

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 particularly, the means of grace. We are in the midst of discussing prayer and in our last two sessions we looked at the first two requisites of acceptable prayer according to Charles Hodge; namely, sincerity and reverence for God¹. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: In light of the fact that this coming Sunday is Easter, I'd like to use our time today to dive a little deeper into the topic we covered last week, our need for having a deep reverence for God. The resurrection presents us with a wonderful opportunity for reverence because it confronts us directly with the power and justice of the true and living God. But the resurrection confronts us with something in addition to the power and justice of God, somethings which is wonderful and amazing beyond description.

Marc Roby: What do you have in mind?

Dr. Spencer: The love of God.

Marc Roby: Well, God's love certainly is wonderful and amazing. And we spoke of this love last week. I quoted Jesus, who spoke of the incredible depth of this love when he said, as we read in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."²

Dr. Spencer: That verse does show us the immensity of God's love. And we also noted last week that it is the perfect love of God which is able to drive out fear as we saw from 1 John 4:18, which says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." Love is of paramount importance. When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus responded, in Matthew 22:37-38, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment."

Marc Roby: And Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he was. And that verse is a part of a very important passage, which begins with what is called the Shema because the first word of the passage in Hebrew is shema, which means to hear.

Marc Roby: Pious Jews still recite the Shema every day. It is Deuteronomy 6:4, which says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's true, many Jews do still recite that verse daily. And it is worth quoting the short passage which follows, and from which Jesus was quoting. In Deuteronomy 6:5-9, God

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans, 1997, Vol. III, pp 701-702

² 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.™.

spoke through Moses, saying, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

Marc Roby: Those verses leave little doubt about how important God considers his commands to be.

Dr. Spencer: Oh, you’re right, they don’t leave any doubt at all. And if we want our prayers to be acceptable, God’s law needs to be important to us as well. We are to have his law written on our hearts. We are to teach our children. We are to talk about it all the time. We are to tie God’s laws as symbols on our hands, bind them on our foreheads and write them on our doorframes.

Marc Roby: And many Jews still take these commands literally. They wear their phylacteries on their arms and heads during prayer and have small boxes on the doorframes of their houses. These phylacteries and boxes contain verses from the Hebrew Bible.

Dr. Spencer: That’s all very true. And although many churches and so-called Christian writers often speak as though God’s commands are completely unimportant for us as Christians, that idea is completely unbiblical. We agree with Paul, who wrote in Romans 3:28 that “a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” But that statement in no way implies that keeping God’s law is unimportant or unnecessary.

We must remember that this is the same Paul who, in the beginning of the same letter, wrote, in Romans 1:5, that through Jesus Christ, “and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.” Faith produces obedience precisely because true faith results from new birth. And the same new nature that causes us to believe and be saved also drives us to obey. We are new creations as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Marc Roby: Yes, that makes me think of the great passage in Ezekiel where the prophet speaks about new birth. In Ezekiel 36:26-27 God tells us, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Dr. Spencer: That is a great passage to make this point. God gives us a new heart and a new spirit. And that is speaking about regeneration, or new birth. And he puts his Spirit in us, which is the indwelling Holy Spirit, to *move* us to follow his decrees and keep his laws. That is the obedience of faith about which Paul wrote in Romans 1:5. And, as we saw, the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God wholeheartedly.

Marc Roby: And the importance of love doesn’t end there, Jesus also said, in Matthew 22:39, that the second greatest commandment was to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Dr. Spencer: In fact, in Romans 13:10 Paul tells us that “love is the fulfillment of the law.” We are to love God first and foremost, and we are to love others. But we must remember what love means. In the Bible, it is not primarily a feeling, it is action. Jesus said in John 14:23 that “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.”

Marc Roby: And he said essentially the same thing at other times as well.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he did. Obedience is an expression of love for God. So, while we are not justified based on our obedience, if a man doesn't obey, it is reasonable to conclude that he has not been born again and is not, therefore, justified.

