



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.2.5 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

Justification by Grace, for Christ's Sake, through Faith

We have seen that Scripture teaches justification by grace alone, not merit. Scripture teaches justification by faith alone, not works. Scripture also teaches justification through Christ alone, not through any other Savior. We are **"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"** (Romans 3:24). It is **"by His blood"** that God declares us righteous in His sight (Romans 3:25). Paul repeats this same thought in Romans 5:9, when he says that we have **"been justified by His blood."** If Jesus had not taken the punishment for our sin in our place, there could be no justification for ungodly sinners. Jesus is certainly speaking the truth when He says of those who believe in Him: **"I give them eternal life"** (John 10:28). No one else could do what He did.

Since justification is by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, and apart from all human merits or works, it rests on an absolutely solid foundation. Paul says: **"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed"** (Romans 4:16). If justification were partly by grace and partly by our merit, it would be unsure because it would depend partly on fallible man. If justification were partly by faith and partly by our own works, the certain failure in our works would make our justification unsure. If justification depended on the work of anyone other than Jesus, the Son of God, it would not be sufficient. Paul says that in Christ **"we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him"** (Ephesians 3:12).

Paul concludes his discussion of justification with these bold and confident words: **"I am persuaded (convinced) that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:38-39).

The Roman Catholic Church, as well as others, have taught that it is wrong for Christians to be absolutely sure of their salvation. They want Christians to remain in constant uncertainty as to whether they will be saved or not. But this is a horrible teaching that Martin Luther called monstrous. He had been brought up in this uncertainty, and he had tried every possible way of being assured of his salvation – by becoming a monk, by doing good works, by praying, by punishing himself, by obeying his superiors, by trying to keep God's laws perfectly, by confessing every single sin he could think of – but all of this did not bring him the certainty of salvation he longed for. But then the Holy Spirit led him to the Scripture teaching that our salvation is assured by what Christ did perfectly, not by anything we can do. Our salvation is sure because it is by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. God wants us to be sure of our salvation. The Apostle John said: **"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life"** (1 John 5:13).

The teaching of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, gives all glory to God for our salvation. Three times the apostle Paul repeats the same phrase in speaking of God's plan of salvation: **"to the praise of the glory of His grace"** (Ephesians 1:6), **"to the praise of His glory"** (Ephesians 1:12), **"to the praise of His glory"** (Ephesians 1:14). He emphasizes the same point in Ephesians 2 when he twice says: **"By grace you have been saved"** (Ephesians 2:5, 8). There is nothing that brings greater glory to God than the salvation of mankind brought about by God's working alone, through His Son and Holy Spirit. For this reason, as the final hour drew near for Jesus to carry out His work of redemption, He said: **"Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him"** (John 13:31).

Because of our sinful flesh, God has to keep reminding us of His Law that condemns us, and warning us of the dangers that threaten us, but the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith is the purest Gospel. That is, it is Good News through and through, a promise and a guarantee from God that He wants us to cling to through thick and thin, something we can depend on absolutely, no matter what experiences we are undergoing or how we feel at the moment. When the jailer of Philippi came trembling to Paul and Silas and asked them: **"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"**, what was their answer? **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved"** (Acts 16:30-31). When we use these words in dealing with troubled sinners like the jailer, we should be sure to stress the Lord Jesus Christ, not the act of believing. Remember: faith or believing is not the cause of our justification, but only the way we receive it. Other words may be substituted for "faith" and "believing", words such as "depend on", "rely on", "trust in". We are not justified because of our believing, but because of Christ and His work, and that is what we should rely on.

The justification that Christ won for us and for the world comes to us (and to the world) through the means of grace: the preaching and teaching of the Good News (the Gospel) and the use of the Gospel sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We do not have to go up to heaven to bring Christ down, and we do not have to go down to the abyss to bring Christ up, because Christ comes to us in His Word. Paul calls it **"the word of faith which we preach"** (Romans 10:8) He explains it like this: **"How shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"** (Romans 10:14-17). It is for this reason that Christ has made those who believe in Him His **"ambassadors"** and **"has given us the ministry of reconciliation"** and **"has committed to us the word of reconciliation"** so that **"we implore"** people **"on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God"** **"as though God were pleading through us"** (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). We shall discuss the means of grace in greater detail later on.

It is clear from what Scripture itself says that the doctrine of justification is the central doctrine of Scripture. The apostle Peter said to the Gentile Cornelius and all those gathered in his home: **"To Him (Christ) all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins"** (Acts 10:43). The apostle Paul said that the ministry that he received from the Lord Jesus was **"to testify to the gospel of the grace of God"** (Acts 20:24). More concisely he said: **"We preach Christ crucified"** (1 Corinthians 1:23), and again: **"I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"** (1 Corinthians 2:2). All the other teachings of Scripture are related to this central theme.

All true Christians agree on the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. Otherwise they would not be Christians. Rejection of this doctrine condemns to hell, for Jesus said: **"He who does not believe (the gospel) will be condemned"** (Mark 16:16). The prophet Habakkuk said it long before the apostle Paul: **"The just shall live by his faith"** (Habakkuk 2:4). The apostle Paul introduced his long discussion of justification in his letter to the Romans by saying: **"I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'"** (Romans 1:15-17). It is widely recognized that justification by faith is the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans. He quotes Habakkuk also in his letter to the Galatians, saying: **"That no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith'"** (Galatians 3:11). And remember, if anyone attempts to attain justification in any other way, they lose Christ, their only Savior: **"You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace"** (Galatians 5:4).

Questions

1. Prove from the Bible that we are justified for Christ's sake.
2. What is it that makes our justification sure and certain?
3. What kind of teaching would make our salvation unsure and uncertain?
4. Why is the Roman Catholic teaching of uncertainty a horrible doctrine?
5. What is it that brings the greatest glory to our God?
6. Which words should we stress when we say: "Believe in the Lord Jesus" and why?
7. How does the justification Jesus won for all reach the individual?
8. What do we call these ways by which the Gospel reaches us?
9. What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ?
10. Why is the doctrine of justification such an important doctrine?
11. What is the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans?
12. Why do we say that all Christians agree on how we are justified?