

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of theology today by continuing our examination of eschatology, the doctrine of last things. Two weeks ago we quoted Louis Berkhof, who wrote that eschatology, “is the one locus of theology, in which all the other loci must come to a head, to a final conclusion. Dr. Kuyper correctly points out that every other locus left some question unanswered, to which eschatology should supply the answer.”¹ We have now examined how eschatology answers the questions left open by our studies of theology proper, anthropology and Christology. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: By moving on to examine the question left open by our examination of soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. According to Berkhof, that question is “how the work of the Holy Spirit at last issues in the complete redemption and glorification of the people of God”².

In asking that question, Berkhof primarily ascribes our salvation to the work of the Holy Spirit. He does this because theologians have typically said, with biblical warrant, that our salvation was planned by God the Father, accomplished by Jesus Christ and applied to us as individuals by the Holy Spirit.

Marc Roby: As you said, this breakdown is biblical. We see the planning of our salvation being ascribed to the Father in Ephesians 1:3-4, where Paul wrote, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he” – and that is obviously referring to the Father – “chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”³

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that passage quite explicitly says that it was the Father who chose us. And it says he chose us in ‘him’, which refers to Jesus Christ. Paul went on, at the end of Verse 4 and into Verses 5 and 6 to say, “In love he” – again referring to the Father – “predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” It is God the Father who predestined us, but our adoption is done *through* Jesus Christ, which refers to the fact that Jesus is the one who accomplished our redemption by his perfect sacrifice on the cross and by his perfect righteousness, which is imputed to us by faith. When you read those verses carefully, this distinction in the roles is clearly evident.

Marc Roby: But there is no mention of the Holy Spirit in these verses.

Dr. Spencer: No, there isn't because these verses don't speak about the application of redemption to individual believers. But if we look at what Jesus said to Nicodemus, we will see the role of the Holy Spirit brought out very clearly. In John 3:5-8 we read that Jesus said to Nicodemus, “I

¹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1938, pg. 665

² Ibid

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tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

These verses make explicit the fact that it is the Spirit, referring to the Holy Spirit, who gives birth to spirit. Meaning, it is the Holy Spirit who regenerates us and brings us spiritual life.

Marc Roby: Alright, well that brings us back to the question Berkhof said a study of eschatology would answer; namely, "how the work of the Holy Spirit at last issues in the complete redemption and glorification of the people of God".

Dr. Spencer: And as we demonstrated when we discussed soteriology, when a person has been born again, he or she is a new creation as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17. The old is gone, the new has come. And the first thing that this new creation will do is to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Marc Roby: That raises the obvious question of how people were saved prior to the time of Christ.

Dr. Spencer: And the answer is that they were saved in exactly the same way. The only difference is that we now know the name of, and historical information about, the Redeemer, whereas in the Old Testament times people only knew of God's promise to send a Redeemer.

Marc Roby: Who was referred to as the Messiah, which means the Anointed One.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. And the Greek word Χριστός (Christos), from which we get our word Christ, also means Anointed One. We can see that the mode of salvation was exactly the same in the Old Testament by looking at Ezekiel 36:25-27, where we read that God said, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

Marc Roby: I think it would be useful to relate this description of salvation with the one given by Christ to Nicodemus in Chapter Three of John's gospel. Jesus spoke about the need to be born again, from above, by the Spirit. Ezekiel spoke about cleansing by water and receiving a new heart and a new spirit. I don't think it is obvious to everyone that these are the same thing.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. It isn't immediately obvious. When Ezekiel speaks about sprinkling clean water on someone, he is obviously referring to the physical act of ritual purification used by the Jews and spoken of, for example, in the book of Exodus.

Marc Roby: Let me read Exodus 30:17-21, "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when

they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come.”

Dr. Spencer: That is the basis for the statement in Ezekiel. But in addition to the literal meaning of being sprinkled with clean water, the phrase has a figurative meaning as well, which is given to us by the apostle Paul. In Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul wrote, “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.” Paul clearly says that Christ purified the church by washing her with water *through the word*. The idea is that we are cleansed by hearing, believing and obeying the Word of God. And this corresponds to the Old Testament ritual purification, which also showed forth a hearing, believing and obeying of God’s Word.

Marc Roby: Yes, that reminds me of when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet prior the Last Supper. Peter objected and we read in John 13:8-10 that Peter said “No, you shall never wash my feet.” To which Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” Peter replied, “Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” To which Jesus responded, “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” Jesus was not referring to physical cleanliness when he said that they were clean, though not every one of them.

Dr. Spencer: You’re right, he was not referring to physical cleanliness at all. He was referring to the fact that his disciples had heard, believed and obeyed his words, though not every one of them because Judas was present with them. So, when God spoke in Ezekiel 36 about cleansing with water, he was figuratively speaking about the purification that comes by believing and obeying his Word.

But then he explicitly said that he would put a new heart and spirit in the people. This refers to new birth, or regeneration. The heart is considered the center of our being. It represents not just our thinking, but our will and our emotions as well.

Marc Roby: That’s why, when Paul was witnessing to some women gathered to worship at a river outside of Philippi, we are told in Acts 16:14 that “One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.” It was Lidiya’s heart that God opened, not just her mind.

