

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. In our session last week we discussed two biblical examples, one of a Christian who stood in the face of temptation and one of a Christian who did not. Dr. Spencer, you pointed out that these examples are given to provide us with warning and encouragement. How would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, given that you just called the two saints we discussed last week Christians, even though they both lived in the Old Testament period before Christ, I should probably explain why you are correct, even though that may sound anachronistic to call someone who lived prior to the time of Christ a Christian.

Marc Roby: Yes, I can see how some of our listeners might find that a little strange.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they might. But the Bible is clear that every single human being who has ever been saved, or ever will be saved, is saved by faith in Jesus Christ. We are told in Acts 4:12 that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."¹ Those who lived before Christ were saved by the faith they had in God's promise to provide a Redeemer. They didn't know his name, but were disciples of Jesus Christ nonetheless, so calling them Christians is completely accurate.

Marc Roby: And, of course, we could also point out that Christ wasn't his name, it means Anointed One and is more of a title, so the term Christian really refers to God's promised Savior. So, now that we've explained that, how do you want to continue today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, we are discussing what the Rev. P.G. Mathew called the steps to holiness found in Romans Chapter Six. The first step is based on Romans 6:2-4, where Paul wrote, "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." From these verses the first step to holiness is to recognize that if we have been united to Christ by faith, we are, from that moment on, dead to sin and alive to God.² This change is a present reality in the life of every true believer.

Marc Roby: And it is an amazing change. Now, as I recall, the second step Mathew gave was that we must not let sin reign in our lives.³ Which was based on Romans 6:12, where Paul commanded us, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And it was in that context that we looked at Joseph and King David as examples the Bible provides to encourage and warn us. Joseph is one of the greatest examples in

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² P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, 2011, pg. 348

³ Ibid, pg. 350

the Bible of a person who was careful to not sin and, as a result, God blessed him. While King David on the other hand, even though he was the greatest of all the Israelite kings, an ancestor of Christ himself, and is called a man after God's own heart, fell terribly and committed adultery and then murder. And both he and his kingdom paid a high price for his fall.

Marc Roby: David's sins might cause someone to wonder why he is called a man after God's own heart.

Dr. Spencer: Many a young Christian has wondered exactly that. But the answer is clear. Yes, he sinned, and he sinned terribly. But we *all* sin. The question is, what do we do then? And the answer in David's case is that he repented fully. The Westminster Confession of Faith quite properly says that "As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent."⁴ And we read in Isaiah 55:7, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

Marc Roby: And to forsake your wicked ways and turn to the Lord is to repent and believe on Jesus Christ. And what a wonderful promise that verse gives us! If we repent and believe, God will freely pardon our sins.

Dr. Spencer: It is an amazing promise. The heart of the gospel is that God forgives our sins on the basis of Christ's sacrifice. We all need to be careful to avoid the poison of the modern pseudo-gospel, which says that you can be saved by a faith that does not include real repentance or obedience. That is really no gospel at all, it is not biblical faith, it is a lie that will damn you to hell. True saving faith in Jesus Christ is *always* accompanied by real repentance and then sanctification, meaning a striving after holy living.

And, getting back to our example, we know, without any doubt, that King David received the grace necessary to fully repent of these sins and to never repeat them. In fact, he wrote Psalm 51 about this episode in order to show us what true repentance looks like.

Marc Roby: That is a marvelous psalm. It begins, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin." (Psalm 51:1-2)

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I don't want to take time to read the entire psalm now, but I encourage our listeners to do so. It is a great example of what happens when a man sees the filthiness of his own sin and the glorious mercies of God. And Psalm 32 is another great psalm by David about repentance. There is no way that anyone can save himself. God must wash away our sins and cleanse us.

And the point I want to make about this for now, in the context of sanctification, is that part of the process of sanctification is repentance. No one is ever going to be sanctified if he doesn't see his need for change; in other words, if he doesn't see and hate his own sin. As we grow as

⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 15, Paragraph 4

Christians we see more and more of our own sin and come to a deeper understanding of just how rebellious and wicked we really were and sometimes, it is very sad to say, still are. And that leads us to a deeper understanding of God's great mercy in saving us.

