

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. More specifically, we are discussing the *ordo salutis*, or the order of salvation. Dr. Spencer, last week we were discussing repentance and we ended by noting that real repentance is not just being sorry for the consequences of our sin, it is being grieved for having offended God. And real repentance always produces a changed life.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a necessary result because true repentance involves seeing how awful our sin is. In other words, we hate it. And if you hate something, you can't help but turn away from it. That is why when Paul told King Agrippa about his conversion, we read in Acts 26:19-20 that he said, "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."¹

Marc Roby: And the deeds he is referring to here are clearly those of forsaking sin and walking in obedience.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they are. Forsaking our sin and walking in holiness are *not* necessary for us to be justified. We are saved by faith alone. But true faith is always accompanied by repentance, and as Paul said, the deeds *prove* that the repentance was real, and therefore they also prove that the faith is real. As we read in James 2:26, "faith without deeds is dead." And a dead faith won't save anyone. As I said near the end of our session last week, true repentance and faith are inextricably linked, you cannot have one without the other.

Marc Roby: And I said I was looking forward to your making the complete biblical case to support that contention. So now, here's your opportunity!

Dr. Spencer: And in defending the statement that true repentance and faith always go together, I'm going to make use of the presentation in Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*.² He makes the important point that we are *not* advocating some kind of works righteousness as is often argued by those who oppose this view. The Bible is clear that, as I said a moment ago, we are justified by faith alone. And when I say that faith and repentance always go together, I'm not saying that you must have proven them by your deeds *before* you are justified. Repentance and faith occur in the heart and if they genuine, the person is justified immediately. The change that occurs as a result, namely forsaking sin and walking in holiness, comes *after* the person is justified and simply proves that the repentance and faith were real.

Marc Roby: Okay, that point is duly noted. But it does not address the question of showing that repentance and faith necessarily go together.

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² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, pp 713-717

Dr. Spencer: No, it doesn't. Let me demonstrate the truth of that statement by first making a logical argument and then backing it up with Scripture.

Marc Roby: Okay, what is the logical argument?

Dr. Spencer: Well, we must ask what it means to believe in Christ. It means to trust him for your salvation. But then we obviously have to ask, what is it we are being saved from?

Marc Roby: And the biblical answer is that are saved from the eternal wrath of God.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. And we deserve God's wrath because of our sin against him! To believe in Christ makes no sense if you don't first see that you have a need. And that need is caused by our sin and rebellion. It is logically impossible to think that you are going to believe in Christ to save you from sin if you don't think that sin is worthy of punishment. And if you do think your sin is worthy of punishment, it means that you see it is wrong. In other words, you will repent of it. The two simply go together and cannot be separated.

Marc Roby: I see your point. If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior the Bible claims him to be, then you must also believe what the Bible says about *why* you need to be saved. One of the ways the Bible tells us why we need to be saved is by telling us why Jesus came. When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he was planning to call off the marriage. But we read in Matthew 1:21 that an angel appeared to him and told him that Mary "will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Dr. Spencer: And so we see how repentance and faith are tied together. Saving faith is believing that Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for my sins and that they will be forgiven based on my being united to him by faith. But it makes no sense to think that I will trust in Jesus to save me from my sins if I don't agree that my sins are something I need to be saved from.

Grudem puts it this way: "Repentance, like faith, is an intellectual *understanding* (that sin is wrong), an emotional *approval* of the teachings of Scripture regarding sin (a sorrow for sin and a hatred of it), and a *personal decision* to turn from it (a renouncing of sin and a decision of the will to forsake it and lead a life of obedience to Christ instead)."³

Marc Roby: That argument makes good sense. Now what biblical support do you want to give for it? And before you begin I want to remind you that you ended last time by teasing us by quoting 1 John 3:9, which says that "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God."

Dr. Spencer: And that verse illustrates the point very clearly. If someone has been born again, he has been changed, he is a new creation, born of God. That change causes him to both turn away from his sin in repentance, and turn to God in saving faith. When John wrote that such a person cannot go on sinning, he was referring to habitual sin. He wasn't denying that believers still sin, he was making the point that sin isn't what characterizes our lives.

³ Ibid, pg. 713

Marc Roby: Alright, that's clear. What other biblical support do you have?

Dr. Spencer: Well, let's go back to the Old Testament to begin. The idea was clearly present there that a person must repent of his sin in order to receive forgiveness. For example, in the prayer of dedication for the temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon prayed, in 2 Chronicles 6:36-39, "When [your people] sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, ... and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly'; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul ... then from heaven, ... forgive your people, who have sinned against you." Notice that the people must repent *and* turn back to God with all their heart and soul, which is faith; it is believing that God can and will forgive according to his promise.

Marc Roby: And we know that God responded favorably to Solomon's prayer, because in his response we read in 2 Chronicles 7:14 that great, comforting line, "if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Dr. Spencer: That is a glorious promise from God. But it is predicated on true repentance, which as he says will include turning from our wicked ways. It is easy to say we are sorry, but true repentance isn't just feeling sorry, it is seeing that our sin is really wrong, we must hate our sin. And that will always lead to a turning away from it. And faith is also evident here because God said they must humble themselves, pray, and seek his face. But the connection is made even more explicit in the New Testament.

Marc Roby: What verses do you want to look at from there?

Dr. Spencer: Well, let's look at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. We read in Mark 1:14-15 that after John the Baptist was put in prison, "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'"

Marc Roby: That's explicit. Jesus said "repent and believe".

Dr. Spencer: We also see the connection on the day of Pentecost, which was the beginning of the public ministry of the apostles after Christ's resurrection. When Peter preached to the crowd we are told that many of them were cut to the heart and cried out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" In other words, "What must we do to be saved?" And Peter responded, as we read in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

Now, this statement obviously doesn't explicitly mention faith, but it does implicitly. When Peter told them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, he was telling them to profess their faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice. And so he did, in essence, tell them to repent and believe.

