

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 examining the topic of prayer for some time. In our previous two sessions we discussed some errors that need to be avoided when we pray. Dr. Spencer, what do you want to cover today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to begin to look at what the Bible teaches us explicitly about prayer.

Marc Roby: The Bible certainly speaks of prayer often.

Dr. Spencer: Yes it does. In fact, if you look in a concordance for the 1984 New International Version, which we are using, you will find that the word pray in all its forms – pray, prayed, praying etc. – is used 375 times.<sup>1</sup>

Marc Roby: I might have guessed an even larger number.

Dr. Spencer: I would have as well. But I suspect that if I took the time to look more thoroughly, there are probably many references that don't directly use that word. But I also don't think it is worth a lot of time to try and get an exact number, the point simply is that it is a common topic.

Marc Roby: And it is a common topic because it is so important.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. In fact, we can see just how important prayer is if we look at how things were prior to the fall and consider the most important problem sin has caused. If you think about what life was like for Adam and Eve prior to the fall, what do you think was different than now?

Marc Roby: Well, it's very hard to imagine what that was like, there was no sin, no pain, no sickness, no death. But the thing that obviously stands out is that they had perfect fellowship with God.

Dr. Spencer: I agree that is the most important difference. The temporal consequences of sin, the sickness and so on, are terrible, and death is the worst, but we must remember that physical death is just separation of the spirit from the body, not the end of existence. So, by far the worst consequence of sin is the loss of fellowship with God. We are now his enemies.

Marc Roby: And that is a horrible thing to contemplate. But it is true of everyone prior to being born again. Paul wrote in Romans 5:10, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Goodrick, and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The NIV Exhaustive Concordance*, Zondervan, 1990, pp 899-900

<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.™.

Dr. Spencer: We definitely are God's enemies until we are saved. But it was not so prior to the fall. We are told in Genesis 1:27-28, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"

We were made in God's image and we were made for fellowship with him. He blessed Adam and Eve, and notice that it says he spoke with them. We aren't told exactly how this exchange took place, but it is obvious that they had a more direct form of communication with God than we do now.

**Marc Roby: It is impossible to imagine what that would be like. But I'm sure it was wonderful. And while fellowship with God is the greatest blessing, it is far from the only one. God has given innumerable blessings to mankind.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he has. In the more detailed account of the creation of man in Genesis Chapter 2, we read in Verse 9, "And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." The creation was intended to fulfill all of our physical needs and legitimate desires. It was beautiful, it provided food, it was a perfect environment. But we needed more. In Verse 18 of Chapter 2 we read that "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" And then God makes woman. This provided human companionship.

**Marc Roby: Which is another wonderful blessing. One of the worst punishments you can imagine is solitary confinement.**

Dr. Spencer: Oh, I agree. And Adam and Eve had perfect fellowship with one another and would, eventually, have had perfect fellowship with their descendants if they had not sinned. But I want to focus on fellowship with God for now. He spoke to them directly. The Bible doesn't dwell on this, it moves right on in Chapter Three to talk about the fall, but there is a very strong hint about this fellowship even in Chapter Three.

Right after Adam and Eve sinned, we are told in Genesis 3:8, "Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."

**Marc Roby: That is such a terrible and sad verse. Their guilt caused them to be afraid of their loving Creator and to hide rather than seeking his fellowship.**

Dr. Spencer: It is the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind. In fact, it is the father of *all* tragedies because sin is the cause of all human trouble. And, of course, God was well aware of their sin and he knew they were hiding. But notice the implication here. Had they not sinned, they would have enjoyed walking in the garden with God in the cool of day. It wasn't just that he showed up once in a while, gave them a command and disappeared. He walked and talked with them. We aren't told exactly how this is possible, but it must have been truly amazing. And that fellowship was lost because of sin. That is the message here. And in Christ that fellowship with God is restored.

In 1 John 1:3-4 the apostle wrote, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.”

