

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. In our session last week we discussed the fact that we are saved by faith in Christ, not by our own good works. But our good works are still necessary because they serve as proof that we have, in fact, been born again, which is a necessary and sufficient condition for our repenting and believing and, therefore, being united to Christ and justified by God. Dr. Spencer, at the end of our last session you said you wanted to begin today by looking at Romans 6:1-7. Would you like me to read those verses to begin?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, please do.

Marc Roby: Very well. In Romans 6:1-7 we read, “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.”¹

Dr. Spencer: Those verses are wonderful, and they make it absolutely clear that anyone who has been born again will live differently. Not perfectly, but there will be noticeable change for the better. Paul uses the symbolism of baptism to speak about this radical change in a person's life. His assumption is that the person who has been baptized has, in fact, been born again and has, therefore, repented and placed his personal faith, or trust, in Jesus Christ alone. And then notice what he says. He wrote that “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” Now we must ask ourselves, what does the apostle mean when he says that we died to sin?

Marc Roby: Well, we have argued before that the biblical view of death is *not* a cessation of existence, but rather a separation², so it would seem reasonable to assume that Paul means that we have, in some sense, been separated from our sins.

Dr. Spencer: That's a good way of putting it. In fact, in Psalm 103:12 we are told that “as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” And Paul goes on in this passage from Romans Six to explain further what he means. In Verse 5 he wrote that “If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” This speaks about union with Christ both in his death and in his resurrection. Those events together represent a radical transformation in the life of Jesus; his human nature went from living, to dead, to resurrected. And a believer experiences a similar, radical

¹ All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

² See Sessions 102.1-3 and 104.2-3

transformation. When he is born again, responds in repentance and faith, or conversion, and is then justified by God, we can say that he has died to sin and been raised to new life in Christ.

Paul provides further explanation in the very next verse. Verse 6 says, “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”. The “old self” that Paul speaks about here is our old sinful nature and life prior to being born again. That life was crucified with Christ when we were united to him by faith.

Marc Roby: Paul also speaks of the old self in other places. For example, in Colossians 3:9-10 we are commanded, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

Dr. Spencer: Those are also good verses for showing the difference that regeneration makes. Paul speaks about our having taken off the old self; in other words, it is a completed action. But then he also says we have work to do, we are to put on the new self. And when he says that the new self is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator, that mirrors what he says in Romans 8:29, where we read, “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.”

Marc Roby: We know from the Bible that man was originally created in the image of God, but sin defaced that image. We could say that new birth begins the process of restoring, or renewing that image.

Dr. Spencer: That’s exactly what it does. New birth initiates a process. It immediately produces a radical and decisive change, but not a complete change. We are still sinners and have more work to do. We need to put on our new self, we need to be renewed day by day. This is the process of sanctification that we will speak about in detail in later sessions, but it has a decisive beginning that represents a radical change in a person’s life. There is an old self and a new self, an old man and a new man, an old life and a new life, and they are radically different. The dividing line is regeneration, or new birth.

And then we need to notice what else Paul said in Verse 6. The verse says, “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”. That last phrase – that we should no longer be slaves to sin – speaks about our having been redeemed from sin.

Marc Roby: I remember that in our session last week you briefly mentioned this, but can you explain a bit more what is meant by saying that we are no longer slaves to sin?

Dr. Spencer: That is what the notion of redemption is all about. When Paul wrote that we died to sin, he meant that we no longer live in the realm in which we were slaves to sin. It isn’t that we now live perfect, sinless lives, but we are no longer *slaves* to sin; in other words, we are no longer *ruled* by sin. In Verses 11 and 12 of Romans Chapter Six Paul wrote, “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so

that you obey its evil desires.” And later, in Verse 14, he says that sin shall no longer be our master.

Marc Roby: And sin is a terrible master. It leads to nothing but misery for us and for others.

Dr. Spencer: That is certainly true, sin is a horrible master, a tyrant of the worst sort. And in John 8:34 we read that Jesus himself said, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” And when Jesus refers to everyone who sins, the verb in the Greek is a present participle, which means it is a continuing action. He isn’t referring to sinning just once in a while, he is speaking about habitual sin as the normal pattern of life.

