

**Marc Roby:** We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. Last week we finished discussing the Christian's Armor. Dr. Spencer, what would you like to cover today?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I think it would be good to remind our listeners, and ourselves, of where we are in our outline. We have been going through what is called the order of salvation, or *ordo salutis*, and we have been using the order given by John Murray, with the exception of our having covered union with Christ first since it underlies the entire order.

**Marc Roby:** And I'm confident Murray would agree with that statement. In fact, he calls union with Christ, "the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he does. And we will come back to that point in a few minutes. But first, let's note that the order we are using is this: first, effectual calling; second, regeneration; third, repentance and faith, which together are called conversion; fourth, justification; fifth, adoption; sixth, sanctification; seventh, perseverance; and finally, eighth, glorification.

**Marc Roby:** And we are still on that sixth item, sanctification. Which includes both definitive sanctification, which is the immediate, radical change brought about by new birth, and progressive sanctification, which is the process by which Christians become increasingly holy throughout their lives.

Dr. Spencer: And this is a process in which we participate, although it is still primarily God's work. Paul told us in Philippians 2:12-13 to, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."<sup>2</sup>

And Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, that "we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth." Which shows that the Holy Spirit is the primary actor in our sanctification, but that it is accomplished through belief in the truth, which the whole of the New Testament makes clear also implies obedience to that truth.

**Marc Roby:** And God provides us with a number of different things to help us work out our salvation, which are often called the means of grace. It is these means of grace that we have been discussing for quite a while.

Dr. Spencer: And I think we have finished with what I want to say about the means of grace for now, so I'd like to move on. But before we do, I think it will be very helpful to remember the goal of the entire process of sanctification, by which I mean to include both definitive and progressive sanctification. We are told the goal in different ways in different places. For

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<sup>1</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955, pg. 170

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example, in Romans 8:29 we are told, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

**Marc Roby: Now, that is a lofty goal to say the least, to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, who was, and is, perfect.**

Dr. Spencer: A lofty goal indeed. And Paul also wrote in Ephesians 1:4 that God, “chose us in him”, meaning in Christ, “before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”

**Marc Roby: And to be holy and blameless in God’s sight would imply being continually, as well as finally and totally, conformed to the likeness of Christ.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it would. Those are two ways of saying the same thing. Peter adds even another perspective in his introduction to his first letter. In 1 Peter 1:1-2 we read, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

**Marc Roby: Those verses present a lot of information.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they do. But I just want to point out a few things that are germane to our present discussion. The apostle Peter says he was writing to God’s elect, in other words, to true Christians. He says that we are strangers in the world, which speaks about the fact that Christians are to be separate from the world in a sense, which is also part of the meaning of being sanctified, it means to be set apart for some use. We are to be set apart for God’s purposes. Christians have a completely different worldview from non-Christians. Our purpose is to glorify the true and living God, not maximize our own pleasure or serve some other man-made goal.

Peter also notes that we are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, which really means his forelove<sup>3</sup>, and that our salvation has come through the work of the Holy Spirit. But the most important thing for our present discussion is that we are chosen for a specific purpose, which Peter says is obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.

**Marc Roby: I think that idea of sprinkling with blood needs to be explained.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. It is really another way of saying obedience to Jesus Christ. It refers back to the time of the Jewish exodus from Egypt as pointed out by the Rev. P.G. Mathew in his commentary on 1 Peter, *Our Living Hope*.<sup>4</sup>

In Exodus 24:3 We read that “When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws”, which refers to the Ten Commandments, “they responded with one voice, ‘Everything the LORD has said we will do.’”

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<sup>3</sup> See P.G. Mathew, *1 Peter, Our Living Hope*, Grace and Glory Ministries, 2021, pg. 4

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp 7-8

We are then told that Moses wrote down all that God had told him on Mount Sinai, built an altar at the foot of the mountain and made animal sacrifices to God. After that, in Verses 7-8 we read that Moses “took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.’ Moses then took the blood,” which came from the animals he had sacrificed, and “sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

**Marc Roby: So, sprinkling with blood symbolized that the people were set apart as God’s people to obey the covenant he instituted on Sinai. The covenant that is succinctly described in the Ten Commandments. We could say that this sprinkling symbolized their being sanctified for God’s purpose.**

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. So, putting all these different perspectives together, the purpose of our sanctification is to set us apart for God. We are to be conformed to the image of Christ, which means to be holy and blameless before God, to be his obedient covenant-keeping people.

**Marc Roby: All this talk of holiness and covenant-keeping obedience is not the modern view of Christianity. Most churches today only speak about God’s love and grace in saving us.**

Dr. Spencer: Which is certainly true and important. God’s salvation *is* supremely loving and gracious. But if you leave out entirely the *purpose* of God’s saving us, you change the meaning and distort the gospel. At some point, it becomes a different gospel, which will not save you.

**Marc Roby: The purpose of the true gospel is to make us holy, which is necessary to save us. In fact, we are told in Hebrews 12:14 that “without holiness no one will see the Lord.”**

Dr. Spencer: Yes. But we should note that this kind of perversion of the gospel message is nothing new. The Lord’s half-brother, Jude, wrote about this. In Jude 3-5 he wrote, “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.”

**Marc Roby: It’s obvious that Jude assumes his audience is believers since he says that they share the same salvation. But he says it is necessary to contend for the faith, which implies that there is opposition to the true faith.**

Dr. Spencer: And the opposition was from men who had secretly slipped in among them, in other words, they claimed to be Christians. But Jude says they are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality. In other words, they were teaching that you can be a Christian and go on sinning. But Jude says that by doing this, they were denying Jesus and so he reminded his listeners that even though God delivered his people out of Egypt, he later destroyed most of them because they demonstrated their unbelief by their disobedience.