And love for other people is again, not primarily a feeling. It is action. In the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10 Jesus addressed this exact issue. He made it clear that loving your neighbor means to help him when he is in need. And, of course, the greatest help every single human being needs is to be saved from his sins. Therefore, the greatest way we can show our love for others is by sharing the gospel with them.

Marc Roby: Yes, I agree. But it seems as though we have strayed from the topic of reverence and its relation to the resurrection of Jesus Christ on That first Easter Sunday.

Dr. Spencer: Well, not really. Reverence is not in any way opposed to love. In fact, I would maintain that proper reverence for God includes both love and fear. And I think this is supported by the same passage in Deuteronomy that we have been looking at. Right before giving the people the famous Shema and the passage about loving God and keeping his commands, Moses tells the people in Deuteronomy 6:1-2, “These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.”

Marc Roby: That is interesting. Moses first lists fear as a motive for obeying God, but then immediately speaks about the need to love God as well.

Dr. Spencer: We tend to think of love and fear as being contradictory, but they aren't. A proper reverential fear of God goes along with real love for God. And this all ties into the resurrection of Christ and Easter because the resurrection of Christ proves that this life is not all there is. We all die. So, death itself is not a surprise nor is it big news. The important question, which the resurrection forces us to address, is, “Where do we go when we die?” The resurrection of Christ proves that death is not the end of existence, it confronts us with the need to make a decision about God.

Marc Roby: Paul made the same point about the importance of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15. He first made a negative statement, he wrote, in Verses 13-14, that “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, Paul was always direct and logical. He knew that there were many at that time, as there certainly are today, who believed that when our physical bodies die, that is the end of life. And he had just gone over some of the evidence for the resurrection, focusing on Christ's personal appearance to many people and pointing out, in Verse 6, that most of those people were still alive at that time.

Marc Roby: Which, of course, a challenge to his listeners. Essentially saying, "Go! Talk to these people. Find out for yourselves what happened."

Dr. Spencer: That was obviously his point. And a similar point can be made today. We can't speak to those eye witnesses of course, but there is ample evidence that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a true historical event, so people should look at the evidence. And if they do, they will find themselves confronted with the reality of the risen Christ.

Marc Roby: Can you briefly outline some of that evidence?

Dr. Spencer: Yes, very briefly. The resurrection of Christ is one of the best attested events in all of ancient history and there can be no doubt about its truth. First and foremost, the Bible itself. It is, as we have noted at length before, our most reliable book about ancient history³. It also presents us with many prophecies that were fulfilled by Christ's life, death and resurrection. And then we have the empty tomb, the undisturbed grave clothes, the inability of the authorities to produce the body of Christ and quash this new religion, the dramatic change produced in Christ's disciples, the growth of the church, the testimony of the eye witnesses and more. There is abundant evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Perhaps we will get into that in more detail in a later session, but I don't want that to be the focus for today. I'll just ask one rhetorical question to demonstrate the truthfulness of all that Jesus taught, including what he said about his own resurrection.

Marc Roby: What question is that?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I have to preface the question by pointing out something Jesus said. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Now, let me ask you and our listeners, "Can you name one human organization that has been around for 2,000 years?"

Marc Roby: Yes, I see your point. The Church of Jesus Christ is obviously the only answer.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. No government or any other organization has been around that long. The church is unique. It was established and is maintained by the power of God, which was amply demonstrated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Countries, governments and empires come and go. But the church has been around since the time of Christ and, in fact, if we include the Old Testament church, which was based on God's promised Messiah, the true church has been around ever since the beginning of recorded human history.

³ See Session 7.

Marc Roby: That is rather powerful evidence.

Dr. Spencer: And so, we, as Christians, should marvel at the resurrection of Christ. Easter is the most important Christian holy day. As Paul wrote in the passage you read earlier from 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ has not been raised, our faith is useless. But, and praise God for the but, Jesus Christ *was* raised from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures. Christians have no reason to fear anything in this world. Our eternal destiny is secure in Jesus' hands. A Christian should have great joy in meditating on the resurrection, but as we discussed at length last time, we should also have fear. Our awareness of the fearful, terrible destiny of all who reject Jesus Christ is a great motivator to make our own calling and election sure.

