

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Last time we finished our discussion of the doctrines represented by the acrostic TULIP; namely Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace and Perseverance of the saints. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, as we noted, the doctrines represented by the acrostic TULIP are the five doctrines that are characteristic of Reformed theology, which we believe to be the best theology for summarizing what the Bible teaches. They do not present the whole picture, but they do represent what distinguishes Reformed theology from Arminian theology, which is by far the most common theology presented in seminaries and churches today. They also distinguish Reformed theology from Lutheran theology, which is itself different from Arminian. And, I might add, there are differences even among groups who call themselves Arminian or Lutheran.

I don't really want to get into all the history of the different Protestant denominations at this time, I would rather move on to look at the sequence of events in the application of the redemption accomplished by Christ to the lives of individual believers.

Marc Roby: And that sequence is usually called the *ordo salutis*, or order of salvation.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. And the Bible never spells out the entire order in one place, but it does give us a partial list, which is often called the golden chain of salvation.¹ In Romans 8:30 the apostle Paul tells us that those God “predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”²

Marc Roby: And what a wonderful chain that is. It all began with God's electing love in eternity past and it moves with absolute certainty to glorification. It is, from beginning to end, a marvelous demonstration of God's love, mercy, power and wisdom.

Dr. Spencer: It most certainly is. And I want to take the time to go through the *ordo salutis* in some detail. We will, in general, follow the treatment given in John Murray's excellent book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, which we have used a number of times before. In that book he notes that “God is not the author of confusion and therefore he is the author of order. There are good and conclusive reasons for thinking that the various actions of the application of redemption ... take place in a certain order, and that order has been established by divine appointment, wisdom, and grace.”³

¹ e.g., see R.C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?*, Baker Books, 1997, pg. 143

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³ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955, pg. 80

Marc Roby: I know that not everyone agrees on the exact order, so what does Murray say about that?

Dr. Spencer: He discusses the order and points out that there are some items that must be put in a certain order and other items where the exact location in the sequence is debatable and not particularly important. We should also note that the order is not always a temporal order, some of it is, but some of the items only represent a logical order and may actually occur simultaneously.

Marc Roby: And where does Murray choose to begin?

Dr. Spencer: Well, you actually said it a couple of minutes ago when you said that it all began with God's electing love in eternity past. Murray begins his exposition by saying that "No treatment of the atonement can be properly oriented that does not trace its source to the free and sovereign love of God."⁴

Marc Roby: We can all say "amen" to that. If it weren't for God's love and mercy, we would all be eternally lost.

Dr. Spencer: That's true, although God's love isn't just a step in the *application* of redemption, it is rather the one truth that underlies all of creation and redemption. There is also one other thing, which again isn't a step in the process, but underlies the entire process, and that is union with Christ. Murray discusses this after going through the *ordo salutis*, but I think that is a bit anti-climactic, so I am going to deviate from him on this point and discuss union with Christ first.

Marc Roby: We have spoken about the believer's union with Christ several times before, most notably way back in Sessions 13 and 14. In looking back at those, you quoted John Murray there also. He wrote that union with Christ is "the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."⁵

Dr. Spencer: That's a great quote and completely biblical.

As I said, union with Christ is not just a step in the application of redemption. The entire Christian life is lived in union with Christ. In Ephesians 1:4 Paul tells us that God chose us in Christ "before the creation of the world", so in a sense all Christians, even those who have yet to be born, have been united to Christ for all eternity.

Marc Roby: And yet there is great mystery here since we are also told in the very next chapter, in Chapter 2 Verse 3, that before we were saved, "we were by nature objects of wrath."

Dr. Spencer: That is a great mystery. We are also told in Romans 5:10 that we were enemies of God and in Colossians 1:21 that we were alienated from God and were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior. All of this emphasizes the amazing work that God does in saving us. Our alienation from God was real. Our being subject to the wrath of God was real. Our being enemies of God was real. And yet, in his eternal plan, he had already chosen us to be saved. In that sense, and *only* in that sense, we can be said to have been united to Christ in eternity past.

⁴ Ibid, pg. 9

⁵ Ibid, pg. 170

But God still had to do a miraculous work and cause us to be born again in order to unite us to Christ in this life through the instrument of faith. A radical change had to take place, we needed new hearts.

Marc Roby: Which God promised to his people more than 500 years before Jesus was born. We read of that promise in Ezekiel 36:26, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, what a glorious promise that is. And we have already quoted from Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, where he wrote in the first chapter that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. Then, in Chapter 2, he starts off in Verse 1 by saying that we were dead in our transgressions and sins and, as you quoted a minute ago, he says in Verse 3 that we were by nature objects of wrath. But he then goes in Verses 4 and 5 to say, “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” This is the fulfillment of the promise given through the prophet Ezekiel. God makes us alive.

But the key point for our discussion today, is that God made us alive *in Christ*, and he did it because he had chosen us *in Christ* before the creation of the world.

Marc Roby: And Paul goes on in that chapter to say, in Verse 10, that “we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. God’s ultimate purpose, of course, is his own glory. And we are to contribute to that by doing the work he has ordained for us to do. Just as Jesus brought God glory by finishing the work he was assigned, as he tells us in John 17:4. So we fulfil the command to glorify God by doing the work we have been assigned to do.

Marc Roby: And Paul gives us that command in 1 Corinthians 10:31, where he tells us “whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. But getting back to the subject at hand, union with Christ is an amazing topic, on which all true Christians should take time to meditate. It will lead you to give great thanksgiving and praise to God for his amazing mercy, wisdom and power.

