

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We are currently discussing the doctrine of sanctification. And, more specifically, we have been discussing what John Murray called definitive sanctification<sup>1</sup>, which is the fact that a person is truly changed when he is born again. He is not perfected, but he is radically different. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, at the end of our session last week we had just started to look at Romans 6:4-7, where the apostle Paul speaks about our union with Christ in both his death and resurrection and I want to begin by looking at that passage some more.

Marc Roby: Alright, let me read those verses again; “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.”<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Spencer: I made the point last time that Paul specifically says our old sinful nature no longer rules, we have been freed from sin. In fact, Paul says that “our old self was crucified with” Christ! It would be reasonable to conclude from the English translation of this verse by itself, which uses the past tense, that our sinful nature is completely gone at that point. Certainly, when a person has been crucified, he no longer has any power to act in this world.

Marc Roby: That’s obvious. But the Bible as a whole clearly teaches that Christians are all still sinners. We all sin daily. Therefore, that can’t be a correct understanding of that verse; we should never assume a meaning that contradicts what is clearly taught elsewhere.

Dr. Spencer: No, we shouldn’t. And there is no real conflict because in the Greek, it doesn’t say the crucifixion of our old nature is completed. The verb is in an aorist indicative, which is a tense we don’t have in English. It simply refers to an event happening, but it doesn’t specify whether the event is completed or is continuing<sup>3</sup>, so we can’t make that determination from this verse alone. In this case, based on many other verses in the Bible, it is clear that the action of crucifying our old sinful nature is not yet complete.

Marc Roby: Well, for example, Paul commands us in Colossians 3:5 to, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”

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<sup>1</sup> John Murray, *Collected Works*, Vol. II, Banner of Truth Trust, 1977, pg. 294f

<sup>2</sup> 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.™.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., see W. D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd Ed., Zondervan, 2009, pg. 194

Dr. Spencer: And that verse is only one of many examples we could use to make the point that our sin is still with us and that we need to fight against it. The great apostle Paul himself said in Philippians 3:12, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”

**Marc Roby: Well, certainly, given that the apostle Paul said that he had not yet been perfected, that is a pretty clear indication that we aren't going to be perfected in this life either.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is a very clear indication. But, getting back to Romans 6, the aorist indicative *does* speak about an event that has either begun or has been completed. It is *not* speaking about something that will begin sometime in the future. And to say that we have started to crucify our old nature is still a very strong statement. Our sinful nature is still present, but it is hanging on the cross so to speak. It is powerless to rule over us, which Paul makes even clearer as he goes on in that Chapter. In Verses 11 he commands us to, “count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

**Marc Roby: In other words, we are to recognize that our being dead to sin but alive to God through our union with Jesus Christ is a reality.**

Dr. Spencer: That is exactly Paul's point. Now that we have been born again and united to Christ in his death, we are to count, or we could say consider, ourselves dead to sin. The Greek verb is a present imperative so it is, as I said, a command. The Rev. P.G. Mathew wrote in his commentary on Romans that “the first step in holiness is to consider ourselves dead with respect to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. The word used ... speaks of logical thinking. We must keep on considering, thinking, realizing, remembering, meditating, accounting, calculating, reasoning, and keeping before our minds the reality of our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.”<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby: And when Mathew says that realizing this truth about ourselves is the first step in holiness, it is probably good to remind our listeners of the quote you read last week. Earlier in his commentary on Romans, Mathew said, “In Romans 6, Paul speaks about why believers should live holy lives and how they can do so in Christ. Holiness is the key to happiness.”<sup>5</sup>**

Dr. Spencer: And he is completely right in that statement. Holiness is the key to happiness. It is impossible for a child to be completely happy when he knows he has done something that displeases his father. There is a strain in the relationship. The father doesn't stop loving his child because he has sinned, but there is a problem that needs to be resolved. And so it is with us as God's children. In order to be truly happy, we have to be in a proper relationship with our heavenly Father, and that is only possible when we walk in holiness. And, as Mathew stated, the first step on the road to holiness is to recognize the truth of the fact that as Christians, we are

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<sup>4</sup> P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, 2011, pp 348-349

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 337

already dead to sin and alive to God because of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Sin cannot be the pattern of our life any longer.

