



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 7.2.6 – The Doctrine of the Way of Salvation (Soteriology)

The Blessings of Justification

The person who knows his sins are forgiven because of Christ's sacrifice is a blessed person. David describes such a person in Psalm 32: **"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity"** (Psalm 32:1-2). Such a person knows that God does not count his sins against him. No, God declares that person just in His sight, declared righteous, justified.

After calling attention to David's words in the fourth chapter of his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul goes on in the following chapters to spell out the blessed results of justification. He writes, for example: **"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations"** (Romans 5:1-3). Because of our sins our natural state is not peace with God at all, rather we are under God's wrath. But when God pardons us because of Christ's work, we are at peace with God. Because we are at peace with God, we can freely speak to Him in prayer; we have access to Him by faith. We are not excluded from His presence. This means that our natural fear of death is overcome by the prospect of eternal life. We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The hope of heaven cheers our spirits.

It is also true that since we know that our sins are forgiven and that we are regarded as God's holy children through faith in Jesus, we are able to persevere more easily through the various tribulations that come our way. Since our sins are forgiven, we know that whatever we have to endure in this life, is not an indication of God's hatred or that He has forsaken us. What God did for us in Christ in taking away our sins and declaring us righteous and forgiven in His sight remains as an impregnable fact in our lives. Regardless of what happens to us and no matter how we feel or how much we suffer, this fact remains true: Jesus died for our sins and rose again, and therefore God counts us as righteous in His sight. We are His beloved children for whom Jesus died. Apart from Jesus' work we would be wretched, but because of what Christ did, we are blessed.

In chapters 5-8 of his letter to the Christians in Rome the apostle Paul pictures the blessings of justification as freedom from God's wrath or anger (chapter 5), freedom from the slavery and power of sin (chapter 6), freedom from the law (chapter 7), and freedom from death (chapter 8). Each chapter ends with a reference to the work of Jesus Christ in our behalf that has established this freedom for us. Chapter 5 ends with the phrase: **"eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 5:21). The last sentence of chapter 6 is: **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 6:23). At the end of chapter 7 Paul cries out: **"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!"** (Romans 7:24-25). Finally, in chapter 8, we find Paul exulting in the fact that nothing, not even death, **"shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (Romans 8:39).

What a great blessing it is to be free from the wrath of God! **"Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him"** for **"we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son"** (Romans 5:9-10).

What a great blessing it is to be free from the power and slavery of sin! Jesus said: **“Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin... If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed”** (John 8:34-36). **“You were slaves of sin,”** Paul says, but now, **“having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness... But now, having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life”** (Romans 6:17-18, 22).

What a great blessing it is to be free from bondage to God’s holy Law! God’s law is good, but we are doomed if we try to keep God’s law in order to attain righteousness as we cannot perfectly keep God’s law. **“But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter”** (Romans 7:6). No longer must we strive to keep the law in order to become holy in God’s sight. Now, because of what Christ has done, we are enabled to do what the law says in a joyful spirit, because we know God has already forgiven our sins for Christ’s sake.

What a great blessing it is to be free from death itself! **“It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... I am persuaded that neither death nor life...nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Romans 8:33-39).

Because we retain our sinful flesh until death, we need to be on guard against abusing the freedom that we have in Christ. Since we have been set free from sin, we must be on guard lest we live in sin. **“How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”** (Romans 6:2) **“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another”** (Galatians 5:13). We are to live **“as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God”** (1 Peter 2:16).

Another blessing that results from our justification is that we can consider ourselves sons and daughters of God – members of His holy family. The apostle John tells us: **“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God... Beloved, now we are children of God”** (1 John 3:1-2). It was our sin that made us enemies of God. But now Christ has taken away our sin. **“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:26). Christ came into the world and carried out His work of redemption **“that we might receive the adoption as sons”** (Galatians 4:5).

The prophet Isaiah told the people of his day: **“Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear”** (Isaiah 59:2). But since God pardons our sins for Christ’s sake, we are no longer separate from God, but we have peace with God and a good conscience. **“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”** (Philippians 4:7). **“Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (Romans 5:1).

The Bible speaks of living **“under law”** and living **“under grace”** (Romans 6:14). Life lived under law is not a blessed, joyful life. It is a life that is plagued by fear that we have not measured up to God’s standard of perfection. We may try to lower God’s standards so that we can live up to them. If we think we have lived up to them, we become proud of ourselves. But even then, in the face of death we become uncertain as to whether we have done enough. Or we may realize our case is hopeless and so we are driven to despair and hopelessness.

But life lived under grace is a joyful life, because we know that our sins are forgiven because of Christ and that we are the beloved children of God by faith in Jesus. God works all things together for our good. Because He has shown such love to us, we love Him in return and cheerfully think, speak, and work according to His will, albeit in great weakness because of our sinful flesh. We walk **“in newness of life”** (Romans 6:4). We **“serve in the newness of the Spirit”** (Romans 7:6). We **“delight in the law**

of God according to the inward man” (Romans 7:22). We present “our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (Romans 12:1). We are enabled to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

Our growth in appreciating the blessings of justification and living accordingly may be gradual, but justification itself is not gradual; justification is instantaneous. Because of Jesus’ death for all sins of every sinner and because of His resurrection from the dead, forgiveness of sins is a ready blessing offered to all persons everywhere. The whole world has been declared righteous in the sight of God. The only way we receive this universal justification is by faith in Jesus. The tiniest faith in Jesus receives the total blessing: total forgiveness of sins, total justification.

Thus the present world is divided into two classes and only two classes: those who are justified without knowing it or trusting in it, and those who have received justification and all of its blessings by faith. The unbelievers, by their rejection of God’s gift of justification, forfeit the gift of justification and lose its blessings as long as they reject it. In Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the tax collector went home justified, totally justified, 100% righteous in God’s eyes, whereas the proud Pharisee went home unjustified, with 0% righteousness in God’s eyes (Luke 8:9-14). And so it is with us. We either believe in Jesus and receive the total package, 100% forgiveness, or we do not believe in Jesus and reject His gift of forgiveness and are 0% righteous in His sight. But as long as they are alive in this world, there remains an opportunity for unbelievers to become believers in Christ through the Gospel. That is why we are to go into all the world and preach the Gospel of Jesus to every creature (Mark 16:15-16).

Questions

1. Which person is blessed, according to Psalm 32?
2. Which blessings of justification are spelled out in Romans 5:1-5?
3. How is it possible for a Christian to rejoice in time of tribulation?
4. Name the four things from which we are free, according to Romans 5-8.
5. What is meant by the wrath of God?
6. What is the difference between being under law and under grace?
7. Why can the Christian live a joyful life under grace?
8. Why do we say justification is instantaneous rather than gradual?
9. Can a person with weak faith be saved? Explain your answer.