

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 have been looking at the requisites of acceptable prayer according to Charles Hodge and we are ready to look at the seventh and last one, which is that we must pray in the name of Jesus Christ.¹ Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to begin by noting that we have clear biblical warrant for this final, extremely important requisite. In the sixteenth chapter of John we read about Jesus telling his disciples that he is going away, which is speaking about his death and, ultimately, his final ascension. He tells them that he will send the Holy Spirit to be with them and that their grief will be turned to joy, which may refer to their joy at his resurrection, but ultimately certainly speaks about their joy at his second coming. In any event, in John 16:23-24 we read that Jesus told them, “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”² Notice that he twice speaks about asking the Father “in my name.”

Marc Roby: And what, exactly, does it mean to ask the Father in Jesus’ name?

Dr. Spencer: Well, Hodge does a good job of explaining this, so let me quote him. He wrote that “when one asks a favour in the name of another, the simple meaning is, for his sake. Regard for the person in whose name the favour is requested, is relied on as the ground on which it is to be granted. Therefore, when we are told to pray in the name of Christ, we are required to urge what Christ is and what He has done, as the reason why we should be heard. We are not to trust to our own merits, or our own character, nor even simply to God’s mercy; we are to plead the merits and worth of Christ. It is only in Him, in virtue of his mediation and worth, that, according to the Gospel, any blessing is conferred on the apostate children of men.”³

Marc Roby: That answer says a lot.

Dr. Spencer: I agree, it does. But let’s unpack it point by point. He first speaks about asking someone for a favor. He then says that when we ask a favor in the name of another, we are asking, in effect, that the favor be granted for the sake of the person named. Or, he goes on to say, that regard for the person named is the ground, or we could say the basis, on which the request is made. This is not a common thing among people, but it certainly isn’t unheard of.

Marc Roby: Well, for one example, the apostle Paul did something similar when he sent a runaway slave home to his master. The slave was named Onesimus and he had become a

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Eerdmans, 1997, Vol. III, pg. 704

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³ Hodge, *op. cit.*, pg. 705

believer as a result of Paul's ministry. But Paul sent him back to his master, Philemon, to be reconciled to him. His master was also a Christian and obviously knew Paul personally, so in the letter Paul sent with Onesimus, he said to Philemon, as we read in Philemon Verses 17-19, "if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self."

Dr. Spencer: That's a great example. Paul is asking Philemon to do a great favor to Onesimus, but the request is founded on *Paul's* relationship with Philemon and whatever it was that Paul had done for him, which most likely included leading him to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Marc Roby: In other words, a favor was being sought for Onesimus, but it was being sought on the basis of Paul's merit and not on the basis of any merit on the part of Onesimus.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. And that is a great picture of the gospel. When we approach God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ, we are doing something similar. As Hodge goes on to explain, we are asking the Father to consider our request based not on our own merits, but on the merits of Jesus Christ. We are, in effect, saying, "Based on the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ on the cross, the atoning sacrifice through which he paid for all my sins, hear my prayer." As Hodge says, it is only in virtue of Christ's "mediation and worth, that, according to the Gospel, any blessing is conferred on the apostate children of men."

Marc Roby: And when Hodge refers to the "apostate children of men" he is speaking about all unbelievers who are guilty sinners because of the sin of Adam, who became apostate by virtue of his disobedience.

Dr. Spencer: I think that's right. We have to recognize that outside of Christ, we are all sinful rebels deserving nothing from God but his judgment and wrath. It is only by being united to Christ by faith that we are justified in God's sight and that our guilt is taken away. Paul tells us in Romans 3:26 that it is only on the basis of Christ's atoning sacrifice that God can be "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." Our sins must be paid for, but the glory of the gospel is that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for us and so, as Hodge says, it is in virtue of Christ's mediation and worth that those who were once outside of Christ can receive blessing. They must be born again and united to Christ by faith.

