

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We have been discussing the doctrine of limited atonement and the “specific categories in terms of which the Scripture sets forth the atoning work of Christ”¹ according to the theologian John Murray. He lists four categories: sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption. We have covered the first three of these, so, Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed with the final category of redemption?

Dr. Spencer: Let me start with a quote from Murray. He wrote that “Just as sacrifice is directed to the need created by our guilt, propitiation to the need that arises from the wrath of God, and reconciliation to the need arising from our alienation from God, so redemption is directed to the bondage to which our sin has consigned us.”²

Marc Roby: And that raises an obvious question. To whom or to what are we in bondage?

Dr. Spencer: Well, we need to be careful in answering that question. Many would be tempted to say that we have been redeemed from the law, but that is not true in general. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, we read in Matthew 22:37-40 that he answered, “‘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.”³

And Murray notes that “It would contradict the very nature of God to think that any person can ever be relieved of the necessity to love God with the whole heart and to obey his commandments.”⁴

Marc Roby: That would be an unbiblical conclusion. We have made the point a number of times that we are, as Paul wrote in Romans 8:29, “to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” and Jesus was perfectly obedient. He tells us 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: We have addressed this issue many times because it is of fundamental importance and is often misrepresented in modern churches. So Murray is very careful to be more specific. The first thing he notes is that we have been redeemed from the *curse* of law. Paul wrote in Galatians 3:13 that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’”

Marc Roby: And the curse of the law is the punishment that is due to us for violating it.

¹ J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955, pg. 19

² *Ibid*, pg. 43

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⁴ Murray, *op. cit.*, pg. 44

Dr. Spencer: That's right. Murray says that "The curse of the law is its penal sanction." Sin is a violation of God's law and Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death". But Christians have been delivered from death in its fullest sense, which is why Paul wrote that wonderful passage in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, "'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Marc Roby: That reminds me of the answer to Question 85 of the Westminster Larger Catechism.

Dr. Spencer: I agree, and it is worth taking the time to look at that question and answer. Question 85 reads as follows – and I'm modernizing it a fair amount here; Since death is the wages of sin, why are the righteous not delivered from death, since their sins are forgiven in Christ?

Marc Roby: And the glorious answer is that "The righteous shall be delivered from death itself at the last day, and even in death are delivered from the sting and curse of it; so that, although they die, yet it is out of God's love, to free them perfectly from sin and misery, and to make them capable of further communion with Christ in glory, which they then enter upon."

Dr. Spencer: The question, of course, is a very difficult one. In essence, it asks, "Why do Christians have to die?" There is mystery here and we cannot give a complete answer. But we can say, as the Catechism does, that we are "delivered from the sting and curse" of death. When death is a penalty for sin, it has a great sting and is a tremendous curse because it leads to eternal hell, the unending wrath of God.⁵

But, for a Christian, that sting and curse are removed. We must still experience the death of our bodies, but for a Christian, as Paul wrote in Philippians 1:21, "to die is gain." It brings us into the very presence of God and our souls are perfected. We then remain in that perfected but disembodied state until Christ comes again, at which time we receive our new glorified bodies and spend eternity in heaven where, as we read in Revelation 21:4, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Marc Roby: That is a glorious and unimaginable future, which I long for with all my heart.

Dr. Spencer: And I do as well. We will speak more about that in a later session, but for now it is enough to note that Jesus' atoning sacrifice redeems us from this curse of the law.

Marc Roby: What a wonderful redemption that is. What else does Christ's atonement redeem us from?

Dr. Spencer: It redeems us from the ceremonial law. Paul explains this in his letter to the church in Galatia. He uses the example of a child coming of age. In those days a minor child would be under the supervision of a παιδαγωγός (paidagōgos), which is a Greek word that means one who leads a boy and is the origin of our word pedagogue. When the child comes of age, he would no

⁵ For a good short treatment of this answer in the Catechism, see J.G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism, A Commentary*, Ed. By G.I. Williamson, P&R Publishing, 2002, pp 197-198

longer be under the supervision of the παιδαγωγός. Let me read a passage from Paul's letter using the English Standard Version of the Bible because it translates the passage more literally. In this passage, when you hear the English word "guardian", it is translating the Greek word παιδαγωγός. In Galatians 3:24-26 we read, "So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."

Marc Roby: So, in other words, Paul is saying that believers, viewed as a whole, came of age when Christ came, to whom we are all united by faith.

Dr. Spencer: That is the idea. The law was our guardian, but when Christ came he redeemed us from this guardianship. In Galatians 4:4-5 Paul wrote, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."

Therefore, Christ's coming brought an end to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, which included the system of sacrifices. We read about these ceremonial laws in Hebrews 9:10, "They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings—external regulations applying until the time of the new order."

Marc Roby: And this new order was ushered in by Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. A couple of verses later, in Hebrews 9:12, we read that Christ "did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."

Marc Roby: And so we are no longer bound to keep the Jewish ceremonial laws dealing with kosher food, ceremonial washings, specified feast days, animal sacrifices and so on.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. We are free from all of that. But as I noted earlier, we are *not* free of our obligation to keep the moral law. Murray writes that "Christ has redeemed us from the necessity of keeping the law *as the condition of our justification and acceptance with God*. Without such redemption there could be no justification and no salvation. It is the obedience of Christ himself that has secured this release."⁶ Notice that if we did have to keep the law to be saved, there could be no salvation. But, as Paul wrote in Romans 3:20, "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." So, although anyone who has been truly born again will live a life characterized by the obedience of faith, our obedience is not in any way meritorious. It is the obedience of Christ alone that saves us.

