

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine biblical anthropology. Dr. Spencer, last time we were discussing the question, “Why did God make man?” I think it would be good to give a brief summary of how we answered that question to set the stage for our discussion today.

Dr. Spencer: I agree, please do.

Marc Roby: Alright. We first presented the biblical answer to the question, which is that God made us for his own glory. And we then noted that we glorify God by obeying him, as Christ himself said in John 17:4. We also discussed the fact that as Christians we can have great joy even in times of suffering and that the Bible commands us to test ourselves to see if we are truly saved. Finally, we started to examine the first letter written by the apostle John to see how we are to test ourselves.

Dr. Spencer: And I quoted from the Rev. P.G. Mathew’s commentary on First John, which says that John provides “three biblical tests of authentic Christianity: the doctrinal test, the moral test, and the social test.”<sup>1</sup> We then dealt with the first of these, the doctrinal test.

Marc Roby: Although we didn’t give an exhaustive test of essential doctrine.

Dr. Spencer: Nor did the apostle John. He just gave some examples of the most important doctrines, like the full deity and humanity of Christ and the sinfulness of man.

Marc Roby: And, at the end of the session, you also mentioned Christ’s atoning death on the cross and his bodily resurrection as essential doctrines.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I did. In 1 John 2:2 we read that Christ, “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”<sup>2</sup>

Marc Roby: We probably need to point out that this verse does not lend any support to the heretical idea that all people will be saved.

Dr. Spencer: No, it doesn’t support the idea of universal salvation at all. You have to read the verse carefully and interpret it in light of the clear teaching of all of Scripture.

Marc Roby: Which is the first rule of hermeneutics; that we must use Scripture itself to understand Scripture.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And for interested listeners, we covered hermeneutics, which is the science of interpretation, back in Sessions 39 through 48.

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<sup>1</sup> P.G. Mathew, *The Normal Church Life*, OM Books, 2006, pg. 4

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://www.zondervan.com) The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

Marc Roby: I think it would also be good to point out that there is a topical index available, as well as a scripture index and an index of all references used in these podcasts. So our listeners can find where we have discussed different topics or verses in the Bible. These indexes are all available on our website at [whatdoesthewordsay.org](http://whatdoesthewordsay.org).

Dr. Spencer: That's a good reminder. And now, betting back to 1 John 2:2, notice exactly what John says in the verse. He first says that Christ, "is the atoning sacrifice for our sins", which is addressed to the original recipients of this letter. He was assuming that they were Christians, although I'm certain he was aware that non-Christians would read his letter too, so you don't want to make too much of that point. He just didn't want to take the time in this spot to spell out exactly who was included in the statement.

Marc Roby: Yes, our writing and speech would be pretty cumbersome if we always explained every possible exception or precisely defined every general statement.

Dr. Spencer: It would be very tiresome indeed. In any event, he then goes on to say that not only did Christ provide the atoning sacrifice for the recipients of this letter, but also, "for the sins of the whole world."

When you see the contrast he is making you realize it isn't at all necessary to assume that he means every single person in the world without exception. The statement makes perfectly good sense if all he had in mind were all believers everywhere, in contrast to the smaller group of believers to whom he was writing. And when you look at the rest of the Bible, it is abundantly obvious that not everyone will be saved.

Marc Roby: There is no doubt about that fact when you look at the whole Bible. For example, in Matthew 25 Jesus tells us he will separate the people into two groups and in Verse 41 we read, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

Dr. Spencer: That's a terrifying verse, and it certainly shows that not everyone will be saved. I'll cite just one more example to solidify this point. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus told us, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Marc Roby: That's another sobering verse. So the first test to know whether or not we are saved is doctrinal. If we don't agree with the clear teachings of the Bible, we have no basis for believing we are saved.

Dr. Spencer: And in order to agree with the Bible, we must obviously know what it says. Therefore, being biblically illiterate is not an option for a true Christian.

Marc Roby: And I would say that anyone who has been born again will have a desire to read the word of God.

Dr. Spencer: I agree, but let's move on with examining John's letter. The second kind of test John gives is moral. For example, in 1 John 2:3 we are told, "We know that we have come to

know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

I don't know how John could have made this any clearer. The modern idea that we can have Jesus as Savior without having him as Lord; in other words, that I can be saved without any obedience, is completely contrary to the teaching of the apostle in these verses.

**Marc Roby: And he was very politically incorrect in how he stated it. He says that anyone who claims to know Jesus Christ, by which he obviously means to know him as Savior, but does not obey him, he's a liar. In other words, he is not saved.**

Dr. Spencer: It goes against the grain in our culture, but our testimony about ourselves is of no value on the day of judgment. Our self-esteem and our self-evaluation will not matter. All that will matter is what Jesus says about us. If he says, "This one is mine, I died for his sins", then we will be saved. If he says, "depart from me, I never knew you", then we will be eternally damned. There is no way to soft-pedal the true gospel. We do not earn our salvation nor do we, or could we, pay for it in any way. But, at the same time, the basic confession of Christianity is that Jesus is Lord, which implies that I am his bond slave. In other words, my salvation costs everything I am and have.

**Marc Roby: And, as we noted in Session 95, Jesus provides the example for us to follow. We are to be conformed to his image. And John explicitly uses this as one of his moral tests. He wrote, in 1 John 2:5-6, "But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."**

Dr. Spencer: I love the biblical imagery of walking. It is far more descriptive than to say we should live like Jesus did. It implies effort and motion, taking one step after another. And the apostle Paul uses the same imagery. For example, in Ephesians 2:1-2 he wrote, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live". In the Greek it actually says "in which then you walked". The Greek word is περιπατέω (peripateō), which is the origin of our word peripatetic.