Marc Roby: Now, we have spoken about the glorious double transaction many times. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 we read that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Dr. Spencer: That is glorious indeed. God takes our sin and places it into Jesus' account and then takes his righteousness and places it into our account. And in John 19:30 we are told that just before Christ died on the cross he said "It is finished." In the Greek, that is one word, τετέλεσται (tetelestai), which could be translated "paid in full". Jesus has paid the debt owed by all of his chosen people and he has paid it in full. That is why we read in Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus". There is no condemnation because, if we are united to Christ by faith, Jesus has paid our debt in full.

Marc Roby: Praise God! But that is only the first half of the double transaction. The second half is just as amazing, it is that we are given Jesus' righteousness.

Dr. Spencer: And on that basis God adopts us as his children. When we come to the Father in prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, we are claiming all of this. We are, in effect, saying, "Father, I am your adopted child, united to Jesus Christ by faith. He has paid my debt in full, and I am clothed in his righteousness, and on that basis I am making a request of you."

Marc Roby: It would be hard to have a better basis for prayer than that of a child.

Dr. Spencer: In fact, it would be impossible to have a better basis. But just appending "in the name of Christ" to our prayers is not some magic incantation. We must be sure we have the right to use that name. We must make our calling and election sure as Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:10.

At the end of the day, what I say about myself is of no importance at all. The question is, "Will Jesus Christ vouch for me?"

Marc Roby: Going back to the example of Paul and Onesimus, it was *Paul* who asked Philemon to grant the favor to Onesimus. It was not Onesimus who came to Philemon entirely on this own saying, "Please do this for me because of what Paul has done." Philemon needed Paul *himself* to vouch for Onesimus.

Dr. Spencer: That is an important point. And it is the same with our coming to the Father in the name of Christ. Anyone can pray and conclude their prayer by saying, "in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen." But if Christ doesn't add his own "amen" to our prayer, it will not be effective.

But, praise God, we are told in Romans 8:34 that "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: I remember you listed Christ's intercession as one of the benefits we receive in this life from the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Spencer: I did list it, yes. And it is critically important. Without Jesus adding his amen to our prayers, they are not acceptable to God.

Marc Roby: And it isn't just our prayers that depend on the divine approbation, it is also our eternal salvation.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is quite true. When we die and appear before the judgment seat of Christ, our claim to being a Christian is absolutely worthless unless Jesus himself says, "This one is mine. I paid for his sins on the cross." We must also remember the terrible warning in Matthew 7:21-23 where Jesus tells us, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

Marc Roby: Those are sobering verses to be sure. But if, in fact, Jesus acknowledges us as his blood-bought brothers and sisters, then we will have great rejoicing.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we will. Everyone who has been born again will be ushered into the presence of God for all eternity. We will see the heavenly Jerusalem, and what a sight that will be. The apostle John relates this vision to us in Revelation 21:2-4. He wrote, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

Marc Roby: That is a marvelous vision. And it makes me think of Psalm 87.

Dr. Spencer: Which is a wonderful psalm, and quite appropriate for our present discussion. It only has seven verses, so why don't you read the whole thing?

Marc Roby: Sure. The psalmist wrote, “He has set his foundation on the holy mountain; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are said of you, O city of God: ‘I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me— Philistia too, and Tyre, along with Cush— and will say, “This one was born in Zion.”” Indeed, of Zion it will be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.’ The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: ‘This one was born in Zion.’ As they make music they will sing, ‘All my fountains are in you.’”

Dr. Spencer: Hallelujah! This psalm is obviously about the city of Jerusalem, which was built on Mount Zion. It is where Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac, whom God then spared and provided a ram caught in a thicket as an alternative sacrifice.⁴

Marc Roby: And it is also where Jesus Christ was sacrificed on the cross to pay for our sins.

Dr. Spencer: Yes. God spared Isaac, but sacrificed his own eternal Son. And when the psalmist says that “the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.” The gates of Zion is a figure of speech called a synecdoche, where a part of something refers to the whole. So, what is meant is the whole of the city. And the city of Jerusalem itself is used as a metaphor for the church. So, this psalm is, ultimately, speaking about the true church, the bride of Christ as we saw in the passage from Revelation 21.

Marc Roby: And when the psalmist refers to Rahab here, scholars tell us that this is a poetic name for Egypt, so we see two of Israel's traditional enemies, Egypt and Babylon being counted among those who acknowledge God along with other enemies and rivals of God's people.