**Marc Roby: In other words, the death and resurrection of Christ truly have efficacy in the life of the believer. This is not just symbolism.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. It is definitely not just symbolism. John Murray wrote that "As the death and resurrection are central in the whole process of redemptive accomplishment, so are they central in that by which sanctification itself is wrought in the hearts and lives of God's people."<sup>6</sup> In other words, Christ's sacrificial death is both efficacious in paying the penalty for our sins, or we could say in paying the price necessary to redeem us, and it is also efficacious in the process of sanctification. The exact means by which it is efficacious is mysterious, but the scriptures are clear that it is. And the first step in this process is definitive sanctification. We have truly been changed. We died to sin and are now alive to God, meaning simply that we have a desire and an ability to obey him.

**Marc Roby: And that is a wonderful beginning. We could never bring about this change in ourselves, it is the work of God.**

Dr. Spencer: Very true. But then the process of sanctification continues, so we get to what Murray calls progressive sanctification. Right after telling us in Verse 11 that we are to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus, Paul then draws a wonderful conclusion in Verse 12. He writes, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

**Marc Roby: That is wonderful. Sin used to reign in our lives, but we are not to let that be true anymore. We don't have to obey sin; it is no longer our master.**

Dr. Spencer: No, it isn't. We don't have to sin, we can have victory over it. But it is still present. We still have sinful desires. And Satan still brings temptations to fulfil those sinful desires. We were passive in our regeneration. We then responded in repentance and faith, but then we were again passive recipients of God's legal declaration that we are just and of his adopting us as his children. We were also passive recipients of God's grace in our definitive sanctification, but we are now to be actively involved in the process. Rev. Mathew says that Verse 12 gives us the second step to holiness; we are not to let sin reign in our lives. In other words, we are not to give in and obey our sinful desires. An unregenerate person can only sin. He makes real choices of course, but only between different kinds of sin. We, however, have the ability to say "No" to sin.

**Marc Roby: We should probably remind our listeners of the fact, which we have noted before, that God judges our attitudes and motives as well as our actions. So when you say that an unbeliever can only sin, you are not saying that an unregenerate person will never deny himself and do something that is outwardly unselfish and proper. But, because his motivation will never be to obey and glorify God, it is still sin even when he does so.**

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<sup>6</sup> Murray, op. cit., pg. 289

Dr. Spencer: That's a good reminder. Unbelievers definitely behave in noble ways at times. And some of them do so as a matter of routine. When an unbeliever denies temptation; for example, say he denies himself the indulgence of staying home from work and gets up and goes to work because he knows that is better for his family, he *is* doing what is right and good. But his motive will be wrong. For example, his motive may simply be that he knows his marriage and family life will be more pleasant; in other words, while this motive is not terrible, it is ultimately selfish and centered on this life. That will always be true of even the most noble of acts by unbelievers.

**Marc Roby: Whereas, a believer who makes that same decision to get up and go to work will do so for different motives. He may also be motivated in part by the fact that the decision will contribute to having a more pleasant marriage and family life, but there will also be a desire to obey and please God and to bring him glory.**

Dr. Spencer: And that motivation makes all the difference in the world. It involves a radical change in focus from this world and this life to the kingdom of God and eternity. It is God centered rather than man centered. Even though both men, the unbeliever and the believer, made the same decision; namely to not give in to laziness but to get up and go to work instead, the unbeliever sinned because of his motive, whereas the believer's action, while not fully devoid of sin, was nonetheless pleasing to God.

**Marc Roby: And the Bible tells us clearly that before we are born again we always obeyed our sinful desires. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:1-3, "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. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."**

Dr. Spencer: And that is the condition out of which God saved us. We were by nature objects of wrath. But if we have been born again, that is no longer true. We are now objects of mercy. And the process of sanctification is a simple matter of continuing to make godly decisions one after another. To say "No" to sin over and over again. To not let sin reign and to not obey its evil desires as Paul wrote.

