

**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 specifically, the means of grace. Last week we started looking at the responsibility of believers in making use of the means of grace. Dr. Spencer, what would you like to cover today?

Dr. Spencer: I first want to review something we covered before. The review will be preparation for finishing our discussion about the personal responsibility believers have for using the means of grace as we cooperate in the process of progressive sanctification.

**Marc Roby:** Okay, what is it you want to review?

Dr. Spencer: I want to remind us all that the process of sanctification is a fight. We looked at Romans Chapter Six when we began our discussion of sanctification back in Sessions 186 and 187. And in that chapter of Romans the apostle Paul speaks of both definitive sanctification – that is, the fact that our being born again brings about real, tangible, instantaneous change – and progressive sanctification, which is a process in which we participate in fighting to put our remaining sinful nature to death and to grow in holiness.

**Marc Roby:** And we know that holiness is essential if we want to go to heaven. We are told in Hebrews 12:14 that “without holiness no one will see the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is essential, because the new heaven and the new earth are the home of righteousness as we are told in 2 Peter 3:13. Therefore, if we are truly born-again Christians, and I should add that there is no other kind of Christian, then we are engaged in a battle to put our sin to death and to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. We see this, for example, in Romans 6:6-7 where we are told that our old self was crucified with Christ, “so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

**Marc Roby:** I remember that we noted before that this is the freedom that is ours as Christians, it is freedom from sin. Many Christians today would probably say that the freedom of a Christian is to be free from the requirements of the law.

Dr. Spencer: I think that is a common unbiblical view, yes. In other words, to put it in a way that very few would like, although it is accurate, many modern professing Christians seem to think we are free *to* sin without consequences. But the biblical teaching is very different. We have been set free from sin. We died to sin as Paul wrote, which is the definitive aspect of sanctification. But we still have work to do because God has not yet removed our old sinful nature. He has given us power to rule over it, but he has not removed it. Which is why Paul also commands us, in Romans 6:13-14, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of

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wickedness, 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. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

**Marc Roby: And when we considered that verse earlier, it led us into a discussion of what it means to be under grace. In Session 190, we made the point that grace is real power from God to enable us to put our sin to death and to walk in holiness.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, and back in Session 186, we quoted the Rev. P.G. Mathew, who wrote that “Holiness is the key to happiness.”<sup>2</sup> When God calls us to be holy, he isn’t telling us to do something that will make us miserable in this life while we wait for some later reward. He is telling us to do that which will lead to the greatest joy we can experience in this life. Now the idea that the greater reward comes later is obviously true. But nevertheless, even in this life, obedience to God’s commands is not a burden, it is a blessing.

**Marc Roby: That’s not the way many people view it. Even many professing Christians seem to think that God’s commands prevent us for having many joys in this life.**

Dr. Spencer: And the reality is that there is some momentary pleasure in certain sinful behaviors. That is why people are tempted to sin. No normal person is tempted to do something because it is painful. But the reality is that all sinful behaviors lead to major problems in this life; they are painful, only the pain comes later, after the momentary pleasure is long gone. Just think about the consequences of eating too much, or drinking too much, or being lazy, or committing adultery.

**Marc Roby: Yes, I’d rather not think about them. They all lead to unpleasant consequences.**

Dr. Spencer: Which is precisely my point. The greatest joy in this life is obtained when we abstain from sinful behaviors, they are simply not good for us. That is why Peter wrote, in 1 Peter 2:11, “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.”

**Marc Roby: Now that is strong language. Our sinful desires *war* against our souls.**

Dr. Spencer: It is strong language, but it is also accurate. We are made for eternity, not just for this short life. There are some activities in this life that can bring momentary pleasure, but which produce pain in the end, and eternally. God wants us to avoid these things. He wants us to be holy. But, again, being holy leads to the greatest happiness. Christians need to see that connection.

And we need to see that we are truly in a war. We have real, powerful enemies, often summarized as the world, the flesh and the devil.