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. And Paul used a different metaphor in Romans 2:29, where he tells us what it really means to be a Jew – by which he meant a child of God. He says that “a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”

Circumcision of the heart and cleansing by the water through the Word both refer to the process of effectual calling; that is, to a person hearing the Word of God and the Holy Spirit then causing him or her to be reborn and to respond to the gospel with repentance and faith. And notice that

God said through Ezekiel that he would move you to follow his decrees and be careful to keep his laws. Obedience is always the result of true conversion.

Marc Roby: Yes, Paul wrote in Romans 1:5 that through Jesus Christ, “and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

Dr. Spencer: That’s exactly right. Modern Christians don’t like the idea of obedience, they think it is opposed to grace. But that is untrue. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone, but we are saved unto the obedience of faith.

Marc Roby: Well, right after telling us in Ephesians 2:8-9 that “it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” Paul wrote in Verse 10 that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. Our obedience does not earn our salvation in any way, but it is the proof that we have been saved. Jesus said in John 14:23, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” I could quote many more verses from the New Testament, but we have discussed the need for obedience before many times, so I won’t repeat that here.

To stay on topic, we have shown that the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating God’s chosen people issues forth in their repentance and faith, which means that they have been redeemed. And there is no such thing as partial redemption. Whenever the Bible speaks about God redeeming his people it is always a completed act. There is nothing left for us to do in order to be redeemed, our works are simply evidence of our redemption as I’ve noted.

Marc Roby: Alright, so we have answered the first half of the question Berkhof says was left unanswered by our study of soteriology; namely, “how the work of the Holy Spirit at last issues in the complete redemption and glorification of the people of God”. We have seen that the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit leads to our complete redemption.

Dr. Spencer: And now it remains to be shown that our glorification necessarily follows.

Marc Roby: Well, Paul says that it does. In Romans 8:30 he wrote that those God “predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

Dr. Spencer: And that is certainly enough to settle the matter, but we can usefully say more. Paul also wrote to the church in Philippi saying, in Philippians 1:6, that he was “confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Marc Roby: Jesus also told us in John 10:28-29 that “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”

Dr. Spencer: We could quote many other verses, but we’ve made this point before so I don’t think it is necessary. It is completely unbiblical to think that God’s plan and his work can be

thwarted. In Isaiah 55:10-11 God declared that “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

Marc Roby: And so, if God’s purpose in sending his gospel to a particular individual is to save that person, we can be sure that the person *will*, in fact, be saved.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we can be certain. Most professing Christians want to maintain that natural man has the ability to accept or reject the gospel message. But that view is unbiblical. We have discussed this view, which is called the Arminian view, several times, most notably in Session 128, so I want to be brief in summarizing it today.

Marc Roby: And we should probably remind our listeners that we believe the biblical view is that put forward by John Calvin and other reformers, which is therefore called the Calvinistic or Reformed view. That view says that all of those people, and *only* those people, who have been chosen by God will be born again and will then go on to repent, believe the gospel and be saved.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. Arminians will usually say that the Calvinistic view is unfair because it says that a natural man has no ability to respond to the gospel offer of salvation and, therefore, that offer is somehow not a true offer. But God gives us a rather humbling answer to this objection in Romans 9:20 where Paul answered it by saying, “But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?’””

The point being simply that we are held morally accountable for our nature. And the fundamental nature of the natural man is at enmity with God as Paul wrote in Colossians 1:21, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.”

Marc Roby: And he wrote that to Christians – they also were originally enemies of God.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, we are all born that way. God must change our heart, which is called new birth, or regeneration, before we are able to respond to his offer of salvation. And, if we have been born again, it is impossible for our new nature to *not* respond to God’s gospel with repentance and faith. That is what it truly means to be saved by grace *alone*. We play no part whatsoever.

Marc Roby: But the same Arminians often object to the reformed idea that we must have good works to prove that our salvation is true.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, most do object to that. Which is somewhat paradoxical when you think about it, because if all men have the ability to respond to the gospel offer, then the deciding factor in whether or not I am saved is my *own* action of accepting or rejecting that offer. In other words, if I am saved, it is because of a work that I did. The good work of accepting God’s offer.

Marc Roby: Well, Arminians will object to calling that a good work.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, they will object. But that is, to be quite frank, a game of semantics. In the Arminian view, that personal decision is *the* deciding factor in a person's salvation. How can that not be considered a good work?

On the other hand, the reformed, or I could say biblical, view, is that no one can accept God's offer unless and until he or she has been born again. And, if a person is born again, he is guaranteed to accept the offer because he is new creation. It would be contrary to his new nature to refuse God's gracious offer. And then, that new nature also shows up in changed behavior, in other words, good works. But those good works are not in any way the basis for our being saved, they are simply the proof that we have been saved.

Marc Roby: Very well. In answer to our original question then, which was, "how the work of the Holy Spirit at last issues in the complete redemption and glorification of the people of God", we have shown that the Holy Spirit causes an elect person to be born again, and that change in nature guarantees that the person will repent, believe, be justified, go on to be sanctified, and will then be glorified by God.

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

Marc Roby: And it's also a good place to end for today because we are out of time. Therefore, I'd like to remind our listeners that they can send questions or comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. And we will do our best to answer you.