
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 28: APPLICATION

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

Old Testament Lectures:

1. Introduction
2. Creation
3. Fall
4. Noah
5. Abraham
6. Patriarchs I
7. Patriarchs II
8. Exodus
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New Testament Lectures:

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29. Mission
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Lecture 28

APPLICATION

Lecture Theme:

God applies Christ's completed work of redemption in history to every individual believer throughout time.

Text:

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29–30).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 28

Imagine a scientist who has devoted his whole life, all of his time, energy and resources, to preparing a cure for a deadly disease that kills thousands of people each year. Would he be satisfied with merely having developed such a cure if all that he achieves remains in his lab? Well, of course not. The purpose of his work is to provide for the needs of real people in hopeless situations. The fulfillment of his work comes in its application to those who need it. So it is with Christ. What is the purpose of Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, and ongoing reign? The ultimate answer is, well, to display God's glory, but the more immediate or proximate answer is for the salvation of His people through which He magnifies His glory.

Christ's work in history finds its fulfillment in every one of His people being brought to salvation. Where do we find Christ's ongoing work after His ascension? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in relationship to this work? How is the accomplishment of redemption related to the application of redemption? What is included in this application? What are effectual calling, regeneration, justification, adoption, and sanctification? And how do they relate to revealing God's glory in the world? Last time we explored the place of union with Christ in New Testament theology. We noted that all the benefits of redemption derive from this union. In this lecture, we will consider some of these benefits in the application of Christ's work of redemption to His people. This marks the transition from Christ's work for us to Christ's work in us. The biblical history of Christ's redemption is final and not repeated, but it is applied in the life history of individual believers over and over throughout time. This constitutes part of His ongoing work.

So, first of all, let's consider the ministry of the Spirit. We saw in an earlier lecture that at Christ's ascension, He poured out His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Christ's ongoing work would be mediated through His Spirit, Who would magnify the Son, take the things of Christ and show them to His people. The Holy Spirit

is the One Who applies the fruits of Christ's person and work to His individual people. We read in John 16:8, "And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." The Holy Spirit is Christ's great promise as seen back in Ezekiel 36:27, "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." The Spirit gives a new heart, faith to receive Christ, and carries on the work of sanctification in the soul. II Corinthians 3:18 says, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Furthermore, we learned that the Holy Spirit does all of this by bringing the believer into union with Christ, which is the source of all the benefits received in Christ.

We must now consider these benefits and the work of Christ's Spirit in the application of redemption. The application of redemption begins with calling and regeneration. We'll consider, first of all, effectual calling. The terms *call* and *calling* are used in two different ways. This has been frequently distinguished by the terms *external call* and *internal call*. The external call is the simple presentation of the gospel. It includes setting forth the promise of the gospel as the warrant for saving faith and repentance. It is addressed universally to all those who hear the gospel. Therefore, it is obviously broader than election. Jesus says in Matthew 22:14, "For many are called, but few are chosen."

The internal or effectual call is the work of God efficaciously and savingly applying the gospel to the soul of an individual. The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, [is] the efficacious supplier of effectual calling. John 6:63 says, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing." What does this entail? We learned that the Spirit convinces of sin and misery, that the Spirit enlightens the mind to understand the truth and renews the will, and the elect are thereby persuaded and enabled to embrace Christ freely offered in the gospel. At some point in time, the external call and the internal call take place simultaneously in the elect, whereas others remain unchanged under the external call. It is only made effectual by the Holy Spirit in the heart of His people.

The word *calling* in Scripture refers to the internal or effectual call the vast majority of the time; and think of a few of the characteristics of effectual calling. It is the divine summons which actually unites the believer to Christ. It is based on the sovereign eternal decree of God, and it is through the irresistible and persuasive power of the Spirit. Effectual calling is closely connected to regeneration.

The New Testament uses a few words for regeneration. It speaks of the rebirth and regeneration, and of one who is begat again. It refers to being born from above. Regeneration is often referred to as the new birth or being born again. It is that act of God by which the principle of new life in grace is implanted in man. God removes the heart of stone and gives a new heart of flesh, bringing the soul from spiritual death to life. The Holy Spirit comes to indwell the believer, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy. Jesus describes all of this to Nicodemus in John 3.

Contrary to Arminianism, regeneration precedes faith and repentance. Regeneration is the commencement of all saving grace in us. God's call requires, of course, a response of faith, but given man's depraved condition, how is it possible for him to respond? How is it possible for these to be brought together? It is God's grace and power in regeneration that resolves this tension. He quickens the dead through the new birth. Conversion, or faith and repentance, signifies the first exercise of the gracious disposition implanted in regeneration.

