

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing our examination of ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church. In our session last week we looked at the church as comprising all those people who are the subjects of God's covenant of grace, while all unbelievers are still under the covenant of works. We finished last week without being able to look at the implications for Christians resulting from our being partakers of the covenant of grace. So, Dr. Spencer, how do you want to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I want us all to pause for a moment and consider the amazing love, mercy and grace of God and the tremendous privilege that is ours if we have been born again, which is what brings us into the covenant of grace. We are all sinners. If we stand before God on our own merits, under the covenant of works, we will be eternally condemned.

Marc Roby: And that judgment would be completely just.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it would be just. God doesn't treat anyone unjustly. But he does treat some with mercy, praise God! And we should be filled with joy as a result and we should desire to know God more and more and to know how he wants us to live. We should want to know *his* purpose for our lives and not try to figure out our own purpose.

I want to consider a somewhat lengthy passage in this regard, 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Marc Roby: Alright, well let me read those verses. Peter wrote, "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, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."¹

Dr. Spencer: That is a wonderful passage and it is packed with important information. Peter quite appropriately begins with praise and mentions God's great mercy, but then he immediately says that God has "given us new birth". In other words, he reminds us, and in fact glories in the fact that, salvation is a gift. We do not and cannot save ourselves. No one can do anything to earn his salvation and no one can repent and believe in the gospel unless and until God causes him to be born again.

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Marc Roby: That is, indeed, something for which we should be grateful and filled with joy!

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we should. And Peter says that we have an “inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade”. That inheritance is our ultimate glorification and spending eternity with God. Or, as the Rev. P.G. Mathew says in his commentary, “we can say that God himself is our inheritance.”² And our inheritance is absolutely certain. Nothing can destroy it and nothing and no one can take it from us. Peter says that it is “kept in heaven” for us. And we should ask, “Kept by whom?”

Marc Roby: And the answer, of course, is that it is kept by God. No one can thwart his plan, so if he has decided to save us, we will be saved.

Dr. Spencer: We will indeed. And Peter then says that “through faith” we “are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”. This tells us again that our salvation is by faith, not by works. And because we are united to Christ by faith we “are shielded by God’s power”. And that is speaking about this life, because he says it is “until the coming” of our salvation.

Marc Roby: And, of course, this doesn’t mean that Christians cannot be harmed by the world.

Dr. Spencer: Of course not. The world can do us great harm. But two things are true in spite of that ugly and sometimes painful reality: First, the world can kill us, but it can’t take away our eternal reward. And, second, the world cannot prevent us from completing the work that God has ordained for us to do. We are invincible so long as God still has work planned for us.

Marc Roby: And that is a great encouragement to us all. We don’t need to worry about earthly consequences so long as we are busy doing the work God has called us to do.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. But Peter also says that this salvation “is ready to be revealed in the last time”, which means it has not *yet* been revealed in full measure. We don’t receive our reward here and now. And so Peter went on to write that “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

Marc Roby: I don’t know anyone who likes the idea of suffering.

Dr. Spencer: Nor do I. But it is part and parcel of the Christian life. We obviously do not all suffer to the same extent, but every true Christian will suffer in this life. We can, however, rejoice even in our sufferings. Peter went on to say, “These”, referring to our sufferings, “have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Marc Roby: That reminds me of something the apostle Paul wrote. In Romans 5:3-5 he said, “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

² P.G. Mathew, *1 Peter, Our Living Hope*, Grace & Glory Ministries, 2021, pg. 17

perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

Dr. Spencer: That is the same idea. When God brings trouble into the lives of his children, it is for a good purpose. That doesn't make the trouble any more pleasant to go through, but at least we can know for certain that it serves a good purpose. And Peter said that our sufferings come so that our faith “may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor”. This glory, of course, belongs to God and not to us. We must remember that the purpose of our lives is to glorify God.

Marc Roby: And to enjoy him forever if I may complete the answer from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. And the fact that Peter says our faith may be proved genuine clearly implies that not everyone who claims to have faith is telling the truth.

Dr. Spencer: That is a clear implication, yes. The person may *think* he has real faith, so it doesn't necessarily mean that he is consciously lying. But his claim to faith may not be true. This is what Jesus told us in Matthew 7:21 when he said, “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.”

Marc Roby: Clearly those who come to him saying ‘Lord, Lord’ think that they are saved. So that is a stern warning to all of us to make our calling and election sure.

Dr. Spencer: We should be very careful to examine ourselves. And as Jesus said, we must do the Father's will. In other words, we must obey. And that is why Peter added that our faith being proved genuine “may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” God is glorified by the obedience of his people. Obedience even when they are called to suffer.

Peter closes the passage we've been examining by saying that “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” This last statement makes three important points about the true Christian life. First, he notes that we love Jesus Christ even though we have not seen him.

Marc Roby: And Jesus said, in John 14:15, that “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” What is the second important point from that passage?

Dr. Spencer: That we believe in Jesus in spite of the fact that we don't see him now. And to ‘believe’ in Jesus does not refer to some nebulous feeling without content. Jesus is revealed to us in the Word of God and he himself makes clear that we must walk in obedience to the Word. So, to believe in Jesus means that we accept the testimony given about him in God's Word and we are subject to it.

And Peter also says that if we have this true faith, we “are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy”. But we must be careful to not trivialize this and think that this is referring to being happy and free of pain or trouble. This is referring to a deep joy that will be there even in moments of serious personal pain and anguish.