Marc Roby: That also makes me think of what Paul said in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders. We read in Acts 20:21 that he proclaimed, “I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a good summary of the gospel. And it clearly lists both repentance and faith.

Marc Roby: But we must also admit that the New Testament often tells people to believe in order to be saved without mentioning repentance. For example, when the Philippian jailer cried out, “What must I do to be saved?” We read in Acts 16:31 that Paul and Silas responded, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

Dr. Spencer: That’s very true. There are a number of places where repentance is not specifically mentioned. But that certainly doesn’t mean it isn’t required for salvation, it simply means that both elements are not named in every case. There are also places where only repentance is mentioned, and that does not imply that one can be saved without faith. For example, we read in Luke 13:3 that Jesus himself declared to the crowd, “unless you repent, you too will all perish.” Now Jesus did not mean to imply that they could be saved by just being sorry for their sins. Faith is assumed in this statement or Jesus would be contradicting what he said in Mark 1:15, which we looked at a minute ago.

Marc Roby: And it is impossible for Jesus to contradict himself.

Dr. Spencer: It most certainly is. The connection between true repentance and faith is also implicit in all of the biblical teaching about the need for believers to turn from their sins and walk in obedience. We’ll talk more about this when we get to the topic of sanctification, but we must remember that repentance and faith, or to use just one word, conversion, is the response of the individual to God’s work of regeneration. We argued in Session 151 that regeneration brings about a radical change. We are given new hearts. We have a new mind, will and affections. We are, as the apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, new creations. He also speaks about our having died with Christ in Romans 6:8, and our having died to sin in Romans 6:2. And he says in Colossians 3:3 that “you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

This language all speaks of a decisive break with our old nature. Repentance is part of that break. We hate the sinful life we used to live and we want to live a life pleasing to Christ, in whom we have placed our faith. The two things go together, you simply cannot have one without the other.

Marc Roby: When you talk about hating our sin, we do have to acknowledge that we all still sin daily. And the Bible mentions the pleasures of sin in Hebrews 11:25. How can we say that we hate something that we still do and that is at least some times still pleasurable?

Dr. Spencer: That’s a reasonable question, but I think we all know the answer if we are honest with ourselves. We have all given in to the temptation to say or do something that we later regretted, even though it may have brought us momentary pleasure at the time. Our regret was based on a realization that the momentary pleasure or gratification we received was improper and could not justify the action.

For example, we have all responded to some situation in our life by saying something mean to somebody. That may have given us momentary satisfaction, by getting back at the person a little for whatever problem we had endured, but on further reflection we realized either that the person we were mean to wasn't responsible for our problem, or that whatever they did was unintentional, or that what we said was far more damaging and serious than the slight we received.

Marc Roby: I'm afraid I have to admit that is true.

Dr. Spencer: And, in addition, we can all remember other things we have done. Maybe we stole a candy bar when we were a child or something along those lines. We may have received some momentary thrill, but when we looked back on it we saw how wrong it was and hated the fact that we had done such a thing.

And although most of us have never committed the physical act of adultery we can certainly understand how someone could receive momentary pleasure, but later hate the fact that they had done something so destructive to the trust involved in their marriage and so cruel to their spouse.

Marc Roby: I agree that we can all understand that, even if we have never experienced it ourselves.

Dr. Spencer: And I'm sure we can all come up with more examples, but the point is clear. It is entirely within the realm of normal human experience to regret, and even to hate, some things that we have done and even occasionally continue to do. We do them because at that moment we desire them, but then when we think it through more later we realize they were wrong. And this is true even for non-Christians. But there are two very significant differences between the regret a non-Christian feels and the regret a Christian feels.

Marc Roby: What are those differences?

Dr. Spencer: The first difference is that a non-Christian does not decide what is wrong or right based on the Word of God, but a Christian must. So, for example, a non-Christian might not think that getting drunk is wrong, so long as you don't drive.

Marc Roby: Well, the ads tell us that we need to drink responsibly!

Dr. Spencer: That's right. Have a designated driver and then it's OK to be drunk. But that is not what the Bible says. Getting drunk is a sin. And so a Christian will have real guilt and pain if he allows himself to drink enough to be drunk. His standard is the Word of God, not his own ideas.

Marc Roby: And what is the second difference?

Dr. Spencer: That a Christian is grieved not just because he feels he let himself down, or his family down, but most importantly because he offended almighty God. True repentance is only possible when the person has faith in the God of the Bible. He knows that he has sinned against his Creator and Redeemer. He has offended his heavenly Father. And that brings great pain and true godly sorrow and repentance. A true Christian longs for the day when he will be without sin, when his every desire will conform to the perfect law of God.

Marc Roby: I know that I look forward to such a day. It is impossible to imagine what it will be like to never have any internal struggle between what I want to do and what I should do.

Dr. Spencer: I agree completely. There won't even be any need for the word "should" in heaven because what we should do will be exactly what we do! It is a marvelous thought.

Marc Roby: I think we have established that true repentance is always accompanied by saving faith. Do have anything more that you would like to add before we move on?

Dr. Spencer: Yes. We've been speaking about conversion, which is repentance and faith viewed as a single act. The word conversion is a good word for this. To convert something means to change it in some fundamental way. The process of becoming a true Christian, a child of God, who is on the way to heaven, is not just a matter of making a decision. It requires real change. As we have noted, God must first do the glorious work of causing us to be born again and then we must repent of our sins and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. This process necessarily produces radical change in our life. We are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come.

Marc Roby: Well, this looks like a good place to end for today. So, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org, we would love to hear from you.