

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Last week we showed that justification is a legal declaration of God. As the apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:16, we “know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”¹ At the end of our session last week Dr. Spencer, you noted that the Roman Catholic view of justification is called analytic justification and the reformed, or biblical, view is called synthetic justification. How would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I first want to remind our listeners that how we are justified is not some unimportant, esoteric discussion about a trivial technical point of doctrine. We are dealing with *the* central question for all men and women; namely, “How can a sinner be justified, or declared righteous, in the sight of a holy and just God?” Justification is the heart of the issue and the differences here are critically important. If you are wrong in your understanding of justification, it may well be that when you stand before God to be judged, you will hear those terrible words, “Depart from me!” And that would mean eternal destruction. Our whole reason for doing these podcasts is to lead people to Christ and to strengthen the church. But the path to salvation is narrow.

Marc Roby: Near the end of his famous Sermon on the Mount, we read in Matthew 7:13-14 that Jesus himself admonished us to, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

Dr. Spencer: Those verses are very important. I don’t know anyone who enjoys conflict – well, maybe some lawyers I know – but, seriously most people don’t like conflict. We would like to be able to say it doesn’t matter what someone believes, just so long as he is sincere and a nice person, he will go to heaven. But that is not the truth. And, in fact, if we think about it for a few minutes, we wouldn’t really want that to be true. It would require that God change his just character, and his character is perfect, so we should never want that. The bottom line is that there is one and only one way to heaven. Calling yourself a Christian and even faithfully attending a church, no matter what denomination, will not save you. So, there is nothing more important than understanding what God says about how we can be justified.

Marc Roby: Very well. Getting back then to this issue of analytic and synthetic justification, what do you want to say about these different views?

Dr. Spencer: We should begin by briefly reminding our listeners of what these terms mean. The terms analytic and synthetic come from philosophy. An analytic statement is true by definition; in other words, it is a tautology. So, for example, the statement “All bachelors are unmarried” is

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an analytic statement. The subject, bachelor, contains within it the information contained in the predicate, “unmarried”, so the sentence tells us nothing we don’t already know from just the subject. Synthetic statements however, can be either true or false. If I tell you that my car is blue, that statement may be true or false because the predicate, “blue”, adds information to the subject, “car”.²

Marc Roby: And how does all of this apply to justification?

Dr. Spencer: Well, in the Roman Catholic view, no one is declared just in God’s sight until that person actually *is* just. You could say that God analyzes you and determines that you are, in fact, just, or righteous, and so he declares that to be so. His declaration doesn’t change anything; you were just and he simply recognized that fact. That is analytic justification.

Marc Roby: In other words, God justifies the just.

Dr. Spencer: Yes. But that is unbiblical. In Romans 3:23-24 we read that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Which tells us that God justifies sinners, not righteous people.

Marc Roby: And there are no righteous people as Paul noted; *all* have sinned. Every single human being outside of Christ is a sinner.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And in Romans 4:5 we read that “to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Which is even more explicit. God “justifies the wicked”.

Marc Roby: That verse ended by saying why God justifies the wicked; it said that “his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Dr. Spencer: And that is the point we were making last time, but using different words. This justification is synthetic. It is *not* based on analyzing the person and determining that he is, in fact, righteous, it is based on imputing to him a righteousness that is not his own, what has been called an alien righteousness.³ As it says in Romans 3:21-22, “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

Marc Roby: In these verses Paul wrote that this righteousness “comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” And in the previous verse we looked at he wrote that God justified the wicked because “his faith is credited as righteousness.” These two expressions are obviously speaking about the same thing.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they are. They are both speaking about being united to Christ by faith and the double imputation that results from that union as we noted last week. Paul’s main point in Romans Chapter Four is to show that Abraham, the father of the Jews, was justified by faith and

² John Frame, *The History of Western Philosophy and Theology*, P&R Publishing, 2015, pg. 187

³ R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, Baker Books, 1995, pg. 107

not by works. The Jews at that time thought that “Abraham was perfect in his deeds with the Lord and well pleasing and in righteousness all the days of his life”⁴, so Paul was arguing against this view. He quoted Genesis 15:6, which says that “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” And he then argued, in Romans 4:4-5, “Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

Marc Roby: That’s a strong statement. If Abraham earned his justification, then God would have been obligated to justify him and would not have said in Genesis 15:6 that his faith was credited to him as righteousness.