**Marc Roby:** Jesus said, as we read in John 14:15, that “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it may not be popular, but that is part of the true gospel. Our good works do not in any way provide a basis for our salvation, that is the grace and love of God alone, but as Paul says in Ephesians 2:10, “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” The church is called the bride of Christ and Christ will have a holy bride.

**Marc Roby:** I’m sure you are now referring to Ephesians 5:25-27 where we are told, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I had those verses in mind. And I was also thinking of Revelation 19:7-8 where we read about the wedding supper of the Lamb, who is Jesus Christ. John wrote, “Let us rejoice and be glad and give [God] glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.’ (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)”

**Marc Roby:** You’ve pointed out before<sup>5</sup> that these verses show that salvation is a gift since they say that the fine linen was given to the bride to wear, but also that we have work to do in our sanctification since the fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, both ideas are present. At the beginning of this session you reminded us that John Murray called union with Christ, “the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.”<sup>6</sup> The Bible uses different metaphors for our union with Christ as we noted way back in Session 180 and marriage is one of those metaphors.

The church is also called the body of Christ in Ephesians 4 and Jesus himself is the head of the body. We are also told in Ephesians 2:19-22 that we are living stones being made into a holy temple, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone and that we are to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

**Marc Roby:** And in each of those metaphors it is impossible to think that the church would be anything other than holy.

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. It is impossible to think that the bride of Christ, or the body of Christ, or the temple for the Holy Spirit would have any stain of sin. The amazing thing is that God is doing a marvelous work in building his church. He begins with sinful creatures and he then works on us to drive out all sin and make us holy. In his eternal plan he does not complete that work in this life, but only in the next.

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<sup>5</sup> See Session 180, pg. 4

<sup>6</sup> Murray, op. cit.

**Marc Roby: But God guarantees that he will, in fact, complete this work in each of his chosen children.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he does. And that is perseverance, the next, and seventh, item on the *ordo salutis*, which we are going through. But I want to be brief in our discussion now since we already covered perseverance, most notably in Session 131 as a part of our discussion of the acrostic TULIP, which describes five key doctrines of reformed faith.

**Marc Roby: And, just to remind our listeners, the acrostic TULIP stands for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.**

Dr. Spencer: And as we noted when we went through it, you can argue with the names used for some items, but it is such a common way of putting it that we are pretty much stuck with at least describing the terms used. And we also noted that these five points do not cover all of reformed theology, only the major points that were in dispute between Arminians and Calvinists.

**Marc Roby: Alright, and getting back to our present discussion, we pointed out in Session 131 that perseverance of the saints might be better termed preservation of the saints since our perseverance depends on God's preserving us.**

Dr. Spencer: That is very true. If our salvation ultimately depended on us in any way, we would all be lost. But God is faithful. We can know for sure that we have eternal life, not because of ourselves, but because of God's faithfulness. Now, we have the responsibility to test ourselves and make sure that we show the fruit of regeneration, but if we have been born again, we can be absolutely certain God will save us eternally.

**Marc Roby: That makes me think of Jude 24-25, where we read, "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."**

Dr. Spencer: That is a wonderful doxology and clearly says that it is God himself who will preserve his people. He is able to keep us from falling. But we have an obligation to be sure that we are, in fact, God's people.

In John's first letter he gives us a number of tests that we can apply to see if we have been born again. And then he tells us, in 1 John 5:13, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." This tells us that we can know for sure that we have eternal life if we know that we have been born again. It is God's faithfulness and ability that guarantees the end, not ours.

**Marc Roby: You mentioned seeing the fruit of regeneration, perhaps we should discuss what that is.**

Dr. Spencer: Fruit is a common and important metaphor in the Bible. The idea of fruit makes it very clear that how we live our lives matters tremendously. Both as a witness to the gospel and also as proof that we have been saved.

The most famous passage about fruit is in Matthew Chapter Seven, where in Verses 15-20 we read that Jesus said, “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”

**Marc Roby: That is about as clear as it can be. You can tell who a person really is by his actions. And the idea of being thrown into the fire is terrifying, so it is wise to be sure to bear good fruit.**

Dr. Spencer: And we are told in different places what good fruit is and what bad fruit is. Probably the most well-known place for that is in Paul’s letter to the churches in the province of Galatia. In Galatians 5:19-21 he wrote that “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

**Marc Roby: That describes bad fruit pretty well, although the list is certainly not meant to be exhaustive. And it makes it clear that how we live matters eternally. Paul said that those who live this way will not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, they will go to hell. And, regrettably, this list of bad fruit describes much of our culture as well.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. And Paul then went on in Galatians 5:22-23 to say, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” And, of course, this list is not meant to be exhaustive either, but only representative.

And, I must say that none of us see all of these traits in ourselves to the degree we would like, but we should see them to some degree and we should see them increasing over time. And we should see a hatred within ourselves for the bad fruit mentioned in the previous verses. If we see that in ourselves, then we have a reasonable basis for confidence that we are saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved on that day.

**Marc Roby: Very well. And I think that that finishes all but the last item in the *ordo salutis*. And that last item is glorification.**

Dr. Spencer: Which is, if you will pardon the pun, a glorious topic.

**Marc Roby: That was bad.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it was. But I couldn’t resist. And we will start the topic of glorification next week.

**Marc Roby: Very well. I look forward to that. And now, let me close by reminding our listeners that they can send questions or comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org). We love hearing from you.**