Marc Roby: I can imagine someone objecting though and saying that they have never done anything as awful as David did. Many Christians have never committed the physical act of adultery, let alone murder.

Dr. Spencer: Well, that's quite true. But if someone wants to make that objection, it tells me that the person has not yet understood God's law very well, nor has he understood his own depravity very well. The greatest sin of all is rebellion against God, and we have all done that. And if we are completely and brutally honest with ourselves, once we start to see some glimmer of the holiness of God and the comprehensive nature of his law, we also see the cesspool of the human heart. It is one giant mass of selfishness, pride, lust, jealousy, anger and so on.

If we are united to Christ by faith, if we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, if we have a new nature produced by regeneration, in short, if we are truly Christians, then we *will* hate our sin and want to be done with it. We will *want* to walk in holiness. We *will* take the second step and not let sin reign in our lives. But it is a battle that we must fight every day.

Marc Roby: And the Bible uses some violent language to describe that battle. In Romans 8:13-14 the apostle Paul wrote, "For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."

Dr. Spencer: And it is important to note that this language is not hyperbole; we really *are* in a life-and-death struggle. It has been said, correctly, that if you don't kill your sin, it will kill you. And the whole point of Romans Chapter Six, which we have been looking at the past couple of sessions, is that because we have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection, we are able to live a new life. Our dying with Christ isn't just symbolic. There is real, present power given to us because of Christ's death and resurrection. He has defeated sin and death, and since we are united to him, we can also.

Marc Roby: The entire tone of Romans Chapter Six makes it clear that when Paul commands us in Verse 12 to not let sin reign in our lives, he is confident that we have the power, given to us by the Holy Spirit, necessary to obey that command.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is clear. Let's also take a look at what Paul wrote in Colossians 3:1-6; "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."

Marc Roby: That is a great passage to encourage us. We are to set our hearts on things above, not on earthly things. In other words, we are to think of eternal realities, not just the troubles and

trials of day-to-day life. And it refers to both definitive and progressive sanctification. We are told that we died already, which is speaking about the once-for-all definitive nature of the change. That is definitive sanctification. But then we are also told that we must put to death what belongs to our earthly, meaning sinful, nature. And that is referring to the process of progressive sanctification.

Dr. Spencer: The passage also alternates between indicative statements, in other words, statements of fact, and imperative statements, in other words, commands. Paul begins by saying “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ”. This is an indicative. It is a statement of fact for those who have been born again. We died with Christ and we were raised with Christ. And because of this fact, we are then commanded to set our hearts on things above. That is an imperative. And then Paul says that we died and our life is hidden with Christ in God. This is another indicative. It is a statement of fact. As you noted, it is speaking about definitive sanctification. And Paul again follows that with an imperative. We are command to put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature, in other words to actively participate in our progressive sanctification.

Marc Roby: And Paul closes the passage by reminding us that it is because of sin that God’s wrath is coming. In other words, we need to see sin as the enemy that it really is.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is very important. The whole passage also contrasts the heavenly with the earthly, or we could say the eternal with the temporal. As a result of our new birth, we are now aware of eternal realities. We know that there is a heaven and there is a hell. We know that we are sinners and deserve to go to hell. But we also know that we have died to sin and been raised to life in Christ. And these things should motivate and empower us to say “No” to sin. To not let it reign in our lives as Paul said. The commands we are given are based on the reality of our union with Christ, which gives us the ability to obey these commands.

And it isn’t just the apostle Paul who speaks in these stark terms.

Marc Roby: Yes, Peter also says the same thing. In 1 Peter 2:24 we read that Christ “himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”

Dr. Spencer: That’s a great verse. And, of course, Peter is quoting from the marvelous Messianic passage in Isaiah Chapter 53, where we read, in Verse 5 that “he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

Marc Roby: Praise God!

Dr. Spencer: Praise God indeed! He has accomplished for us what no man is capable of doing for himself. He has paid the infinite penalty we owed because of our sin and rebellion against God. And, as we have been laboring to show, he not only paid the penalty we owe, but he has changed us and is continuing to work in us to be conformed to the image of Christ. In other words, to be made holy and fit for heaven, to be sanctified.