Being born of God produces these fruits of faith and repentance, and you can see, therefore, the glory of God in regeneration. God the Holy Spirit is the agent Who applies the work of redemption, including regeneration, to the elect. While the Spirit is the divine Initiator and Re-Creator, if you will, the mode regeneration is the rather mysterious as Jesus says in John 3:8. It is the Spirit who causes those who are spiritually blind to see, and the spiritually dead to rise, and the spiritually ignorant to understand. The glory of God is displayed in this grace, mercy, and love. We read in Titus 3:5, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

In terms of the history of redemption, the theme of our course, think with me. Adam heeded the call of the devil in the garden, and mankind was plunged into sin by the fall. This resulted in spiritual and eternal death. Christ's redemption results in the believer being irresistibly called by God, quickened, and raised to life by the Holy Spirit. Next, we should consider justification and adoption. Martin Luther described justification as the doctrine by which the church stands or falls. Justification answers the question: how can a person be made right with God and acceptable to Him? The Shorter Catechism question 33 says, "Justification is an act of God's free

grace wherein He pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.” This is expounded in places such as Romans 3, 4, and 5.

We learned in a previous lecture about the doctrine of imputation. In justification, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to the believer. This is a legal transaction of God crediting, or reckoning, declaring a sinner righteous in His sight, only through Christ’s righteousness credited to their account before God. It is a one-time legal act, so it’s not a process that takes place over time, and it is by grace alone and received through faith alone. You notice those last words. They mark a very important distinction. The ground, foundation, of justification is the righteousness of Christ that is outside of us. In other words, it is not the righteousness that is generated in us or produced by us, nor is it even our personal faith in Christ. It is Christ’s righteousness that provides the ground for acceptance before a holy, just, and righteous God.

The instrument of justification, on the other hand, is faith. So, faith is the vehicle, if you will, or the way of appropriating the blessing of justification. So, faith is not the ground. Otherwise, it would be the one good work that we contribute to our justification, which contradicts the biblical teaching that it is by free grace. We shouldn’t think of faith as something that provides the basis. Why are you acceptable before God? Well, because I did the right thing and believed, and my faith merits that. No. Faith neither brings, nor contributes anything. It is merely receiving what Christ is and has done and what Christ offers to us. It is believing, trusting, resting in what Christ alone has done.

So, if you think about the relationship of justification to good works, things should begin to become clear. Justification is not faith plus works equals salvation, so as if we believe and then do a lot of good deeds that are added to our faith and that results in salvation. Rather, if you’re thinking in terms of a mathematical formula, it’s not faith plus works equal salvation, but rather faith equals salvation plus works. In other words, the fruitfulness of sanctification flows by necessity out of justification. We can distinguish between the demonstrative aspect and a declarative aspect of justification. Well, what does all of that mean? In Paul’s writings especially, he’s emphasizing the declarative aspect. He’s emphasizing that God declares His people righteous in the Lord Jesus Christ, that Christ’s work is the ground. But, for example, in James 2:21, he’s emphasizing the demonstrative aspect, the fact that those who are justified by faith alone will demonstrate the fruitfulness of that lively, saving faith. So, he says that faith without works is dead; it should be accompanied by this fruitfulness. The reformed Dutch theologian Bavinck said, “Paul battles against dead work and James against dead faith.”

So, if you put these things together, we have what we could call the great exchange. You have the sinner, on one hand, and you have the Lord Jesus Christ on the other. And, if you take some of the pieces that we’ve learned previously and put them together, what do we find? The sin of the Lord’s people is imputed to Christ. So, it’s legally credited, reckoned, to Christ’s account. He doesn’t become sinful, but He bears the sins of His people. He assumes, as it were, responsibility, the place of the sinner. And so, that helps us understand the cross; and Christ is dying as a substitute in the place of His people. He has had credited to Him the sins of His people, and He pays the full punishment and penalty for the sins. He bears the just wrath and righteous indignation of God on their behalf and thus, satisfies the demands of the law, and appeases and pacifies a righteous God. That’s half of the exchange.

On the other hand, we have Christ. And, what do we see? In His ministry, His life, we find Him obeying fully and completely all the demands of God’s law. There’s a sinless record of perfect righteousness that is found in Christ. And so, the second half of the exchange is that in justification, we also see that righteousness of Christ credited, legally reckoned, to the Lord’s people so that when God looks upon His people, He sees them clothed in the righteous garments of the Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore, on the merits of Christ, they are acceptable before Him and received by Him. And so, this is the great exchange: sins of God’s people placed on Christ, Christ’s righteousness credited to His own people for their salvation. In connection with this, we can also think about adoption. This is a beautiful part of the application of redemption. The Puritan John Owen wrote, “If the love of a father will not make a child delight in Him, what will?” Adoption, like justification, is a legal one-time act.