Marc Roby: Alright, so someone who sins habitually is a slave to sin. That makes me think of what Paul wrote in Romans 6:16, “Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, those verses make the point clearly. Now, of course, sin is impersonal, so saying we are slaves to sin as though sin itself were our master is a rhetorical device, the real master is the devil. And we’ll come back to that point later. But first, I want to make clear that Christians have the ability to say “no” to sin, which is a major burden of what Paul is teaching us in Romans Chapter Six. That is part of what it means to say that we have been redeemed. We have been purchased out of one condition and placed in a new condition. Theologians sometimes use a couple of Latin phrases to describe this difference. Prior to our conversion, we were *non posse non peccare*, which literally means that it was not possible to not sin. But, after our conversion, we are *posse non peccare*, meaning it is possible for us to not sin.

Marc Roby: Unbelievers, and even many professing Christians, have a hard time accepting the idea that an unbeliever is sinning all the time.

Dr. Spencer: I think people have a hard time with this idea because they have a wrong view of sin. For example, suppose an unbelieving man wakes up one morning and just doesn’t feel like going to work that day, he isn’t sick, he just doesn’t feel like going to work.

Marc Roby: We have all had that feeling.

Dr. Spencer: I’m sure our listeners can all relate. But then suppose that he gets himself ready and goes to work anyway. He has done the right thing. It would have been sin to be lazy and stay home. But even though he made the better choice, he hasn’t avoided sinning altogether.

Marc Roby: Why not?

Dr. Spencer: Because of his motives. There are all sorts of motives we can imagine for doing the right thing here, some of them more noble than others. For example, perhaps he thought staying home would set a poor example for his children, or maybe he just considered the fact that it would cause him trouble at work and might, ultimately, lead to losing his job. But whatever his motives, they are focused on what is best for him and his family in this life. They are, at least to some extent, selfish and they are entirely worldly; meaning focused on this life alone. But there is one motive an unbeliever is guaranteed to *never* have. He will never be motivated by a desire

to do what is right in God's sight. His is not concerned with obeying God or bringing God glory by how he lives his life.

Marc Roby: Yes, that's a good point and agrees completely with what is said in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 16, Paragraph 7. And it makes me think of the famous verse in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we sin whenever we fail to recognize that we are creatures, accountable to God. We are to live all of our lives with that humble recognition, and every decision, no matter how minor, is to be made with reference to God and his laws. We are to live for his glory. We are to please him, not ourselves. This is the comprehensive lordship of Christ.

Marc Roby: And the most basic confession of a Christian is that Jesus is Lord. We read in Romans 10:9, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Dr. Spencer: And Jesus is the Lord of a Christian for two reasons. First, because he is the Creator he is the Lord of everyone, whether they acknowledge that fact or not. And secondly, for a Christian, Jesus is Lord because he redeemed us by his atoning sacrifice. He purchased us with his blood. We belong to him both as creatures and as his blood-bought slaves.

Marc Roby: I'm sure that statement will rile some. You often hear that Christ died to set his people free. In fact, in Galatians 5:1 Paul tells us that "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." So how can you say we are his slaves?

Dr. Spencer: Because that is what the Word of God tells us. The apostle Paul refers to himself many times as a slave of Christ. For example, he begins the book of Romans, in Chapter One, Verse One, by saying, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God". Now the Greek word translated here as "servant", is δούλος (doulos), which literally means bond slave. Paul uses the same expression elsewhere³ and it is also used, for example, by James⁴, Peter⁵ and Jude⁶. It is somewhat paradoxical, but we have been set free from our slavery to sin in order to serve as slaves of God.

Marc Roby: I'm sure that concept will be hard for many to grasp.

Dr. Spencer: It is difficult for all of us to grasp I think, especially at first. But the greatest freedom a person could ever possibly have is the freedom to always do what is right and to do it for the right reasons. True freedom would be to be completely free from our selfish and sinful desires and from the sinful influences of the devil and the world and to be completely controlled by the only perfect law, which is God's law. None of us achieve that freedom fully in this life,

³ E.g., Titus 1:1

⁴ James 1:1

⁵ 2 Peter 1:1

⁶ Jude 1

but the radical change brought about by regeneration makes us able, for the first time, to be free in principle even if we don't always achieve it in practice.