He also wrote, in Titus 2:12-14, that the grace of God "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

**Marc Roby: And our battle against sin goes on as long as we are alive. And I must add that it gets very tiring sometimes.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does get tiring. But God gives us grace. We are told in 2 Corinthians 9:8 that "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." We don't fight against sin, the devil and the world in our own strength. If we do, we will surely fail. But if we recognize the reality of our position

in union with Christ and the power that position grants to us, we can and will lead victorious Christian lives. The Bible provides us with a number of examples; both of saints who failed to be victorious over sin and of saints who were victorious. And we need to use those examples to motivate ourselves.

**Marc Roby: One of the most prominent examples I can think of for a child of God being victorious over sin is Joseph.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he is a great example. For those who may not remember, he was one of the twelve patriarchs of the Jewish people, the favorite son of Jacob, who also known as Israel. His brothers despised him and sold him into slavery. He ended up in Egypt, in the service of Potiphar, who was one of Pharaoh's officials. But Joseph remained faithful to God and was granted success in all he did. As a result, he rose to be in charge of all of Potiphar's household. But he was also presented with great temptation. Potiphar's wife tried very hard to seduce him, but he steadfastly resisted.

**Marc Roby: Yes, we are told in Genesis 39:9 that Joseph responded to Potiphar's wife's proposition with this statement, "No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"**

Dr. Spencer: What a great answer. And, as I said, we should all learn from this example and resolve to meet temptation in the same way. We should be able to say, "God has redeemed me and granted me many blessings, how can I be wicked and sin against God?"

**Marc Roby: Oh that we would all be able to be so holy at all times. Our lives would be much better. But, unfortunately, the Bible also gives us many examples of God's chosen people falling in temptation.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. And there is always pain as a result, so we should take warning. Perhaps the greatest example is King David. Here was the greatest of all the Israelite kings. In speaking about him, the prophet Samuel said, in 1 Samuel 13:14 that "the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people".

**Marc Roby: What a wonderful thing to have God say about you. That you are a man after his own heart.**

Dr. Spencer: It is a wonderful thing. And God granted David amazing success. But then, later in life, he gave in to temptation in a horrible way. We see the beginning of this sad tale in 2 Samuel 11:1 where we read, "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem."

**Marc Roby: And for those who may not know, Joab was the head of David's army.**

Dr. Spencer: That's right. But David was getting a bit old and was enjoying his great luxury, so he gave in to the temptation to not go out with the army.

Marc Roby: And, as a result, we read in 2 Samuel 11:2 that “One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful”.

Dr. Spencer: And so we see Satan taking advantage of David’s weakness and bringing this temptation. And David fell. He found out the woman was named Bathsheba and that she was the wife of one of his faithful soldiers named Uriah. But he had her brought to him anyway and he slept with her.

Marc Roby: Which was a monstrous mistake and a terrible sin in God’s sight.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it was. Bathsheba then became pregnant and David eventually ordered that Uriah be placed in a position where he was certain to be killed in battle in order to cover up David’s crime.

Marc Roby: And so this king, who is described as a man after God’s own heart, committed adultery and then murder to cover it up.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he did. And he and Bathsheba and his kingdom all paid a terrible price for it. The baby died and Nathan the prophet was sent to David to tell him what would happen. We read in 2 Samuel 12:7, 10-12 that Nathan told David, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ... Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own. ... Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.”

Marc Roby: And we know that all of these terrible things came true in the life of David. Even though he was God’s child, he was severely disciplined by the Lord.

Dr. Spencer: And we should all learn from Joseph, David and the other examples in the Bible. As the Rev. P.G. Mathew said, holiness is the key to happiness. We must strive to obey God all of life.

Marc Roby: That is good counsel for all of us, and this is a good place to end today. So, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We’d love to hear from you.