Justification pertains to our being accepted as righteous in God’s presence. Adoption pertains to our acceptance as sons and daughters and becoming part of His family. You think of Romans 8:14–17, Galatians 4:4–7, and I John 3:1–2. Both justification and adoption pertain to our status before God, and this adoption brings with it all sorts of privileges. God’s name is put on us. We have access to His throne with boldness. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time

of need.” Another privilege is that we’re enabled to cry, “Abba, Father,” as we see in Galatians 4. We’re pitied, protected, and provided for by Him, Psalm 103:13–14, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”

Another privilege is that we are chastened by Him. There’s that wonderful passage in Hebrews 12 beginning in verse 5 and following where the Lord says the chastening of the Lord is actually proof or evidence that he’s the Father. We don’t chasten children [who] live down the street [who] are not part of our own household. The Lord shows His love and training, and in bringing forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness in the life of His people, and our inheritance. We have an inheritance as children, and that includes the promises and everything that is involved in everlasting salvation, heaven, and glory. The Lord also gives us the spirit of adoption as we see in Romans 8 and Galatians 4. And this goes beyond merely bestowing objective promises to the witness of the Spirit to these facts.

This includes the creation of filial trust and affection within God’s people. It also includes, however, the joint witness of our spirits with God’s Spirit that we are His children. God graciously stirs up our hearts to draw near to Him and have confirmed that He is our Father. Again, in terms of the history of redemption—think with me—God drove Adam out of the garden at the fall, leaving him alienated and cut off. This also resulted in the imputation of Adam’s sin to all his posterity. In Christ’s work of redemption, Jesus secured a record of perfect righteousness to be imputed to His people. He opened a way for acceptance with God and for reception into His family as children of the living God.

Another benefit of union with Christ includes what we call *sanctification*. Again, the Shorter Catechism has a helpful definition in question 35. It says, “Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man, after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and to live unto righteousness.” Unlike justification and adoption, which are a one-time, definitive act of God, sanctification is an ongoing work. It is a process, an ongoing work of the Spirit. It is the process by which the believer dies to sin and is renewed in holiness after the likeness of Christ and conformed to His image. This is an important part of redemption. Remember Romans 8:29, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” We are to be holy as He is holy. This is connected to a proper view, a biblical view of good works. John 15:1–8 makes clear that the fruitfulness of good works flows from our union with Christ, the branch engrafted into the vine. So, if there is no fruit, no good works, then there is no root, no conversion, no saving faith. Sanctification is evidenced by gospel fruitfulness.

Going back to James 2, you see this in verses 14–26, which says that faith without the demonstration of works is not true saving faith. And there are many other passages, for example I Peter 2:12, that teach that our chief end is to glorify God, and God is glorified through the believers’ good works. Well what does that mean? What are these good works? What is the nature of them? Well, the ability to do good works comes directly from the work and constant influence of the Holy Spirit, which requires believers to dependently draw upon Him for grace and energy to do what the Word requires. These good works must be in obedience to the commands given by God in His Word. So, they cannot be acts stemming from additions to the Scriptures and based only on human authority.

Believers must be diligent in performing the duties prescribed by God and in stirring up the grace of God that is in them, but the works of believers are not meritorious. They don’t earn something. We’re not paying for salvation. They cannot bolster, if you will, our standing or acceptance with God, satisfy the debt of our sins, or earn eternal life in reference to justification. But, the persons of believers and their good works are accepted in Christ as covered by His merits, and thus bringing glory to God. He rewards the good works of believers when done in genuine faith and love, even though they’re fraught with imperfection. The works of the unregenerate cannot please God because they do not come from a heart purified by faith, are not done in love and repentance toward God, and are not done to God’s glory. Think of some of the benefits of good works in the believer. Well, they strengthen his assurance. They adorn the profession of the gospel. They are a means of expressing our thankfulness and love to God. They also edify the brethren, while shutting the mouths of God’s enemies. And, they bring glory to our heavenly Father. And so, in all of this, they testify to our progress in holiness. Well, we can connect this to the big story of the history of redemption as well.

In our earlier lecture on creation, they learned that man was made in the image of God and that this consisted of a broad aspect and a narrow aspect. After the fall, man retained the broad aspect. He's still a moral, rational creature, but he lost that narrower aspect, the narrow aspect consisting of spiritual knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. But, in Christ's salvation, he secures the recovery of this. We learn this in places like Colossians 3:10, Ephesians 4:24, and Romans 8:29. We learn that the believer is renewed after the likeness of Christ and knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

The glory of God is displayed in and through His people and the fruitfulness of their salvation, all of which magnifies God's glory. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Well, you'll learn far more about the matters we've covered here in your future studies of systematic theology, but our survey in this lecture does not bring us to the end of the application of redemption. The final consummation of salvation comes in the believers' glorification, but we will consider that in our last lecture.

In conclusion, we have seen that God applies Christ's completed work of redemption in history to every individual believer throughout time. In order for this to take place, Christ's gospel must first be taken to them. So, in the next lecture, we will consider the commission that God gave to His church to take His message of redemption to every creature throughout the world.