

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. Last week we discussed how to live under grace, which is an expression that comes from Romans 6:14, where the apostle Paul wrote, “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”¹ And we noted near the end of that session that God provides us with what are called the *means of grace*. So, Dr. Spencer, how would you like to begin our discussion of the means of grace?

Dr. Spencer: I’d like to begin with Wayne Grudem’s definition, which we introduced near the end of our last session. He wrote that “The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians.”² Let’s take a moment to parse this definition. First, Grudem says that the means of grace are *activities*. In other words, they require work from us. We must be active.

Marc Roby: You mean that God won’t just shower grace on us while we sit around and do nothing?

Dr. Spencer: Not usually, no. God has his ways of getting our attention. And I certainly don’t want to imply in any way that grace is earned by our effort. It is completely unmerited. In fact, as we noted last time, we *merit* God’s wrath, grace is the opposite. But we can’t allow the possibility of someone misinterpreting what we are saying and erroneously thinking that he can earn God’s grace to prevent us from teaching what the Bible clearly teaches, which is that we must be active if we want to walk in God’s blessing and be useful in his church. God rewards those who work hard at serving him.

This is a very important point and a common cause of misconception and error, so it is worth taking a minute to examine it. It is, yet again, the issue of the right place, or role, of our works in our salvation.

Marc Roby: Now, we have been careful to state a number of times that justification is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. Our works play no role whatsoever.

Dr. Spencer: And that is clearly what the Bible teaches and is a critically important point, it is on exactly this point that the Roman Catholic Church diverges from true, biblical Christianity. But as we have also labored on many occasions to show, the Bible is clear in teaching that all born-again people *will necessarily* have good works. These good works are not perfect and are not meritorious in themselves, it is, in fact, gracious of God to accept them as good works, tainted by sin as they all are. But they *are* truly good works in the sense that they are motivated by a love

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 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, pg. 950

for God and a desire to obey and please him. And the Bible says that we will be judged based on our works.

Marc Roby: That statement will shock many professing Christians today.

Dr. Spencer: I'm sure it will, but it shouldn't. If you read the whole Bible, it is an unmistakable truth. Consider, as just one example, what we read in Revelation 20:12. John tell us, "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." When you look at this statement it is clear. There is a book of life, which is where the names of God's elect are recorded. That book determines whether we go to heaven or to hell and our own works play no role whatsoever in that determination. But then, in addition to the book of life, there are other books, which record what we have done. And John says that we are judged according to what we have done as recorded in these books. And just in case we didn't get it the first time, he repeats himself in the next Verse. Verse 13 says, "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done."

Marc Roby: That reminds me of what our Lord said. We read in Matthew 16:27 that referring to his own second coming, Jesus told us, "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."

Dr. Spencer: As I said, this is a clear teaching in the Bible. We also read about Christ's second coming in the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. And Jesus makes another statement to the exact same effect as the one you just read. In Revelation 22:12 we read that Christ says, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done."

Marc Roby: That is essentially the same teaching.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, the Bible never contradicts itself. And this doctrine is clear and repeated in different ways. To give just one more verse, in 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul wrote that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." Notice carefully what he said. We will receive what is due us *for things done while in the body, whether good or bad*. In other words, we will be judged based on our works. This point is so important, so clearly biblical, and yet so contradictory to most modern so-called Christian teaching and preaching that we must be very careful to emphasize both sides of the truth. First, we are justified by faith alone and our works play *no role whatsoever*. And, secondly, we will be judged based on our own works.

Marc Roby: Those verses do all make it very clear. Our salvation itself does not depend on our works, but once we are saved, our judgment *does* depend on our works. This logically requires that there be different levels of reward in heaven.

Dr. Spencer: It does require that, and also that there are different levels of punishment in hell as well. There are many other hints of that fact in Scripture too, but I don't want to get too far off topic. We are talking about the means of grace and I simply want to make the point that it takes

effort on our part to walk in holiness and seek out additional grace. Let's take a quick look at one of Christ's well-known parables, the Parable of the Talents.

Marc Roby: And we should point out that that word "talent" in this parable means a certain weight of gold or silver.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. And this is one in a series of parables in which Christ is telling the people about the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew 25:14-15 we read that he said the Kingdom of Heaven "will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey."

Marc Roby: And we are then told that the person given five talents goes out and earns five more, the person with two earns two more, and the person with one simply hides his talent.

Dr. Spencer: And when the master returns from his journey, he rewards the first two servants for having put their talents to work, but he sharply rebukes the third servant for being wicked and lazy and hiding his talent. And then he really surprises people by saying, in Verses 28-29, "Take the talent from [the man with only one] and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."

