



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.2.3 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

Justification by Grace

In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul specifically says that all persons are **“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:24). The term **“grace”** in this context means that our justification and the forgiveness we receive from God has not been earned, merited, or deserved by us in any way, but that it is a free gift from God that has been won for us by the sacrificial suffering and death of our Lord Jesus. It is because of Christ’s redemption that God can freely forgive us. It costs us nothing; it cost Jesus His life. **“In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”** (Ephesians 1:7).

The contrast between grace and our efforts is stated plainly by the apostle Paul: **“If by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work”** (Romans 11:6). Paul makes the same claim in his letter to the Ephesians: **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Ephesians 2:8-9). Forgiveness of sins (justification) is not something God owes us because of some quality in us. It is not payment from God for our works or even for our faith. It is a matter of grace, a free gift. As Paul says: **“To him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt”** (Romans 4:4). Our God is not paying us something He owes us as wages, but it is by grace that we are forgiven.

It is important that we recognize that grace is not something God pours into us, so that it becomes a quality of ours. Grace is the favorable disposition of God’s heart toward us because of the work of Christ for us, not His work in us; it is outside of us and apart from us, but it is for our benefit. We should not look inside ourselves to determine whether we have been forgiven and justified. But we should look to Jesus and trust God’s Word to us that He has by grace forgiven all our sins because of the sacrifice of Christ.

A proper understanding of grace is especially important because the Roman Catholic Church has a different definition of grace that contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture. In October of 1999 the Lutheran World Federation worked out a so-called agreement with the Roman Catholic Church by using the word **“grace”** without defining it. This allows both parties to interpret the word as they please. We, however, want to understand correctly what God means when He uses the word **“grace”**.

Questions

1. What does the word **“grace”** mean in Romans 3:24?
2. On what basis can God freely forgive us as His gift to us?
3. What is the difference between grace and debt?
4. How should we become certain that we are justified and forgiven?