Dr. Spencer: And that paints a glorious picture of the fact that God saves people from every nation. There is no discrimination in God's church based on nationality, race or sex. We all have different roles assigned by God, but he saves all kinds of people. And now we come to the part of the psalm that I most want to talk about. We read, “This one was born in Zion.” And then, again, “This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her.”

⁴ See Genesis 22

And then, finally, “The LORD will write in the register of the peoples: ‘This one was born in Zion.’”

Marc Roby: And to be “born in Zion” is speaking of those who have been born again, or born from above and are, therefore, counted as part of the heavenly Jerusalem, the bride of Christ.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And the psalmist refers to the LORD writing in the register of the peoples, which is a reference to what is called the Book of Life in Revelation. Charles Spurgeon gave a wonderful exposition of this psalm in his *Treasury of David*. He wrote, “Never let thy praises cease, O thou bride of Christ, thou fairest among women, thou in whom the Lord himself hath placed his delight, calling thee by that pearl of names, Hephzibah, - ‘for my delight is in her.’”⁵

Marc Roby: That is wonderful. God’s people should always be filled with praise. It is incredible to think that God would take delight in sinful rebels such as us.

Dr. Spencer: Although we always have to remember that he doesn’t let us *remain* sinful rebels! We are being transformed into the likeness of Christ. We will be perfected and made ready for heaven before we get there. Christ *will* have a holy bride. But let me quote a bit more of what Spurgeon says about this psalm. He also wrote that “one by one, as individuals, the citizens of the New Jerusalem shall be counted, and their names publicly declared. ... What a patent of nobility is it, for a man to have it certified that he was born in Zion; the twice born are a royal priesthood, the true aristocracy, the imperial race of men.”⁶

Marc Roby: Hallelujah! By twice born Spurgeon is, of course, referring to those who have been physically born and have then also been reborn of God from above. That is the second birth.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is obviously what he means. And when he says we are a royal priesthood he is alluding to 1 Peter 2:9, where we read, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Christians should rejoice greatly in their calling. We are a chosen people. But that provides no occasion for pride. We must be humble. God did not choose us because we were better than anyone else. He chose us simply because he chose us. It is the work he does *in* us that makes us different.

Marc Roby: And praise God for that work.

Dr. Spencer: Praise God indeed. But now I want to tie all this back into our discussion of praying in the name of Jesus Christ.

Marc Roby: Please do.

⁵ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Hendrickson Publ., 2016, Vol. 2, pg. 478

⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 479

Dr. Spencer: We have been making the extremely critical point that our own profession of faith, while certainly necessary, does not settle the issue. It is what *God* says that really matters. Therefore, we all need to be extremely careful to test ourselves. We must never be presumptuous in our prayers or in any other way. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 the apostle Paul exhorts us to, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?”

Marc Roby: That is a serious challenge.

Dr. Spencer: It is a very serious challenge. And I’d like to close with one last quote from Spurgeon’s commentary on Psalm 87. He wrote, “May it be our happy lot to be numbered with the Lord’s chosen both in life and death, in the church-roll below, and in the church-roll above. Jehovah’s census of his chosen will differ much from ours; he will count many whom we .. have disowned, and he will leave out many whom we ... have reckoned. His registration is infallible.”⁷

Marc Roby: Infallible indeed. May we and all our listeners be found in that church-roll above. Are we now done with examining the requisites of acceptable prayer as outlined by Hodge?

Dr. Spencer: We are. And if we abide by them, we can approach God with great confidence and boldness. To summarize the requisites of acceptable prayer according to Hodge, we can say that we must pray with sincerity, reverence, humility, persistence, urgency, submission to the will of God, faith, and in the name of Jesus Christ.

Marc Roby: And I pray that all of our listeners will do that and will see many answered prayers. And I look forward to seeing what you have in store for us next week. But now let me close by reminding our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We will do our best to answer you.

⁷ Ibid, in two places I have left out the word “should” because in modern English the statement is clearer without it. E.g., Spurgeon wrote about the “many whom we should have disowned”, by which he did not mean that it was something we should properly have done, but simply that it was something we had done.