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<sup>2</sup> P.G. Mathew, *Romans: The Gospel Freedom* (Volume 1), Grace and Glory Ministries, 2011, pg. 337

**Marc Roby:** And we are told in 1 John 5:19 that “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” Which is obviously speaking about the devil.

Dr. Spencer: That is true. And our old sinful nature also used to be under the control of the devil. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:1-2, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” So our enemy is, first and foremost, the devil. He rules in this world among those who have not been born again and he was the tempter who caused our first parents to sin, which then led to our inheriting a sinful nature. And each one of us was under his control prior to our conversion.

**Marc Roby:** Although the devil always tries to make people think they are, in fact, autonomous. I’ve never met a person who would admit to being under the control of the devil.

Dr. Spencer: Nor have I. He is very successful in hiding his rule. But he is a real enemy. And the process of progressive sanctification involves fighting against him and the vestiges of his rule. It is spiritual warfare and it is a daily reality for all who have been born again and adopted into the family of God. That is why Paul wrote, in Ephesians 6:12 that “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

**Marc Roby:** Yes, that verse is very clear. There are spiritual forces at work in this world to oppose Christians.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, there are. And, now that we have been reminded of this spiritual warfare, let’s get back to the means of grace and our responsibility to properly make use of them. The means of grace are given to us by God to help us in this fight. First and foremost, each believer is given the Holy Spirit to help us fight our individual battle.

**Marc Roby:** And the Holy Spirit is powerful.

Dr. Spencer: He is extremely powerful. Back in Session 190 I quoted Louis Berkhof, who wrote that the most common meaning of the word grace is that it, “signifies the unmerited operation of God in the heart of man, effected through the agency of the Holy Spirit. ... it is in reality the active communication of divine blessings by the inworking of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

Notice that grace is a work of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit must be at work in every means of grace for it to be effective in helping us win our battle. And we are guaranteed victory. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”

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<sup>3</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1938, pg. 427

**Marc Roby: That is a wonderful promise! Although we clearly must work, it is, ultimately, God who makes us stand firm in Christ. And the Holy Spirit is a marvelous guarantee. He is able to strengthen and guide us to victory.**

Dr. Spencer: In fact, the victory has already been won by Jesus Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit in applying that victory to individual believers is a particular emphasis of Chapter Eight of the book of Romans. It would take a tremendous amount of time to go through the chapter in any detail and I refer interested listeners to the Rev. P.G. Mathew's exposition of the chapter.<sup>4</sup> But for right now I just want to make a few comments that are particularly germane to our discussion of the means of grace and sanctification.

**Marc Roby: Well, let me point out that the chapter begins with the great declaration, in Romans 8:1, that "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus".**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, and Mathew says of this verse, "God has pardoned all our sins, clothed us with Christ's divine righteousness, and given us the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life of victory. Through regeneration God has given us divine nature. ... With God we can fight and defeat Satan, sin, and the world."<sup>5</sup>

Note that there are two things going on here. First, God clothes us with the righteousness of Christ and pardons us. The guilt of our sin is taken away. And then, secondly, God gives us the power of the Holy Spirit. Through regeneration, which brings about a real, tangible change as we have noted, we are given real power to defeat our enemies.

**Marc Roby: All I can say to that is praise God for his incredible mercy!**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, praise God indeed. And now I want to look in particular at the last part of Verse 3 and then Verse 4 of Romans Eight. Paul wrote that God, "condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." John Murray presents a lengthy argument to support his conclusion that when it says God condemned sin in sinful man, it "refers to the judicial judgment which was executed upon the power of sin in the cross of Christ. God executed this judgment and overthrew the power of sin".<sup>6</sup>

**Marc Roby: That's interesting the Murray refers specifically to the *power of sin*.**

Dr. Spencer: It is very important. Remember when we looked at Romans Chapter Six, we saw that Paul argued that the natural man is a slave of sin. He has no power to overcome sin. And we already quoted Romans 6:6 earlier, where Paul speaks about our union with Christ – specifically referring to his crucifixion – he wrote, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin". This is

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<sup>4</sup> Mathew, op. cit., Chapters 37-57

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pg. 452

<sup>6</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997, pg. 278

the same idea we just saw in Romans Chapter Eight. The enslaving power of sin has been broken.

