

Marc Roby: After taking a week off to discuss the proper Christian response to the current corona virus pandemic, we are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Dr. Spencer, are we ready to start looking at the order of salvation, or *ordo salutis* as it is often called?

Dr. Spencer: We are indeed ready. In Session 141 three weeks ago we noted that salvation began in eternity past with God's sovereign electing love. We then also noted that, as John Murray put it in his book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, "the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation"<sup>1</sup> is our union with Christ.

Marc Roby: And we have spent the bulk of two sessions examining that union, which is a wonderfully edifying topic.

Dr. Spencer: Well, that's an understatement for sure.

Marc Roby: I also recall that you mentioned what is often called the golden-chain of salvation in Romans 8:30 where the apostle Paul wrote that those whom God "predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Spencer: I did quote that verse because it is the closest thing in the Bible to a single statement of the *ordo salutis*. I also noted that some of the steps in the complete order, although *not* those in the golden chain, can be moved without serious theological consequences and that some of them are not meant to be interpreted temporally, but rather logically. And so we are almost ready to give the order.

Marc Roby: What else do you want to say before we give the order?

Dr. Spencer: I want to point out that because we are all by nature objects of God's wrath, our greatest need is to be reconciled to God. We need to take a moment to appreciate God's amazing, gracious plan of salvation.

Murray points out that God has provided for our greatest need in a way that "exhibits the overflowing abundance of God's goodness, wisdom, grace, and love. The superabundance appears in the eternal counsel of God respecting salvation; it appears in the historic accomplishment of redemption by the work of Christ once for all; and it appears in the application of redemption continuously and progressively till it reaches its consummation in the liberty of the glory of the children of God."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955, pg. 170

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<sup>3</sup> Murray, op. cit., pg. 79

**Marc Roby: That is wonderful. And I look forward to the liberty of the glory of the children of God.**

Dr. Spencer: As do all of God's adopted children, that is our eternal destiny. And, with all of that said, I think we are now ready to give the actual list.

**Marc Roby: Should I give you a drum roll?**

Dr. Spencer: I don't think that's necessary. John Murray first lists the following five items; effectual calling, regeneration, faith, justification, and finally, glorification.<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby: And three of those five elements are listed in that golden chain of salvation by Paul.**

Dr. Spencer: They are. Paul lists calling, justification and glorification in that order. Murray then inserts regeneration and faith, in that order, after calling and before justification. Now the order of regeneration and calling could be reversed with no major problems, but they *must* come before justification as we will discuss in more detail later.

After giving these five basic elements, Murray then adds the other elements that are usually included in the list.

**Marc Roby: And what are those?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, the first is repentance, which as Murray says is "the twin sister of faith – we cannot think of the one without the other."<sup>5</sup>

**Marc Roby: Well, biblical repentance is a turning away from and forsaking our sins, and biblical faith is a turning to Christ in complete trust, so what Murray says makes perfectly good sense. Repentance and faith are really two sides of the same coin; you turn away from sin and to God.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. So whether you put repentance before faith or faith before repentance doesn't really matter, although I personally like repentance first because at least logically you turn *away* from sin first and then you turn *to* God. As is often said, you need to hear the bad news before you will receive the good news. But true biblical repentance and faith always occur together. The word conversion can also be used to represent both repentance and faith.

**Marc Roby: What does Murray add to the list next?**

Dr. Spencer: Adoption, which is an amazing doctrine. God doesn't just forgive our sins, which is incredible enough in and of itself, he also adopts us as his children. We are told in John 1:12 that God gives to all who receive Jesus Christ, who believe in his name, "the right to become children of God".

**Marc Roby: That is a staggering privilege. We find it difficult to forgive those who sin against us in any serious way, but God not only forgives, he brings us into his family.**

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, see the bottom of page 86

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 87

Dr. Spencer: That does blow your mind, doesn't it? And we'll talk about it in more detail later of course, but for now we just need to note that adoption must come *after* justification. As Murray correctly notes, "we could not think of one being adopted into the family of God without first of all being accepted by God and made an heir of eternal life."<sup>6</sup>

**Marc Roby: That makes good sense.**

Dr. Spencer: Murray next places sanctification in the sequence. He wrote, "Sanctification is a process that begins, we might say, in regeneration, finds its basis in justification, and derives its energizing grace from the union with Christ which is effected in effectual calling. Being a continuous process rather than a momentary act like calling, regeneration, justification and adoption, it is proper that it should be placed after adoption in the order of application."<sup>7</sup>

**Marc Roby: That again sounds perfectly reasonable.**

Dr. Spencer: And that brings us to the last element, which is perseverance. Murray wrote that "Perseverance is the concomitant and complement of the sanctifying process and might conveniently be placed either before or after sanctification."<sup>8</sup> While I agree that it goes along with sanctification, I prefer to place it after sanctification, which is where Murray places it, simply because we must persevere to the very end of this life.

**Marc Roby: Very well, the entire order then, as given by Murray, would be the following: effectual calling, regeneration, repentance and faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and finally, glorification.**

Dr. Spencer: That is the order he uses and the one we will use. And we are now ready to start with the first item on the list, effectual calling.

**Marc Roby: And how would you like to begin?**

Dr. Spencer: I want to go through a few of the questions and answers from the Westminster Shorter Catechism because it does an outstanding job. Question 29 asks, "How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?"

**Marc Roby: And the answer is that "We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit."**

Dr. Spencer: Which makes two very important points. First, Jesus Christ is the one who accomplished our redemption. He purchased our freedom from sin with his blood. Secondly, it is primarily the Holy Spirit who applies redemption to believers. The Catechism goes on, logically, in Question 30 by asking, "How does the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?"