**Marc Roby: And Paul uses the same word again in Ephesians 2:10. Let me quote it from the English Standard Version since it gives a more literal rendering of the Greek. It says that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."**

Dr. Spencer: And there we have the moral test in a nutshell. Paul agrees completely with John as we would expect since they were both inspired by the Holy Spirit, who is the true author of the entire Bible. We are to walk in the ways God has foreordained for us, being obedient to his revealed will. We are to walk as Jesus walked when he was on this earth.

**Marc Roby: And he said, in John 8:29, that "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."**

Dr. Spencer: And we understand that we will not do that perfectly, but we must not use that as an excuse. We should be striving to do the will of God. I want to give a stern warning to our

listeners. If you think you are a Christian, but that does not affect how you walk day by day in every area of life, then you must seriously question whether or not you have truly been born again. Read through the New Testament and note how many times it speaks of the necessity for us to live an obedient life.

**Marc Roby: Yes, and how many times we are warned to test ourselves and to be sure about it.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's right.

**Marc Roby: But we still have one more type of test to examine; the social test.**

Dr. Spencer: And we see the social test, for example, in 1 John 1:7, where we read, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another", which ties the moral and social tests together, and again makes use of the walking metaphor for life. If we walk, or live, as Jesus did, then we will also have fellowship with each other. That is the social test.

**Marc Roby: And in 1 John 2:9-10 we read, "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble."**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, this is, again, a common teaching throughout the New Testament. If we have been born again, we love other people. Other Christians first, but even our enemies. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." We are to love our enemies enough to do good for them, to share the gospel with them and pray for their salvation. And we are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ and have fellowship with them.

**Marc Roby: Jesus Christ told us the same thing. During the Last Supper Jesus said to his disciples, as we read 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: Yes, if I had to give a one-word answer to the question, "How is a Christian to live?" I would have to say "love". But the answer is only correct when you apply a biblical definition of the word love. Jesus himself said, in Matthew 22:37-40, "'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."

**Marc Roby: And he also tells us in John 14:15 what it means to love God, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command."**

Dr. Spencer: And to love our neighbor as ourselves is summed up in the moral and social tests given by John. But, and this is a critically important qualification, we spoke earlier of the necessity for a Christian to be biblically literate and to agree with what the Bible teaches. This point is never more important than when you say that a Christian should love others.

I see yard signs all around our town that say love, but the clear message of these signs is that it doesn't matter how a person lives. The message is that same-sex couples or transgender couples or whatever are all equally right. That is absolutely *not* the teaching of the Bible. I'm not saying that we should treat such people disrespectfully or attack them, but we dare not pretend that God approves of their conduct or that it doesn't matter, that is not loving them. It matters eternally because they are rebelling against Almighty God.

**Marc Roby: I'm sure we'll spend more time on human sexuality later in our discussion of biblical anthropology, but do you have more to say about the social test?**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. This is a point on which many modern churches fail miserably. I remember years ago a young woman in our church was away at law school and attended a different church while she was there. That church had a series of teachings on hospitality, but even after several weeks of such teaching no one even bothered to introduce themselves to her, find out about her, or ask her over to lunch. They sat next to her in the pew and then got up and went on about their own lives. That is not true Christian fellowship. We must care about other human beings. There are no Lone-Ranger Christians, but there also should not be Christians who only have their set group of friends and never reach out to anyone else.

**Marc Roby: And we have to admit that we all have that tendency. But the bottom line is that love must be other oriented; it must look outward.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it must. It is often said that there are three marks that characterize a true church. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession deals with these marks. It says, "The true church can be recognized if it has the following marks: The church engages in the pure preaching of the gospel; it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; it practices church discipline for correcting faults."<sup>3</sup> But our pastor, the Rev. P.G. Mathew has proposed there should be a fourth mark, and I think that's completely biblical, and that fourth mark is community life.<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby: We read about the earliest days of the church in Acts 2:42 where it says that "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."**

Dr. Spencer: It's interesting to note that fellowship was listed second after only the apostle's teaching. We need each other to live the Christian life. We need accountability, we need encouragement and sometimes we need physical help. And it isn't just that I need help from others, I need to use my gifts and resources to help others as well. It isn't healthy to live a self-focused life.

**Marc Roby: And this admonition to love one another or serve one another is common in the New Testament. Paul wrote in Romans 12:10, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." And then again, in Romans 13:8 he wrote, "Let no debt remain**

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., see <https://reformed.org/documents/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Life* (Volume 2), Grace and Glory Ministries, pg. 341

outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”

Dr. Spencer: And Peter said much the same thing. We read in 1 Peter 1:22, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

Marc Roby: And in John’s first letter, which we’ve been examining, we read the phrase “love one another” five times. In 1 John 3:11 we read, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.” And then in Chapter 3 Verse 23 we read, “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”

Dr. Spencer: And in 1 John 4:7 we are told, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” Which again tells us that this is a good test of our salvation. If we love the way the Bible commands us to love, we have been born of God and we know God.

So, to recap what we have said, the purpose of life from our perspective is to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and to serve him all of life. If we do that, we will have eternal joy in his presence.

And the Bible commands us to test our faith and see if it is genuine. John’s first letter gives us three tests of authentic Christianity: the doctrinal test, the moral test and the social test.

Marc Roby: And we certainly hope that all of our listeners will pass these tests or cry out to God for mercy if they don’t. And with that, we are out of time for today, so I’d like to remind our listeners that they can email questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We’d love to hear from you.