Dr. Spencer: In fact, given that the argument is part of God’s infallible word, it isn’t just a strong argument, it is definitive. You quoted Galatians 2:16 in your opening statement today and it says, in part, that “by observing the law no one will be justified.” The Bible is clear that no one outside of Jesus Christ has ever lived a sinless life, and no one ever will. But a sinless life is necessary to be perfect in righteousness. It is only the perfect imputed righteousness of Christ that can save; and that can only be ours if we are united to him by faith. It is an alien righteousness. Our justification is synthetic, not analytic. We are united to Christ by faith and it is on the basis of *his* perfect righteousness that we are justified.

The free book that we offer to all listeners of the podcast, *Good News for All People*, is, in essence, an exposition of the passage we have been considering from Romans Chapter Three and I strongly recommend it for those who want to consider this topic in more depth.

Marc Roby: And our listeners can obtain a free copy of that book by going to our website, whatdoesthewordsay.org, and clicking on the button to request a copy. Are we done talking about the difference between synthetic and analytic justification?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we are. But I also want to point out that it is possible and, in fact, quite common, to fall into the other ditch as well.

Marc Roby: What do you mean?

Dr. Spencer: Well, we noted earlier that the path to heaven is narrow, and we could add that there are ditches on both sides. On the one side you can error like the Roman Catholic Church does and think that you can earn your salvation in some way, but it is also very common to believe that your own righteousness doesn’t matter at all. That view is frequently called antinomianism, which simply means to be against the law.

⁴ *Book of Jubilees*, Translated from the Ethiopic, by George H. Schodde, E.J. Goodrich, 1888, pg. 69, (available at: <http://matrixfiles.com/JerryKirk/Book-of-Jubilees-from-the-Ethiopic.pdf>) also see Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, 2011, pg. 182

Marc Roby: And I would say that although they may not admit to being antinomian, that view is the most common view among Protestant churches today.

Dr. Spencer: I think that's obviously true. The minute you say anything about good works being necessary, most professing protestants today will accuse you of being legalistic. In other words, they will accuse you of rejecting the idea that we are saved by grace alone. They will say that you are adding your own good works to the requirements for salvation. But that view is completely wrong.

Marc Roby: Well, for one thing, we aren't saying that your works are the basis for your salvation. As you said a moment ago, we are justified on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's right. They ignore the difference between salvation and justification. Although these two terms are sometimes used as though they were synonymous, salvation is a more general term that refers to the whole process of being saved, beginning with God's electing love in eternity past and culminating in our receiving our glorified bodies and living with God in perfect happiness for all eternity future. Whereas justification only refers to God's legal declaration that we are justified in his sight. We would say that our own good works are necessary for salvation, but not for justification; although even our "good works" are only done and accepted by grace as we will discuss in a later podcast. Justification is by grace alone through faith alone; period. Nothing is added to the requirements for justification.

Marc Roby: How then would you explain, I'm tempted to say justify, the statement that our good works are necessary for salvation?

Dr. Spencer: Well, they are necessary proof that we have truly been justified. We have argued that justification is a legal declaration, it does not refer to a process of actually making us just. We are sinners before we are justified and we are still sinners after we are justified. But there is a huge difference nonetheless, a radical change must have taken place or we would not have truly repented and believed and God would not have justified us. We must have been born again, in other words, regenerated.

We discussed regeneration in Sessions 149 and 150 because it comes early in the order of salvation. Our listeners may remember that the order we have been using is: effectual call, regeneration, repentance and faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.

Marc Roby: And no one can repent and believe unless they are born again, which is why it comes before repentance and faith in the order of salvation.

Dr. Spencer: And the converse is also true as I noted in Session 149; anyone who has been born again *will*, without a doubt, repent and believe. In fact, the whole order is guaranteed once God has chosen someone to be saved. We see this in the famous passage in Romans 8:29-30, where Paul tells us, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."

Marc Roby: And when Paul says God “foreknew” certain people, that really means that he has fore-loved them. He knows every single person and everything about every person, so to say that he foreknew someone would not limit the group of people in any way.

Dr. Spencer: And that emphasizes yet again that the source of our salvation is the love of God. But, to stay on topic, every element in the order of salvation is certain to occur in the life of every single individual whom God fore-loved and predestined to be saved. That process begins in the life of a believer with the effectual call and regeneration, which then necessarily result in repentance and faith and also in sanctification in the life of every true believer. God justifies us based on our faith, which unites us to Christ. But we would never have truly believed if we had not been born again first. And the instant we are born again we are radically changed; new birth is the beginning of the process of sanctification.