Marc Roby: And Peter explains why we can have this joy. He said that we have it because we are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

Dr. Spencer: And that is the third important thing I wanted to get from this closing statement. We've noted several times before in these podcasts that there are three tenses to our salvation: *we have been* saved, *we are being* saved and *we will be* saved. The past tense refers to the fact that God chose us to be saved before the creation of the world. The future tense refers, of course, to our ultimate glorification in heaven. And the present tense refers to the fact that we can see God working in our lives even now. And that allows us to have joy in the midst of difficult circumstances. That is why Peter can say that we "are receiving" the goal of our faith. We don't have it in full yet, but we are in the process of receiving it. We are told in 2 Corinthians 5:5 that God "has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."

Marc Roby: And the Holy Spirit works in us to sanctify us. He leads and empowers us day by day to do the work God wants us to do.

Dr. Spencer: And we are told in Romans 8:14 that "those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." And now let me tie what we have learned about this passage back into the topic at hand, which is the church defined as those who are under God's covenant of grace.

Marc Roby: Please do.

Dr. Spencer: This passage shows us that our salvation is a gift from God, by new birth, which results in saving faith. And it tells us that we should have great joy even though we will have suffering. In looking at this passage we noted several times that our obedience is necessary. In Romans 1:5 the apostle Paul wrote that "we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith."

God is the Lord of the covenant of works and he is the Lord of the covenant of grace. There is only one Lord. In the covenant of works, people are represented by Adam, who sinned and brought guilt and death. And they inherit sinful natures from Adam, so they all sin daily and contribute to their guilt. They will be justly punished in hell.

Marc Roby: But, of course, we must note that those who are under the covenant of grace sin daily too. For example, none of us loves God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we do sin daily, but sin does not characterize us. Those who have been brought into the covenant of grace through new birth are enabled to repent and trust in Christ's atoning death. As a result, they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. He is the mediator of this covenant and in him they are forgiven and justified in God's sight.

Marc Roby: That is glorious news!

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is wonderful news. The best news in fact. And the major point to be made here is that Jesus Christ is Lord. He is Lord of both covenants, but for those in the covenant of grace, he has given us a new nature. We are born again. We have a new heart, a new will, a new mind and a new set of affections.

Marc Roby: As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

Dr. Spencer: That is the classic verse. And part of what it means to be a new creation is that we have the ability to obey God. We don't do it perfectly because God has not fully removed our sinful nature yet. But we do obey. If a man's life is not characterized by obedience to the Word of God, he is not born again. And that obedience is a heartfelt, willing obedience. Not a grudging outward conformity to some set of rules. Jesus Christ is our Lord. That is the basic confession of a Christian. If we are truly part of God's covenant people the main implication of this truth is that we will willingly embrace Jesus Christ as Lord.

Marc Roby: Of course, as you noted, Jesus *is* Lord of everyone, whether they acknowledge that fact or not.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, he is. But if someone doesn't acknowledge the fact *and* prove his acknowledgment is sincere by the obedience of faith, then he is not part of the covenant of grace. He is not part of the true, invisible church. And he will not be in heaven.

In Philippians 2:10-11 we are told, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Those who are part of the covenant of grace will make that confession of their own volition in this life and prove its truth by their obedient lives. Those who do not will make this confession against their own will when they are judged by Christ and condemned to eternal hell.

Marc Roby: That should be a terrifying thought.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it should be terrifying. It is meant to be terrifying because it provides motivation for us to seek God. Therefore, let me say again that the main implication of being members of God's covenant of grace is that we willingly embrace Jesus Christ as Lord.

And the heart of the covenant is stated a number of times in the Old Testament. For example, when God called Moses to go to his people in Egypt and bring them out of slavery, we read in Exodus 6:7 that he told Moses to tell the people, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.” That is the heart of the covenant: I will be your God and you will be my people.

Marc Roby: Yes, that is something we see a number of times in the Old Testament. And it is also part of God's promise to redeem his people. In Jeremiah 31:31 and then 33 we read, “‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.’ ... ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.’”

Dr. Spencer: That is the heart of the covenant of grace. And so, everyone who claims to be a Christian must ask himself some hard questions. Is the law of God in your mind and written on your heart? Do you live as though you are a child of the covenant? Do you live as though Jesus

Christ is truly your Lord? Or do you only have the outward form of religion? Do you think that God will accept *your* idea of what you should do?

Marc Roby: Those are hard questions. Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”

Dr. Spencer: And Christians should be very careful here. There is a tendency to listen to that passage and think, “Oh, I don’t love money. I’m not boastful or proud. I love others.” And so on. But do you really? Look at the whole list, realize that it is not exhaustive, and express it in positive terms. Can you say that you are generous, humble, obedient to parents and others in authority, grateful, holy, loving, forgiving and so on?

If you can answer yes to that without any reservations, I would say that you need to be very careful! Christians are sinners just like everyone else. Yes, the sins Paul has listed should not *characterize* our lives, but they are still present to some degree and a real Christian will see that, feel ashamed, and immediately want to cry out, “Oh Lord Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner!”

That’s why Paul said that these people have “a form of godliness” but deny its power. He means they deny the power of salvation to change your life and make you live a more holy life in obedience to God’s commands.

Marc Roby: Very well. I think we’ve answered the question of what are the implications of the fact that the church comprises all those who are partakers of the covenant of grace. The main implication is that they willfully and, in fact, joyfully acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and prove that their declaration is true by walking in the obedience of faith.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that’s a good summary.

Marc Roby: And I think that is a great place to end for today. Therefore, let me remind our listeners that they can send questions or comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. And we’ll do our best to respond to you.