We have seen that we were chosen in Christ and that when God regenerated us we were made alive in Christ, or we can say created in Christ. But there is more that can be said. In Romans 6:4-8 we read that 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. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For 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. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”

Marc Roby: Yes, that is a great description of the symbolism of baptism and also of the reality of the life of a true believer. Baptism all by itself doesn’t accomplish anything, it is just an outward

sign of the inward change. But if the person who is baptized has truly been born again, then it is a *true* sign of the fact that he has died to his old, sinful way of life and has been enabled by regeneration to live a new life in union with Christ.

Dr. Spencer: Very true. And our union with Christ will never end. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about Christ's second coming and, in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, he wrote, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." Now "fallen asleep" is a euphemism for dying, so Paul is indirectly telling us in this verse that when believers die, they die in Christ.

Marc Roby: And Paul also tells us, in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 that "since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

Dr. Spencer: That's wonderful, we will be united with Christ in being resurrected at his second coming. And we will also be united with Christ in sharing in his glory for all eternity in heaven. When he comes again we will all receive glorified bodies. We read in Philippians 3:20-21 that "our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."

Marc Roby: Now that is something to look forward to.

Dr. Spencer: It certainly is. And so we see that we were chosen *in Christ*, we were created, or we could say born again, *in Christ*, we live *in Christ*, we die *in Christ*, we will be raised from the dead *in Christ*, we will receive glorified bodies *in Christ* and we will spend eternity enjoying fellowship with God and one another *in Christ*.

Marc Roby: Hallelujah!

Dr. Spencer: Hallelujah indeed! John Murray wrote that "The perspective of God's people ... has two foci, one the electing love of God the Father in the counsels of eternity, the other glorification with Christ in the manifestation of his glory. The former has no beginning, the latter has no end." And he went on to say, "What is it that binds past and present and future together in the life of faith and in the hope of glory? Why does the believer entertain the thought of God's determinate counsel with such joy? Why can he have patience in the perplexities and adversities of the present? Why can he have confident assurance with reference to the future and rejoice in hope of the glory of God? It is because he cannot think of past, present, or future apart from union with Christ."⁶

Marc Roby: What a wonderful statement of the glorious hope and joy that all true Christians have. I'm confident we could all benefit from spending more time meditating on it.

Dr. Spencer: I'm sure you're right about that.

⁶ Ibid, pg. 164

Marc Roby: Do you have anything more you would like to say about our union with Christ?

Dr. Spencer: Yes. Murray goes on to make several important points. The first point he makes is that our union with Christ is spiritual.

Marc Roby: Now that's a word that is often abused in this day and age.

Dr. Spencer: And that was true even when Murray wrote this book over 60 years ago. He said that the term is frequently used "to denote what is little more than vague sentimentality."⁷

Marc Roby: Yes, that is very much what we still see today, even among professing Christians.

Dr. Spencer: That is, unfortunately, true. But Murray explains that in the New Testament the word spiritual "refers to that which is of the Holy Spirit. ... Hence when we say that union with Christ is *Spiritual* we mean, first of all, that the bond of this union is the Holy Spirit himself."⁸

Marc Roby: And we must remember that the Holy Spirit is personal. He is the third person of the Holy Trinity, not some cosmic force or a metaphor for God's influence through his Word or anything else people might imagine.

Dr. Spencer: That is very important. He is a person whom we can grieve when we sin and who instructs us, guides us and empowers us to live the Christian life. Romans 8:9-11 is a very important passage in this regard.

Marc Roby: Let me read that passage. The apostle Paul wrote to believers, saying "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

Dr. Spencer: There are two important points that we can make from that passage. First of all, we see that union with Christ involves all three persons of the godhead. Notice that Paul starts off referring to just "the Spirit". He then refers to the "Spirit of God", and then to the "Spirit of Christ", then he refers to Christ himself being in us, and then to the "Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead", which clearly refers to God the Father. We must notice the trinitarian nature of this passage. We will discuss this aspect of union with Christ more later.

Marc Roby: I'm definitely looking forward to that conversation.

Dr. Spencer: Secondly, we note that the Spirit *lives* in us, he is a person, not a power.

Another passage relating to the nature of this union is in Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth. In this case the context is Paul's addressing the serious nature of sexual sin, but in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 he wrote, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit,

⁷ Ibid, pp 165-166

⁸ Ibid, pg. 166

who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Marc Roby: Yes, that is an amazing thing to consider, that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Spencer: I think it is incomprehensible in fact. But it should cause us all to be far more careful how we live. We are never alone. God is with us. It isn't just the fact that he sees and hears everything, but he is *with* us in a very intimate and personal way that we can't really define or describe in detail. When Jesus says that a man has committed adultery in his heart if he looks at a woman lustfully, we have to realize that if we do that, or have any other thoughts that are sinful, the Holy Spirit is *in* us and knows those thoughts and feelings!

Marc Roby: You're quite right in saying that we should all be more careful in how we live, and that includes our thoughts and emotions.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they are included. Murray goes on to explain a second thing that he means by saying that our union with Christ is spiritual. He means that it is a spiritual relationship, by which he means it is different than other kinds of unions. It is different than the union of the three persons in the godhead. It is different than the union of the two natures in Christ. And it is different than the union of body and soul in man. It is, he says, a union “which we are unable to define specifically.”⁹

Murray then goes on to make a second point with regard to our union with Christ. He says it is mystical.

Marc Roby: And I look forward to examining that in our next session, but we don't have enough time left today to start a new subject, so we should stop here and I should remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We would enjoy hearing from you.

⁹ Ibid