

**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 order of salvation and we are in the midst of discussing conversion, that is, repentance and faith. Dr. Spencer, we have established that true, saving faith has content, but we don't want to come up with a formal list of essential doctrines. The real issue is one of trust. We have said that a born-again person trusts the truthfulness of the revelation he has received, which may be a more or less detailed presentation of the gospel. So, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to look at what our Lord said after the Last Supper and before he was arrested. In Chapter 13 of John we read about Judas leaving the supper to go and betray Christ and then, after Judas left, Christ told the remaining disciples, as we read in John 13:33, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come."<sup>1</sup>

**Marc Roby:** And Peter then quite reasonably asked where Jesus was going.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he did, and we read in Verse 36 that Christ said, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."

**Marc Roby:** To which Peter famously replied, in Verse 37, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."

Dr. Spencer: Peter was trusting in himself at this point. He thought he could remain faithful in his own strength. But Christ was about to teach him a very important lesson, one which we all need to learn, and that is to not to trust in our own strength.

**Marc Roby:** And that was a painful lesson.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it was very painful. But I'm quite sure that Peter never forgot it! Jesus answered him, in Verse 38, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" And we know that Peter did, in fact, disown Jesus, but then after his resurrection Jesus graciously reinstated him. And that leads us to the verse I want to begin with today. In the very next verse, Jesus said to them all, in John 14:1, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me."

**Marc Roby:** It was a mild, loving rebuke to Peter for trusting in himself.

Dr. Spencer: It was, yes. Jesus was making the very important point that we cannot ultimately trust in anyone or anything in this life. They will all fail us. God is the only one in whom we can ultimately place our trust and not be disappointed.

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Marc Roby: As it says on the US dollar bill, “In God we trust”.

Dr. Spencer: And it’s not just on the dollar bill, it is on all US currency and is the official motto of the United States of America, although a lot of people don’t know that today.

Marc Roby: Yes, I’m sure many don’t know that. But getting back to John 14:1, I know that in both the King James Version and the English Standard Version of the Bible John 14:1 says that Jesus told them, *believe* in God, *believe* also in me, rather than *trust* in God, *trust* also in me.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. The Greek verb being translated in both places in that verse is πιστεύω (pisteuō), and I think the NIV translation is better here, especially given modern ideas about belief. In Vine’s Expository Dictionary we are told that this verb means “‘to believe,’ also ‘to be persuaded of,’ and hence, ‘to place confidence in, to trust’”.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says the word means “to trust” or “to rely on”.<sup>3</sup> And Walter Bauer’s Lexicon says it means to “believe (*in*)” and then goes on to say it is “*trust* of religious belief in a special sense, as faith in the Divinity that lays special emphasis on trust in his power and his nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that he exists and that his revelations or disclosures are true. In our literature God and Christ are objects of this faith.”<sup>4</sup>

I think these definitions all make it clear that the key idea behind biblical, saving faith is one of trust. And it is important to note that it isn’t a blind trust, it is trust based on knowledge. We trust because we are convinced that God is true and his Word is true. Therefore, we trust in the gospel message of salvation.

Marc Roby: Well, it certainly wouldn’t make sense to place your trust in something you didn’t think is true.

Dr. Spencer: No, that wouldn’t make sense at all. And Christ goes on in this passage to give his disciples great comfort by telling them, in John 14:2-3, that “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

This is the greatest promise you can possibly imagine, but it also implicitly provides the reason why we can trust Jesus. He first tells us that “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you.” And then, secondly, he says he is going there, to his Father’s house, in other words to heaven, to prepare a place for us. And, finally, and most gloriously, he says he will come back to get us and take us to be with him in heaven.

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<sup>2</sup> Vine, W.E., Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson, 1996, pg. 61 (in NT part)

<sup>3</sup> G. Friedrich, Friedrich, Gerhard (Trans. By G. Bromley), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI, Eerdmans, 1964-1976, Vol. VI, pg. 177

<sup>4</sup> W. Bauer, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd Ed., Revised and augmented by F.W. Gingrich and F. Danker, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979, pg. 661 (see definition 2β)

**Marc Roby: That is wonderful.**

Dr. Spencer: It is the most wonderful thing that can be promised, but as I said it also implicitly gives us the reason that we can trust in Jesus. He is *able* to go to heaven on his own! He is *able* to prepare a place for us. And he is then *able* to bring us there to join him! This is incredible. No one but the perfect, eternal, God-man, Jesus Christ, is able to do this for us. We must trust in him alone.