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

**Marc Roby: And the answer is that “The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.”**

Dr. Spencer: We see several important things in this short answer. First, we again see that our redemption is accomplished, or purchased, by Christ. Second, the Spirit applies that redemption to us by working faith in us; in other words, by bringing us to saving faith, which we shall see requires that we be regenerated, or born again. And third, one result of this faith is that we are united to Jesus Christ as we have discussed in the past couple of weeks.

Then, in Question 31 the Catechism gets right to the issue we are dealing with and asks, “What is effectual calling?”

**Marc Roby: And the answer given is that “Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.”**

Dr. Spencer: That is a very rich answer. There is a lot of information packed into a single sentence. First, we note that effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit. God is the active agent. We are passive recipients. Murray notes that “the fact that God is its author forcefully reminds us that the pure sovereignty of God’s work of salvation is not suspended at the point of application any more than at the point of design and objective accomplishment.”<sup>9</sup>

**Marc Roby: In other words, salvation is God’s plan, God’s accomplishment and then he applies it to individual believers.**

Dr. Spencer: That’s true, although we do not *remain* entirely passive, we do respond as we’ll see. Murray also notes that “It is God the Father who is the specific agent in the effectual call.”<sup>10</sup> He cites Romans 8:29-30 again to support this view.<sup>11</sup> In Verse 29 we are told that “those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son”. Since this verse speaks of “his Son” it is obvious that it is speaking about God the Father, so in the following verse, Verse 30, when it says that “those he predestined, he also called”, it is obviously saying that God the Father does the calling. Murray also cites 1 Corinthians 1:9, where we read, “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”

**Marc Roby: That again makes it clear that it is the Father who does the calling.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does, so Murray’s claim is completely biblical. The second thing we see in the Catechism answer is that the Spirit convinces us of our sin and misery.

**Marc Roby: Well, we obviously must recognize the problem before we are going to be interested in the solution to the problem.**

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 89

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pg. 90

Dr. Spencer: That's true. You can't put the cart before the horse. We must first receive the bad news that we are sinners under the wrath of God and headed for hell before we will be receptive to God's solution to that problem, the good news of the gospel. And that leads directly to the third thing we see in the Catechism answer. The Spirit enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ.

**Marc Roby: And some knowledge is surely necessary for salvation.**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. Knowledge alone won't save us, but true saving faith has specific content, it isn't just some nebulous feeling or vague generality. We must know that we are sinners, deserving God's wrath, and that Jesus Christ, who was completely sinless, took our sins upon himself, went to the cross, and bore the wrath of God on our behalf. God then raised him from the dead to demonstrate that he had accepted the offering and that death had no hold on Jesus Christ. We can't be saved without knowing, believing and trusting in these biblical truths.

**Marc Roby: And these are not metaphorical truths. For example, Christ was really, physically, raised from the dead. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:20 that "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."**

Dr. Spencer: And this idea of firstfruits implies an abundant harvest to follow. That harvest is all of the elect. And now comes a key piece God's solution to our problem. In our natural state we are all enemies of God, dead in our transgressions and sins. It is impossible for those who are God's enemies, and who hate him, to respond to this knowledge favorably. And so the Catechism next says that the Spirit "does persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ". This is speaking about regeneration, or new birth, without which no one can or will be saved.

**Marc Roby: Jesus himself told Nicodemus, as we read in John 3:3, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." And then, in John 3:5 Jesus added, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."**

Dr. Spencer: Effectual calling and regeneration are very tightly linked. In fact, in seventeenth century theology they were often either spoken of as synonymous or regeneration was thought of as a part of effectual calling.<sup>12</sup> One way to distinguish them is to say that the effectual call is external, while regeneration is, as Murray describes it, "the beginning of inwardly operative saving grace."<sup>13</sup>

**Marc Roby: And, of course, the idea of God's call being efficacious is consistent with what the Old Testament says as well. In Isaiah 55:10-11 God says, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."**

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<sup>12</sup> Lois Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1938, pg. 470

<sup>13</sup> Murray, op. cit., pg 93

Dr. Spencer: That is a wonderful passage. No one can thwart God's plan. We can't stop the rain from watering the earth and we can't stop his call from being effectual. But there is also what is sometimes called the general call, which can be distinguished from God's effectual call. Not everyone who hears the gospel is born again and then responds in repentance and faith. Although Murray points out that when the New Testament refers to a call with reference to salvation, it is almost always referring to the effectual call.<sup>14</sup>

**Marc Roby: I suppose the parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew Chapter 22 is a possible exception.**

Dr. Spencer: Murray agrees with you. For those who don't remember the parable, there is a king who gives a wedding banquet for his son, but the people originally invited to the banquet all make excuses and refuse to come. So the king orders his servants to go out into the streets and invite anyone they can find. When the banquet hall is filled with people, the king notices one man who isn't wearing wedding clothes. We then read, in Matthew 22:13-14, "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are invited, but few are chosen."

**Marc Roby: I think many people find that parable somewhat disturbing.**

Dr. Spencer: I'm sure you're right about that. But the idea is simple. There is a general gospel call that goes out to everyone, and salvation is free, it cannot be purchased. But, we cannot come on our own terms. Only those whom God has chosen will be granted new birth, will then repent, believe and be united to Jesus Christ. Those who do so, will be clothed in the righteousness of Christ himself as we read in Galatians 3:27, "for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

**Marc Roby: That is most glorious truth, and I look forward to spending more time on this discussion next week, but it seems like a wonderful place to close for today. So, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We would enjoy hearing from you.**

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pg. 88