus Christ himself says about us.

Marc Roby: And if we have rejected God’s revelation of himself in the Bible, or twisted and distorted it suit our own ideas, that will not work with God.

Dr. Spencer: No, it won’t work at all. We don’t need to be expert theologians to be saved, and there are doctrines about which truly born-again people can disagree, as we have noted before in these podcasts. But there are also essential doctrines. If you don’t believe in the full deity and

humanity of Christ, his atoning death on the cross and his bodily resurrection for example, you are not a Christian.

Marc Roby: Very well. I think we are out of time today and will have to pick this up again next time. 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 respond.