Marc Roby: That is often shocking to people.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. But it came straight from the mouth of Christ and we must strive to understand what he is teaching us. In his book *The Parables of Jesus*, James Boice points out that this parable, along with the immediately following parable of the sheep and the goats, teaches judgment by works.³ He then quickly adds that they do *not* negate other teaching that we are saved by faith alone, but, as he puts it, "an unbreakable connection exists between what we believe and what we do ... We are not justified by works. But if we do not have works, we are not justified. We are not Christians."⁴

Marc Roby: Yes, he makes the same point that we just made. And yet one that is often completely lacking in the modern church world.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. This parable shows us how God views someone who does nothing with the gifts he has been given, he is a wicked and lazy servant. We are to love God and we are to use whatever gifts he has given us, money, ability, opportunities or whatever for his glory. We are to serve the body of Christ and to transform the world. In 1 Peter 4:10 we read that "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

³ James Boice, *The Parables of Jesus*, Moddy Press, 1983, pp 203-205

⁴ *Ibid*, pg. 204

Marc Roby: And that verse brings us back to speaking about grace, and nicely ties this all together. The gifts that God gives to individual believers are a means of grace for other believers.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they are. The musicians in church for example use their gifts to help us worship in song. The teachers and preachers use their gifts to instruct and encourage us with the Word. Those with technical gifts help to keep the sound system working properly. Those with gifts of administration help to make sure the church runs smoothly as an organization, and so on.

Marc Roby: And everyone has a gift, even if it is only scrubbing the floors or washing the windows.

Dr. Spencer: Both of which you and I have done at different times in our lives. So our gifts can also change over time. And both need to be done and shouldn't be looked down on. But I want to get back to Grudem's definition of grace. He wrote that "The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians." We have seen that the fact these means of grace are *activities* implies that we must be active, we have work to do. But then Grudem goes on to say that these activities occur "within the fellowship of the church", which is an important addition.

Marc Roby: In other words, we can't just live for ourselves. We need each other.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. There is no such thing as a lone-Ranger Christian. We are all commanded to be a part of a local church and we need one another to live a victorious Christian life. I quoted a small part of Romans 12 last week, and let me read a somewhat longer passage. In Romans 12:4-8 we read, "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

Marc Roby: That's a wonderful passage, and it makes me think of Ephesians 4:11-13 where Paul tells us that Christ, "gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Dr. Spencer: And that passage illustrates Grudem's point about the means of grace being activities within the fellowship of the church. Paul said that our works of service have a purpose, they are done *so that* the body of Christ, in other words the church as a whole, may be built up and we *all* reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and so on. We are not *just* individuals and our sanctification is not just an individual process. In fact, the whole body of Christ over all time is included in a sense. When we read about the lives of past saints or use things written by people who are no longer alive, we are building on what they have done and they are edifying us. In Hebrews Chapter 11, which is often called the roll-call of faith, at the

end, after all of these great saints of the past have been named, we read in Verses 39-40, that “These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

Marc Roby: That is amazing. There is a sense in which the entire church will reach ultimate perfection at the very same time. We will all receive our resurrection bodies at the same time and will begin our eternal life of joy in God’s presence as perfected and complete saints, body and soul, made in the image of Christ. Paul wrote about this in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, where we read, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

Dr. Spencer: Hallelujah! It is an amazing picture. A great promise. And it is all true. It is the goal of our salvation. But in the meantime, we have work to do. And getting back to Grudem’s definition of the means of grace, he wrote, “The means of grace are any activities within the fellowship of the church that God uses to give more grace to Christians.” We have now seen that we must each be active, using our God-given gifts and resources for the benefit of others. And that we must do this within the context of the local church, where we all live and work together. And we then see that God uses our work to give more grace to other Christians.

Marc Roby: That paints a wonderful picture of the community of believers living and working together to glorify God and accomplish his purposes.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, the community of believers in the local church is a beautiful thing to observe when the members live in obedience to God’s commands. We all work together and complement each other – that’s complement with an ‘e’, not an ‘i’. In other words, we make each other complete, that is the meaning of the word complement. It comes from a Latin word meaning to fill up.

Marc Roby: Which is a good description of the church working together and being means of grace to each other.

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. But notice that Grudem’s definition says that God *uses* these activities to give other Christians more grace. It doesn’t happen without God blessing our efforts and our diligence; both must be present. For example, when someone plays the piano in church for us to sing a hymn, that doesn’t automatically confer grace on everyone present. But God can use that as a means of grace. He must work in the people who are singing and, I might add, they must also work, to focus on the words and to truly worship God. In that way the music becomes a means of grace.

Marc Roby: Now, when you said that we are to use our gifts within the context of the local church, I’m sure you didn’t mean to imply that we shouldn’t also use our gifts to serve those who are outside the church.

Dr. Spencer: Oh, no, of course not. I was only speaking about the ways in which our gifts are used as a means of grace to other Christians, which will most often be in the context of the local

church. But our gifts can also be used as a means of grace to Christians who are not part of our local church and even as a means of grace to bring others *into* the church. And, finally, even for those who are not believers and will never become believers, our gifts can still redound to the glory of God and can help make our society a more orderly, peaceful and prosperous place for everyone to live.

Marc Roby: Which also helps the church because it can then focus on worship, spiritual instruction, evangelism and so on.

Dr. Spencer: That's right.

Marc Roby: Okay. That took quite a bit of time, but I think we have a good understanding of the definition of the means of grace. And I think that this is a good place to finish for today, so we'll have to continue our conversation on the means of grace next time. I'd like to remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We'd love to hear from you.