Christ's work on the cross broke the power of sin for those who are united to him by faith. This statement is not just symbolic. The Holy Spirit works a real change in the hearts of believers. The power of sin is broken. And that is why Paul wrote what I just read from Romans 8:4, that "the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit."

**Marc Roby: In other words, we are free to not sin, but to keep God's law instead as we noted earlier.**

Dr. Spencer: Precisely. And the point I want to focus on now is that we are enabled to do this because we, "do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit." John Frame has the same understanding of this verse in Romans 8. He wrote that "the gracious work of the Spirit enables us to keep 'the righteous requirements of the law'".<sup>7</sup>

And so, let me now tie this back into our discussion about our responsibility in making use of the means of grace as we cooperate in our progressive sanctification.

**Marc Roby: Yes, please do.**

Dr. Spencer: The Holy Spirit is given to every true believer. But the Holy Spirit is not to be taken for granted and is not given in equal measure to everyone or at all times.

**Marc Roby: Can you back those statements up with Scripture?**

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. In Ephesians Chapter Four the apostle Paul is admonishing his readers to put away all of their old sinful habits and to walk in holiness. And in the midst of this he tells them, in Ephesians 4:30, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Now clearly, if we can grieve the Holy Spirit, we should not take his working in us for granted.

The Holy Spirit is not some power given to us to use, he is the third person of the Holy Trinity. He is God. And he works in us to make us holy. He is sometimes referred to as the resident boss. We should cooperate with him, but we are also capable of grieving him.

**Marc Roby: Which is something we should all be very careful to avoid doing.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we should. And the fact that the Holy Spirit is not given to everyone in equal measure is seen from the fact that we read in a number of places about people being filled with the Holy Spirit, which implies some greater presence than normal. Also, Jesus exhorted us to ask for the Holy Spirit. In Luke 11:13 he said, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

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<sup>7</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, P&R Publishing Company, 2008, pg. 915

**Marc Roby: So the Holy Spirit works in us, but there is a sense in which our greater cooperation, submission to the will of God and desire for greater godliness will lead to his being even more active in our lives.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, in fact, in Acts 5:32 the apostles were speaking to the Sanhedrin about all that Christ had done and they said, “We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” Which clearly ties our receiving the Holy Spirit to our obedience and strongly implies that we will have more of the Holy Spirit’s influence if our obedience is greater. Also, in Galatians 5:22-23 we read that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Now, it is obvious that different Christians do not possess these qualities in equal measure nor in equal amounts at all times, so we can deduce that our cooperation with the Holy Spirit affects how the Holy Spirit works in us.

**Marc Roby: Yes, that does seem like a reasonable conclusion.**

Dr. Spencer: And therefore, one responsibility of every Christian is to seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit to enable us to make use of the means of grace and to have the necessary power to put our sin to death and to walk in greater and greater holiness. We must fight the good fight. If someone claims to be a Christian but is basically satisfied with his or her life and doesn’t see any real need for change, I would have serious doubts about the person’s Christianity.

**Marc Roby: And so would I. Is there anything more you would like to say about our personal responsibility with regard to sanctification?**

Dr. Spencer: Yes. In Philippians 2:12 Paul commands us to, “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling”. Way back in January, right after we started looking at the topic of sanctification, we received a question from one of our listeners and I want to conclude our discussion of sanctification by answering that question. I sent a brief reply in answer to the listener at the time, but the question deserves a more thorough treatment. The listener asked, “How do we fight against our sinful nature since God did not remove it completely and how can I overcome the sinful nature?”

**Marc Roby: Yes, that’s a great question.**

Dr. Spencer: I agree. And so, in our session next week I’d like to provide a more detailed answer.

**Marc Roby: Well, I look forward to that. Now let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We’d love to hear from you.**