**Marc Roby: And as we said last time, true saving faith is, essentially, trust.**

Dr. Spencer: It is. The theologian John Murray wrote that “faith is trust. Trust presupposes an object. An object evokes trust when there is an antecedent judgment of the mind that the object is trustworthy.”<sup>5</sup> Now, an “antecedent judgment of the mind” simply means a judgment made *before* we place our trust in the object.

**Marc Roby: And, as we have said, the object of true, saving faith is Jesus Christ. And he is absolutely trustworthy.**

Dr. Spencer: Which was the point he was making to his disciples. They knew him. They had travelled with him. They had seen him perform miracles – feeding thousands, healing the sick, walking on water, raising the dead – and so they had an intimate personal knowledge of him and knew that he was, in fact, trustworthy. This is, as Murray said, a judgment of the mind.

**Marc Roby: People often think of faith as being divorced from judgments of the mind.**

Dr. Spencer: That’s quite true. Faith is often thought of as being anti-intellectual. But true, saving faith is not that way at all. We may or may not go through a conscious process of careful reasoning, but no one will trust in someone or something in a meaningful way without being convinced that the object of their faith is, in fact, trustworthy. And this requires that we use our minds. The Rev. P.G. Mathew wrote that “biblical faith is not blind. It does not require a leap in the dark or the sacrifice of our intellect. Biblical faith is reasonable because it rests on the greatest possible reason—the infinite, personal God and his word.”<sup>6</sup>

**Marc Roby: I certainly can’t think of anyone or anything in creation that is worthy of complete trust.**

Dr. Spencer: Well, there can’t be anyone or anything outside of the triune God who is ultimately worthy of complete trust because absolutely everything and everyone outside of God himself is a created being, and is completely dependent on God every moment of every day. No one can oppose God and succeed. Therefore, God will always accomplish all that he intends to accomplish.

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<sup>5</sup> John Murray, *Collected Works*, Vol. II, Banner of Truth Trust, 1977, pg. 237

<sup>6</sup> P.G. Mathew, *Faith of Our Fathers*, sermon text available at <https://gracevalley.org/sermon/faith-of-our-fathers/>

So, when Jesus said that he is going to heaven to prepare a place for his people and that he will then come back and get us, we can be absolutely certain that it will happen.

**Marc Roby: In other words, true, saving faith is not just a pie-in-the-sky hope. It is based on real knowledge about who God is and what he has done in history, which then gives us confidence in his promises.**

Dr. Spencer: That's exactly right. John Murray wrote that "Faith is trust, and trust induced or compelled by evidence. It is forced consent."<sup>7</sup>

**Marc Roby: Now that's an interesting statement; forced consent. In what sense is our faith forced?**

Dr. Spencer: It's forced by the evidence. Unbelievers are suppressing the truth that they know as we are told in Romans 1:18. God has provided everyone with sufficient evidence. This suppression is not necessarily a conscious thing. It is embedded deep in our sinful nature. It begins with the most fundamental presupposition of our worldview. The unbeliever starts with the presupposition that the God of the Bible does not exist.

**Marc Roby: And we are told in both Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1 that it is "The fool" who "says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"**

Dr. Spencer: But that does *not* mean that he may not make up a God of his own, the Bible is full of examples of all kinds of idolatry. But it does mean that the fool says there is no real, true and living God, in other words, the God of the Bible does not exist.

But, when God causes someone to be born again, that fundamental presupposition at the core of his worldview is changed. He now believes that God exists and accepts the testimony God has given about himself in the Bible. It is a fundamental and radical transformation, and although the transformation is instantaneous, its effects are not all instantaneous.