**Marc Roby: That is an amazing passage. And it is also a serious challenge to all of us who are Christians. We have to ask ourselves; “Do we enjoy this fellowship?”**

Dr. Spencer: It is a serious challenge to us. Christians are to have fellowship with one another and with God. We aren't yet perfect, so our fellowship will be marred by sin. But it is also characterized by repentance and forgiveness. We are to love one another *as* Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her as Jesus commanded us in John 13:34, where he said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” In the Old Testament we were commanded to love our neighbor as ourself, but this new commandment is even stronger, we are to love as Christ loved us and died for us. It is to be a sacrificial love.

**Marc Roby: And our love for God is to be the greatest love of all. We read in Luke 14:26 that Christ said, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.” Jesus clearly was not teaching that we should hate our parents and siblings, that would contradict his other teaching. But he was making the point that our greatest love, our greatest commitment of all, should be to him.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he told us in Matthew 22:37 that the greatest commandment is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” And so, the point I have been making is that fellowship with God was the greatest loss man suffered as a result of the fall. But that is where prayer comes into play and that is why it is such an important topic. In his commentary on this passage, Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote that “the Christian life is not essentially an application of teaching; it is a fellowship, a communion with God Himself and nothing less.”<sup>3</sup>

**Marc Roby: But certainly, doctrinal teaching is important.**

Dr. Spencer: Oh, it is essential. How else do we know who God is? And how else do we know what pleases God? Lloyd-Jones is very careful here and he defines what fellowship is according to the Bible. He says that in examining what the Bible means by fellowship, “there are two things that stand out. Firstly, to be in a state of fellowship means that we share in things; we are partakers, or, if you like, partners ... the Christian is one who has become a sharer in the life of God.”<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby: Now, that's an amazing statement. It even sounds a bit dangerous.**

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<sup>3</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Life in Christ; Volume One, Fellowship with God*, Studies in 1 John, Crossway Books, 19, pg. 78

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pg. 80

Dr. Spencer: It is dangerous if we think it means that we can be divine in any sense of the term. We are creatures and we will always be creatures. But it is biblical. In 2 Peter 1:3-4 the great apostle wrote, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

**Marc Roby: I think many have been troubled by Peter’s statement that we will participate in the divine nature.**

Dr. Spencer: I’m sure many have been troubled by that statement. In fact, I suspect almost every Christian is a bit confused the first time he reads those words. But, as Mark Johnston wrote, “Peter is not suggesting that Christian experience is like the kind of pantheistic mysticism common in his day and prevalent in present-day Buddhism and New Age spirituality; he is not teaching that the Christian becomes part of the being of God. Rather, he is restating God’s original purpose and grand design for human beings at creation. Man was made in the image of God and was designed to exist and function in fellowship with his Creator. ... the fellowship man enjoyed with his God was lost through the Fall when Adam sinned ... But that perfect and unhindered fellowship will be perfectly restored for the Christian through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

**Marc Roby: And we must praise God for the wonderful gift of redemption. But Martyn Lloyd-Jones said there were two things that stood out in terms of the Bible’s notion of fellowship. The first is that we share in God’s nature in some way. What is the second?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, Lloyd-Jones writes that “The second thing is that as well as being partakers of God, we are partners with Him, sharers in His interests and in His great purposes.”<sup>6</sup> He goes on to explain that we get to share in God’s plan of salvation and we share, for example, in his grief, we are grieved by the sin we see in the world and so on.

**Marc Roby: Well, I have certainly experienced that. I now hate things I used to like before I was a Christian, and I love things I used to despise.**

Dr. Spencer: I’ve had the same experience. I think all Christians, especially those who come to faith as adults, have had that experience. We have been given new hearts, which means a new mind, new will and a new set of affections. We are, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17, new creations. We have been changed. But Lloyd-Jones goes on to add something to this second aspect of fellowship, he adds the very thing we have been discussing for many weeks, which is communication or conversation. He writes that “to have communion with God means that we desire to speak with Him and that we have the ability to do that.”<sup>7</sup>

**Marc Roby: And, of course, we speak to God in prayer.**

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<sup>5</sup> Mark G. Johnston, *Let’s Study 2 Peter and Jude*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005, pg. 11