Marc Roby: And it should also be a great motivator to share the gospel with others. When Paul spoke before the Areopagus in Athens, we read in Acts 17:31 that he said God, "has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

Dr. Spencer: That is a great verse. The resurrection proves that there will be a Judgment Day. And Jesus Christ himself will be the judge. All who have rejected him will be condemned to eternal hell, and all who have submitted themselves to him as Lord and Savior will be saved. We will spend eternity with God in the new heavens and the new earth, the home of righteousness. But our eternal destiny is not the only benefit we receive as a result of Christ's resurrection. We also receive many benefits in this life.

Marc Roby: What benefits are you thinking of?

Dr. Spencer: Well, first, Jesus' death and resurrection are the grounds for our justification. In Romans 4:25 we are told that Christ, "was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." God justifies us when we are united to Christ by faith and that brings us peace in this life. We are free from the fear of God's wrath as we discussed last week and we have peace with God. Romans 5:1 says that "since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Marc Roby: And those who have peace with God can then enjoy the peace of God in this life, a peace that transcends all understanding as we are told in Philippians 4:7.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is amazing. A second benefit we receive from the resurrection is adoption. Our justification, which we just read is a direct benefit of the resurrection, paves the way for the indirect benefit of adoption. The third benefit we receive is that we have the Holy Spirit to guide us in this life. In John 16:7 Jesus told his disciples, "I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."

Marc Roby: That is incredible. I don't understand *why* Jesus had to wait until after he ascended to heaven to send the Holy Spirit, but I am very glad that the Spirit has come.

Dr. Spencer: I don't understand it either. But it has been pointed out by many that Jesus Christ is now, and from now on forever will be, both God and man. In his body he can only be in one place at a time. But by his Spirit, he can be with all of his people all of the time.

Marc Roby: That makes good sense. What other benefits do we receive in this life as a result of the resurrection?

Dr. Spencer: Well, we are short on time, so let me quickly list some. The fourth benefit is that the Holy Spirit, who is sent by the risen Christ and the Father, works in us and with us to sanctify us. Paul wrote in Romans 15:15-16 that he preached so that "the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Then, fifthly, the resurrected Christ is at the Father's right-hand interceding for us right now. Romans 8:34 says, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Marc Roby: That is truly wonderful. Please go on.

Dr. Spencer: I would say the sixth benefit is that Christ's resurrection proves the Bible, which is our ultimate standard of truth, to be true. And seventh, which is closely related to our sanctification, is that we are enabled to live a new life. In Romans 6:4 Paul wrote, "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." The eighth benefit I would list is that Christ's resurrection gives us great hope. In 1 Peter 1:3 we read, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead".

Marc Roby: To which I say, praise God! We do have great hope for a future in heaven with Christ.

Dr. Spencer: It is a glorious hope. And let me close by quickly listing four more benefits we receive from the resurrection of Christ. The ninth is that the resurrection gives us real power. In Philippians 3:10 Paul says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection". Tenth, the resurrection proves that we can depend on God. In 2 Corinthians 1:9 Paul has been telling the people about the hardships he suffered and he wrote, "this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." Eleventh, the resurrection teaches us that we must live for God. In 2 Corinthians 5:15 Paul wrote that Christ "died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." And finally, twelfth, the resurrection means that we are, even now, seated in heaven. In Ephesians 2:6 we read that "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus".

Marc Roby: Again, I don't understand that, but I rejoice in it.

Dr. Spencer: As do I. And so, I want to close by wishing all of our listeners a blessed Good Friday and a glorious Easter Sunday.

Marc Roby: And I also wish them all a blessed Easter. Let me close by reminding our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We would love to hear from you.