Marc Roby: And praise God for that obedience. What else does Christ's atoning sacrifice redeem us from?

Dr. Spencer: It redeems us from both the guilt and the power of sin. The effect of our being redeemed from the guilt of sin is our justification and the forgiveness of our sins. The effect of

⁶ Murray, op. cit., pg. 45

our being redeemed from the power of sin is that we have the ability to say “no” to sin and to walk in holiness for the glory of God.

Marc Roby: And what a wonderful power that is.

Dr. Spencer: But it is a power that is completely eviscerated by the unbiblical teaching that Christ can be your Savior and not your Lord. Murray wrote that “Redemption from the *power* of sin may be called the triumphal aspect of redemption. In his finished work Christ did something once for all respecting the power of sin and it is in virtue of this victory which he secured that the power of sin is broken in all those who are united to him. It is in this connection that a strand of New Testament teaching needs to be appreciated but which is frequently overlooked. It is that not only is Christ regarded as having died for the believer but the believer is represented as having died in Christ and as having been raised up with him to newness of life. This is the result of union with Christ.”⁷

In other words, Christ is victorious, he defeated sin, Satan and death itself, and because we are united with him we can also have victory over sin, Satan and death.

Marc Roby: That makes me think of 1 John 5:4 where we read that “everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”

Dr. Spencer: I like that verse. And I like the way the puritans used to speak about living a victorious Christian life. We need to get that language back into usage. Christians have a glorious freedom in Christ, a freedom to *not* sin! Too often today self-professing Christians think that they have a freedom to sin all they want because they are saved by grace alone. But that is a complete perversion of the true gospel. Paul dealt with this very question in the book of Romans. In Romans 6:1 he asks the question, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?”

Marc Roby: And then he begins his answer, in Romans 6:2-4, by saying, “By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

Dr. Spencer: We see here the symbolism of Christian baptism, we were “buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” We died to our old sinful nature and have become new creations. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul wrote, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” If we have been born again, we are new creations and we will live overcoming lives in union with Christ. We will never be perfect in this life, we sin every day, but we don't *have* to sin. We have the freedom and the *power*, to say “no”!

⁷ Ibid, pg. 48

Marc Roby: Paul went on in Romans 6:6-7 to say, “we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

Dr. Spencer: That is the freedom we have in Christ. And Paul goes in Verses 12-14 to explain what it really means to be under grace instead of under the law. He wrote, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” As I said earlier, to be under grace is to have the freedom to not sin.

Marc Roby: What a glorious gospel this is. It is much greater freedom to have the power to not sin than it would be to be able to sin and not pay the penalty.

Dr. Spencer: And our indwelling sin is not our only enemy. The devil is real and his demons are real. They hate God and they hate God’s people and they do not want us to have victory over sin and live holy lives that bring glory to God. They want to bring us down and make us fail. As Christ told us in John 10:10, the devil only comes only to “steal, kill and destroy.” But he mostly does it by bringing temptations for things that our remaining sin desires.

Marc Roby: But God promises us, in 1 Corinthians 10:13, that “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s a very comforting promise. But we must take the way out that God provides. We need to be on our toes, ready for battle. Paul wrote about this in Ephesians 6:11-13 where he commands us, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.”

Marc Roby: And the full armor of God includes salvation itself, truth, righteousness, faith, the Word of God and prayer.

Dr. Spencer: We need spiritual weapons to fight spiritual battles. Many people who consider themselves Christians today either deny the reality of the devil outright, or deny his reality in practice by never giving any thought to the spiritual warfare in which all true Christians are engaged. If you are a Christian but have no sense of this warfare, you are in serious danger.

Marc Roby: But we are promised that we can win in this war. James tells us in James 4:7, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a wonderful promise. Satan is far more powerful than we are, but as we read in 1 John 4:4, “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.” So if we

submit ourselves to God, meaning that we walk in humble obedience, depending on his grace and promises, then we can overcome Satan because we are united with Christ.

Marc Roby: And so, as you said, Christ has redeemed us from both the guilt and the power of sin.

Dr. Spencer: Let me read one more quote from John Murray to conclude this topic. He wrote that “redemption from sin cannot be adequately conceived or formulated except as it comprehends the victory which Christ secured once for all over him who is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.”⁸

And, for those who may not know, those are all descriptions, or titles, used for the devil in the Bible. He is the “god of this world”⁹ – with a little ‘g’, he is the “prince of the power of the air”,¹⁰ and he is the “spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.”¹¹ When Christ redeemed us from sin, he gave us victory over our sin, over this world, and over Satan.

Marc Roby: Hallelujah! Christ’s atoning sacrifice has secured the ultimate, eternal victory for all of his people.

Dr. Spencer: And we have now seen that the atonement is described in the Bible in the terms of a sacrifice, a propitiation, a reconciliation and a redemption.

Marc Roby: And with that we are out of time for today. So, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We appreciate hearing from you.

⁸ Ibid, pg. 50

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:4 (“god of this age” in the NIV)

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:2 (“ruler of the kingdom of the air” in the NIV)

¹¹ Ephesians 2:2 (“spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient” in the NIV)