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd-Jones, *op. cit.*, pg. 82

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 83

Dr. Spencer: That's right. Now Lloyd-Jones goes on to discuss the fact that God "speaks" to us in all sorts of ways. He directs our thinking and he directs our circumstances. He opens and closes doors to guide us and so on. But he also provides a stern warning against drifting into mysticism.<sup>8</sup>

**Marc Roby: And, by that word mysticism, you mean the idea that we gain our knowledge of God and his purposes through some kind of subjective, direct communication from God, as opposed to through his written Word.**

Dr. Spencer: That's exactly what I mean. Now, we do sometimes have direct communication from God as Lloyd-Jones noted, but that is *not* the primary means. We've discussed this at length before, for example in Sessions 22 and 142, but the written Word is our only infallible, objective communication from God. And so, Lloyd-Jones wrote, "The evangelical doctrine tells me not to look into myself but to look into the Word of God; not to examine myself, but to look at the revelation that has been given to me. It tells me that God can only be known in His own way, the way which has been revealed in the Scriptures themselves."<sup>9</sup>

**Marc Roby: Yes, that's a very important warning.**

Dr. Spencer: It is. But I think we have said enough to establish that prayer is a very important part of our having fellowship with God, which is the essence of true biblical Christianity. It isn't just that we believe in God and try to keep his commands, we *know* God personally. We can't see him or touch him or carry on a conversation like we would with another human being, but we can talk to God in prayer and then he speaks to us primarily through his Word, but also through our thoughts. through the circumstances of our lives, and through other human beings, particularly the pastors and teachers that God has placed over us.

**Marc Roby: And we are told in Ephesians 4:8-16 that our pastors and teachers are gifts given to the church by God to build us up in our faith.**

Dr. Spencer: That's very true. But we need to remember that we cannot have fellowship with God so long as we remain his enemies as we discussed at the beginning of this session. In other words, we cannot have fellowship with God so long as we are outside of Christ. Everyone who is outside of Christ is represented before God by Adam. When Adam sinned, we all sinned and lost fellowship with God. We then inherit Adam's sinful nature and we sin ourselves. We sin because we are sinners; meaning that we have a sinful nature. And because God is perfectly holy, he cannot have fellowship with sinful creatures. Lloyd-Jones writes, "Why is man outside the life of God? The answer of the Bible is that there is a mighty obstacle between God and man, and that obstacle is called sin."<sup>10</sup>

**Marc Roby: And we can't remove that obstacle ourselves.**

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp 87-97

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pg. 95

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pg. 72

Dr. Spencer: No, we can't. Our sin must be dealt with by God. In Isaiah 59:2 we are told that "your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." But when we repent of our sins and trust in Jesus Christ and his atoning work, our sins are counted as having been paid for by Jesus Christ and we are clothed in his righteousness. Isaiah 53:5 famously declares 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: That is the wonderful double transaction that we have spoken about many times. The classic verse is 2 Corinthians 5:21 where Paul tells us 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: And we have spoken of this so many times because it is absolutely central to the gospel. Christ died to take away our sins. Our guilt is gone. Our condemnation is gone. We will never die in the full sense of that term. When God looks at us, he doesn't see our sins, he sees the righteousness of Christ because we are now represented by Christ. And, as a result, our fellowship with God is restored, although not perfectly. We will have even greater fellowship in eternal heaven when we are fully perfected and glorified.

Marc Roby: That is a wonderful thing to look forward to, although I really can't imagine what it will be like.

Dr. Spencer: Nor can I. It is just too far removed from our day-to-day experience. But even though we can't imagine very well what it will be like, we can know that it will be wonderful beyond description and we have a very small foretaste here and now. Every real Christian will experience times in prayer, in reading the Word, in worship when God makes his presence felt. They don't happen as often as we would like, but they are real. We *know* that God exists. We *know* that he is in control of our life. We *know* that he hates sin, and so we feel awful when we have sinned. We have to come back to him in repentance and ask for forgiveness. All of these things are real and show us that we have a real relationship with a real person.

So, prayer is an important part of our fellowship with God.

Marc Roby: And this looks like 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 love hearing from you.