Marc Roby: And so, if I may go back to the point about an unbeliever sinning all the time and summarize your argument, you are saying that even when an unbeliever does something that is in itself a good and right thing to do, the fact that he is not motivated by a desire to please and obey God, makes that action yet sinful. Even if his motives appear noble, he is still motivated by what appears to *him* to be right. And he is, in other words, sinning and acting autonomously.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's a great way to put it. And because all people are made in the image of God, their own internal standard of right and wrong will often *be* right. But the autonomous thinking that is involved in following *their own* standard, rather than self-consciously desiring to follow *God's* standard, makes their actions sinful. That is the autonomy that the devil was promoting when he tempted Eve by saying, in response to her statement that eating the forbidden fruit would lead to death, "You will not surely die, For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)

Marc Roby: Unfortunately, the devil was lying as usual. What actually happened is that Adam and Eve became like the devil, rebellious sinners opposed to God.

Dr. Spencer: Which is why Jesus called sinners children of the devil.

One day Jesus was telling some people that they were not living as children of Abraham because they were not doing the things Abraham would do. The people responded that God is their only father and Jesus replied, as we read in John 8:42-44, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Marc Roby: That was harsh! Jesus told them their father was the devil. That doesn't fit the modern view of Jesus as always smiling and being nice to people.

Dr. Spencer: No, it doesn't fit that image at all because that image is unbiblical. When anyone sins, including a Christian, that person is being obedient to the devil. That is why I said that being a slave to sin really means that you are under the authority of the devil. People think they are being autonomous, but that is never the case. The devil lets you think you are autonomous, but when you set yourself up as the final authority, you are playing straight into his hands. When Christ redeems us, he sets us free from slavery to sin, which is really slavery to the devil; he is, as Jesus said, the father of all lies. And the greatest lie of all is that you can be like God. You can be autonomous. But no creature is ever autonomous, that is an illusion. Everyone obeys either God or the devil. Eve was not being autonomous when she ate the forbidden fruit, she was accepting Satan as her new lord and master. She weighed God's words and Satan's words and decided that Satan was right, so she obeyed him instead of God. That isn't really autonomy, it is a shifting of allegiance.

Marc Roby: That's an interesting way to put it. And it reminds me of a verse you just briefly mentioned last time. You noted that Satan is called the ruler of the kingdom of the air in Ephesians 2:2, so let me read Ephesians 2:1-2, Paul wrote, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that makes it very clear, doesn't it? When a person thinks he is acting autonomously by disobeying or completely disregarding God, it is really Satan who is at work in him. But Christ has redeemed us from this slavery. As Paul wrote at the end of the passage we have been considering from Romans Six, "anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

James Boice wrote that "Redemption has two consequences. First, it means we are free. Paradoxical as it may sound, to be purchased by Jesus is to be set free – free from the guilt and tyranny of the law and from sin's power. ... Yet this is a special kind of freedom. It does not mean that we are set free to do anything we might wish, to sin with impunity or once again fall back into the bondage of rebellion and unfaithfulness. We are released to serve God. We are set free to will the good. We are delivered in order that we might obey and love Jesus."⁷ And Boice then goes on to quote 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, where Paul wrote, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, 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: And so the biblical view is that when we are freed from slavery to sin, or to the devil, we become slaves of Christ.

Dr. Spencer: That is the biblical view, yes. Christ is our redeemer and our Lord and we owe him perfect, unquestioning obedience. To be a slave of Christ is to be as free as it is possible for a human being to ever be. It is to be free to do what is right and good. We are told in Hebrews 9:15 that "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."

Marc Roby: That is glorious. And it raises an obvious question. To whom did Christ pay this ransom? A ransom is usually paid to the one who is holding someone captive.

Dr. Spencer: Well, the analogy breaks down a bit at this point because the ransom is paid to God. It is the price required to satisfy God's justice. Remember that we are justified on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. He paid our debt and he gives us his righteousness. That is redemption.

Marc Roby: And that is also a good place to end for today. So, I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We enjoy hearing from you.

⁷ James Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Revised in One Volume, InterVarsity Press, 1986, pg. 330