**Marc Roby: Now, when you say that the effects aren't instantaneous, you mean, I assume, that born-again people can still have doubts and not be certain about everything in God's Word and that their behavior is not immediately transformed entirely.**

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. The more you have been indoctrinated in anti-God thinking, the longer it will usually take for you to come to terms with this radical new worldview. But, as Murray said, the consent is, in a sense, forced. It isn't forced in the sense that God pushes on you and makes you cry "uncle." It is forced in the sense that you see the truth and, whether you like it at first or not, you are forced by your own new born-again nature to accept it as true. Quoting from John Murray yet again, "We believe not what we could wish were true but what we are convinced is true."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Murray, op. cit., pg. 238

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg. 240

**Marc Roby: That is so clearly the case. If I believed what I wish were true, I would believe I have no sin, no sickness, no death, no trouble, the list could go on and on.**

Dr. Spencer: And we can all agree with that, and add other items to the wish list. I would be the most intelligent, most talented, best looking, and most wealthy man alive. But such is not the case. And the reason that born-again people are forced to agree with God's Word is simply that it is obviously true. We may like it if someone comes and tells us that we are perfect, or that we will never be sick again or never get old and die, we may *want* to believe such things, but we all know they aren't true.

**Marc Roby: And the Bible certainly makes no such statements.**

Dr. Spencer: No, it doesn't. The Bible tells us what is true, whether we want to hear or not and completely independent of whether we like it or not. But getting back to the idea that our consent to the truth of the Bible is forced, it is forced by the truth. If we have been born again, then when we are confronted with the truth we respond properly. And the response is not just mental agreement with the facts. Trust is more than that. Louis Berkhof puts it well in his *Systematic Theology*, he wrote that trust "is the crowning element of faith. Faith is not merely a matter of the intellect, nor of the intellect and the emotions combined; it is also a matter of the will, determining the direction of the soul".<sup>9</sup>

**Marc Roby: In other words, as the well-know song says, "I have decided to follow Jesus." We determine not just to believe, but to think and to live in the way God commands. In other words, to follow Jesus.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And doing that always involves constant change. As I said a few minutes ago, the transformation is instantaneous and radical, but the effects are not all instantaneous. The change is radical because we are instantly given a new heart and we see the truth. And because of the change in our fundamental presupposition, as we discussed earlier, we see everything differently, so, as time goes on we see more and more in ourselves that does not conform to the Word of God. We must continue to work all of our lives at putting our sin to death and walking in greater and greater obedience to God.

**Marc Roby: And that process is called progressive sanctification.**

Dr. Spencer: It is. And we will discuss that more later, but for now I want to point out that when we come to true faith we don't just trust in Jesus Christ, we trust also in the Bible. Berkhof also wrote that "Naturally one who accepts Christ by a true faith, will also be ready and willing to accept God's testimony as a whole."<sup>10</sup>

**Marc Roby: That makes good sense since the Bible is exactly where we learn of Jesus Christ.**

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<sup>9</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1938, pg. 505

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 504

Dr. Spencer: And it is where we learn how we are to change. The Bible is a mirror that shows us our own faults, and then it is also an instruction manual to show us how we should live.

If we say that we trust in Jesus, but we don't really believe the Bible and if we never have it confront us with our sin and show us our need for change, then our confession is false, plain and simple. In the Great Commission, when Jesus spoke to his disciples before ascending into heaven, he said, as we read in Matthew 28:19-20, that we are to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." And where do we find Jesus' commands?

**Marc Roby: In the Bible.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. We must turn to the Word of God to see how to live a life that is pleasing to God. And true, saving faith, a faith that trusts in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, is also an obedient faith; true believers seek to be conformed to the image of Christ.

**Marc Roby: To say that we want to be conformed to the image of Christ is certainly biblical. Paul wrote in Romans 8:29 that "those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."**

Dr. Spencer: We have spoken about the need for obedience many times. We don't earn our salvation by our obedience, but a true faith that will save us is always a penitent, obedient faith. We see that we are sinners and need to change, which is why we don't trust in ourselves, in other words why our faith is a penitent faith. And we hate our sins and want to be done with them and we want to live in the way that pleases our Father in heaven. We want to be like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whom we love, worship and seek to emulate, which is why our faith is an obedient faith.

God originally created man in his image and the fall horribly defaced that image. But, if we are alive in Christ, God is working to restore that image by transforming us to be like Christ.

**Marc Roby: Well, this looks like a good place to end for today. I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We would love to hear from you.**