Marc Roby: Very well. We have then two steps to holiness; namely, realizing that we are, in fact, dead to sin and alive to God in Christ and, second, not letting sin reign in our lives. What is the next step according to Rev. Mathew?

Dr. Spencer: It is very similar to the second and comes directly from Romans 6:13, which begins by saying, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness”. So, the third step is to not offer the parts of our body as instruments of wickedness. Mathew notes that this could be translated, “Do not yield your members as weapons of wickedness”⁵, which is more graphic. When we use any part of our body for wicked purposes – for example, if we use our eyes to view things we shouldn’t – then the eye has become a weapon, which sin is using against us. Or when we say things we shouldn’t say, our tongue is a weapon our sin is using against us.

Marc Roby: Yes, that is a graphic way of putting it. Even if we don’t allow sin to reign, just giving in to sinful desires at all is, essentially, allowing the parts of our body to be used as weapons against our own soul.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And then the fourth step to holiness is a positive command. After telling us to *not* offer the parts of our body to sin, Romans 6:13 continues by saying, “but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.” Or, we could again say, as *weapons* of righteousness.

Mathew points out that when Paul says we should *offer* ourselves to God, the Greek word implies that “we are to present ourselves to God wholly once for all. This is total dedication in the service of Christ our king. We are voluntarily putting our entire being at the disposal of God once for all. In Romans 12:1 Paul says, ‘Offer your bodies as living sacrifices.’”⁶

Marc Roby: Now that is strong language, that we are to be living sacrifices. It obviously harkens back to the Old Testament sacrificial system.

Dr. Spencer: It is very strong language, but it *is* what the Word of God says. Jesus Christ is our Lord. We are told in 1 Peter 1:18-19 that he redeemed us with his blood. We belong to him, body and soul. And he himself told us, as we read in Luke 9:13, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” The reference to the cross here clearly speaks about dying to ourselves; in other words, a whole-hearted commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. He is our Creator and our Redeemer. He has absolute authority over our lives and we should render total obedience.

Marc Roby: And, of course, since he is completely good, obeying him will always be what is best for us and for those around us.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it will. Which is why we looked at the biblical examples of Joseph and King David earlier. Joseph was sold into slavery and then unjustly sent to prison for an offense he

⁵ Mathew, op.cit., pg. 357

⁶ Ibid, pg. 358

didn't commit, but through it all, we are told that the Lord was with him. In fact, we are told four times in Genesis Chapter 39 that the Lord was with Joseph. In Verse 2 we are told, "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered". Then in Verse 3 we read that "his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did". In Verse 21 we are told that "the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden." And then in Verse 23 we read that "The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did."

Marc Roby: I think many Christians are disturbed by the idea that God could be "with" someone and be favorable toward him and yet allow him to be enslaved and then unjustly imprisoned.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. Many people find that hard to grasp. But that is because we have the wrong perspective. First of all, the purpose of creation is God's glory, not our earthly happiness. And, secondly, Joseph has been in heaven with God, enjoying perfect bliss for nearly 4,000 years. Do you think he regrets those years as a slave or in prison? Especially now that he knows they served God's purposes in bringing glory to God, bringing God's chosen people to Egypt and providing countless generations of Christians with great encouragement in their faith.

Marc Roby: Well, when you put it that way, the answer is pretty clear.

Dr. Spencer: I did sort of stack the deck a bit, didn't I? But the reality is that we *must* view things in light of God's purpose for creation and his eternal plan. If we don't, then we will be confused and troubled by many things that are perfectly understandable.

Marc Roby: That makes perfect sense. Are we finished with the steps to holiness as presented by Rev. Mathew?

Dr. Spencer: We are, so let me summarize. The first step is to recognize the fact that we *are*, in fact, dead to sin and alive to Christ. The second step is to not let sin reign in our body. The third is to not offer the parts of our body as weapons of wickedness. And the fourth step is to present ourselves as sacrifices to God, being fully committed to his service.

Marc Roby: And if we do these things, we will achieve a measure of holiness and, as a result, happiness as well.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we will.

Marc Roby: Well, that seems like a perfect place to finish for today. Before we close, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. And we'll do our best to answer.