Marc Roby: And hence, good works are essential proof that this process is truly underway.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. We are justified by grace alone through faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. And that forms a good segue into discussing the third side of the triangle of salvation.⁵

Marc Roby: Now we haven’t spoken about the triangle of salvation yet today, so perhaps I should briefly remind our listeners of what that is. This triangle shows the relations between God the Father, Jesus Christ and an individual believer. God the Father is at the top, Jesus Christ on the bottom left and the believer on the bottom right. The left side, connecting Christ and the Father, represents the fact that Christ propitiates or appeases the wrath of God for us, and the right side, connecting the Father to the believer, represents the fact that the Father then declares us just, or legally righteous, based on the work of Jesus Christ. We have already spoken about both of these. The bottom side, connecting Christ to the believer, represents the fact that Jesus Christ redeems us.

Dr. Spencer: And we pointed out in Session 176 that redemption refers to paying a ransom to free a prisoner or a slave. As James Boice wrote, “The Greek word at the base of the major word group meaning ‘redeem,’ ‘redeemer’ and ‘redemption’ is *luō*, which means ‘to loose’ or ‘loosen.’ It was used of loosening clothes or unbinding armor. When applied to human beings, it signified the loosing of bonds so that, for example, a prisoner became free. At times it was used of procuring the release of a prisoner by means of a ransom.”⁶

Marc Roby: I know that some theologians have objected to the idea of a ransom being paid for our salvation.

⁵ James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Revised in One Volume, InterVarsity Press, 1986, pg. 323

⁶ pg. 323 (note: his book prints the Greek word as *lyō*, which is a printing error, so I’ve corrected it to *luō*.)

Dr. Spencer: That's true, and Boice deals with that objection. He has a rather lengthy, and very good, discussion of this, which I encourage interested listeners to read.⁷ But I'm going to skip most of it and simply point out the most important conclusion.

Marc Roby: And what is that?

Dr. Spencer: The biblical view of man is that he was created sinless. Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect communion with God in the garden prior to the fall. But when they sinned, which we must remember was deliberate rebellion against God in response to the devil's lie that they could become like God ... In any event, when they sinned, their natures were changed. God had told Adam, as we read in Genesis 2:17, that "you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." And that is what happened. Death is not the cessation of existence. As we have discussed before⁸, the biblical idea of death is separation. And Adam and Eve were immediately separated from intimate fellowship with God. In addition, they immediately started the process of physically dying, which leads to the separation of the body and spirit⁹. And that is the state we all inherit from them. We are sinful creatures bound to physically die and then face judgment.

Marc Roby: We are in the estate of sin and misery as the Westminster Shorter Catechism phrases it.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. In any event, the Bible describes this state of sin as slavery. In John 8:34 we read that Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." And in Romans 7:14 Paul refers to himself in his unregenerate state as having been "sold as a slave to sin." But when we are born again, we are freed from slavery to sin. We are also freed from being under the dominion of Satan, who is called the ruler of the kingdom of the air in Ephesians 2:2, and we are freed from the sting of death as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:55-56.

Marc Roby: That makes me think of the glorious symbolism in the sacrament of baptism. We are said to have died with Christ and to have been buried with him, which refers to being done with our old way of life. But then, praise God, we have also been raised to new life with him.

Dr. Spencer: And that symbolism expressly uses the idea of being a slave to sin, especially as it relates to the ethical change that takes place in us and the concomitant release we experience from the power and dominion of sin. Romans Chapter Six speaks about the change that takes place when a sinner is born again and baptized. At the end of Chapter Five Paul argued that the law was never intended to save anyone. Rather, the law actually increased our sin and guilt. Because of our sinful nature, when we are told not to do something, that is the first thing we want to do. But then Paul declared, in Romans 5:20 that "where sin increased, grace increased all the more". His point was that our greater sin leads to God displaying even greater grace in saving

⁷ Ibid, pp 324-330

⁸ See Session 102 pages 1 through 3

⁹ See Session 104 pages 2 and 3.

us. But this can be misunderstood, just like modern antinomians misunderstand our being saved by grace. And so Paul answers them in Romans Chapter Six.

Marc Roby: Let me read the first seven verses of that chapter: Paul wrote, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 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. 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.”

Dr. Spencer: That wonderful passage speaks about our union with Christ, it speaks about our old self and that we should no longer be slaves to sin, and it speaks about our having been freed from this slavery. And in our next session, I want to begin with this passage and speak about Christ as our Redeemer.

Marc Roby: That's a wonderful topic to look forward to. So, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We enjoy hearing from you.