



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 8.2 – The Doctrine of Grace

Salvation by Grace through Christ and the Holy Spirit

There is no such thing as salvation by grace apart from Christ and His work of redemption. The apostle Paul wrote that we are **“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** (Romans 3:24). Jesus Himself said: **“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16). The little word **“so”** really means: **“in this way.”** This is the way God’s love for sinful mankind showed itself: He gave His Son to be our Savior from sin and death. The life and work of Jesus Christ is God’s grace in action. Paul says: **“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”** (Romans 5:8). John wrote: **“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him”** (1 John 4:9).

Some people may think that God in His grace could simply forgive sinners and take us all to heaven without the sacrifice of Christ. In fact, one of the opponents of the Lutheran Reformation, a man named Socinus, said: **“God can pardon our sins according to His supreme power, without having received a real satisfaction for them”** (quoted in F. Pieper: *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 18). That is the way many think God’s grace should act. But that would mean that God does not care about sin and does not care whether we sin or not. It would mean that God is a God without holiness, justice, and hatred of sin. God in His justice must punish sin, and He did so by punishing His own Son, Jesus Christ, for the sin of the world. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, God can and does freely offer to the whole world of sinners the forgiveness of sins because of the life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ.

The grace of God – His undeserved love for sinners – is displayed not only in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, but also in God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, who uses the Gospel Word to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ. Our coming to faith in Christ is also a gift of God’s grace for which we deserve no credit at all. This is what Paul wrote to his assistant Titus: **“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life”** (Titus 3:4-7). From beginning to end our salvation is a matter of grace; it is God working through His Son and His Holy Spirit to give us eternal life. There is no doubt that this is what the apostle John meant when he wrote: **“Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace”** (John 1:16). We have received one wave of grace after another!

Some believe and teach that fallen sinners still have a free will to do something good in the sight of God and that one can contribute something (even the tiniest bit) to one’s own salvation. Anyone who believes this does not have a correct understanding of grace. Grace ascribes salvation entirely to God and gives no credit at all to man. Redemption is God’s work alone. Conversion is God’s work alone. This truth is taught most clearly by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, where we read: **“And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just**

as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:1-5).

We are saved by God's grace alone. But God's grace comes to us in various ways and through various persons. The Bible says that Jesus is our Savior. We are "**justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 3:24). When Joseph was told to name Mary's Son Jesus, the angels said to him: "**You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus understood this, for He told Zacchaeus, the tax collector who climbed the tree: "**The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost**" (Luke 19:10). On another occasion Jesus said: "**I did not come to judge the world but to save the world**" (John 12:47).

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians "**to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come**" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Paul wrote to Timothy: "**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**" (1 Timothy 1:15). The letter to the Hebrews says: "**He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them**" (Hebrews 7:25). Thus, we can say we are saved by grace. We can say we are saved by Christ. There is no contradiction between these statements.

We can also say we are saved by the Gospel Word of Christ, for the Gospel is the means by which God's grace in Christ reaches us. Paul told the Romans: "**I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes**" (Romans 1:16). Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "**It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe**" (1 Corinthians 1:21). He also wrote: "**I declare to you the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you**" (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). James, the brother of our Lord, gave the same testimony, saying: "**Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls**" (James 1:21). It is the Holy Spirit who uses the Gospel to bring us to faith in Christ, for it is written: "**No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit**" (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Since the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to bring us to faith in Christ and thus save us, it is also appropriate to say that the Holy Spirit saves us through baptism, or that baptism saves us, because the Holy Spirit uses baptism to create faith in Jesus in our hearts. Paul refers to baptism in his words to Titus: "**He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing (baptism) of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior**" (Titus 3:5-6). Just as the waters of the flood lifted up the ark and saved Noah and his family, so "**there is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism**" (1 Peter 3:21).

In some contexts Paul even speaks of himself and other servants of the Lord as saving those who hear their Gospel preaching. He says, "**I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some**" (1 Corinthians 9:22). Paul wrote to his assistant pastor, Timothy: "**Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourselves and those who hear you**" (1 Timothy 4:16). James, the brother of our Lord, tells the Christians in his care that they can all be saviors in this sense. "**Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins**" (James 5:19-20).

James also maintains that we can say that faith saves, for he writes: "**The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven**" (James 5:15). This agrees with what Jesus said on several occasions. To the weeping woman who washed His feet Jesus said: "**Your faith has saved you. Go in peace**" (Luke 7:50). To a blind man whom He encountered near Jericho Jesus said: "**Receive your sight; your faith has made you well**" (Luke 18:42). Faith in Christ, which in every case is a work of God by God's grace, receives the salvation God through Christ has won for every sinner.

God, in His Word, uses all of these expressions: Grace saves. Jesus saves. The Gospel saves. Baptism saves. Preachers of the Gospel save. Faith saves. All of these statements are true in their own way. And in every case God receives the whole credit for our salvation. One of the reasons that Baptists and others do not believe in baptismal regeneration or that baptism saves is that they think of baptism as a work of man, rather than as a work of God. Since they call baptism a work of man, they say that it cannot save us because we are saved by faith, not by works. They rule out baptism as a way by which God saves us, even though Scripture clearly says that baptism saves.

Salvation by grace emphasizes the truth that salvation is a free gift from God. But even though salvation costs us nothing, it cost Jesus His holy life in a holy death. Salvation is so costly that the only thing precious enough to save sinners was the giving of the life of the holy Son of God as our ransom. Martin Chemnitz, one of the faithful Lutherans at the time of the Reformation, wrote: "Outside of Christ there is no grace or mercy of God toward sinners" (*Loci Theologici*, Vol. II, p. 549). That is why the apostle Peter told the Jerusalem Jews: "**Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved**" (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul taught the same thing: "**In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace**" (Ephesians 1:7).

Questions

1. What did God in His grace decide to do in order to save sinners like us?
2. Why did God not just simply forgive all sinners by His supreme power?
3. In what way is the Holy Spirit's work a work of grace?
4. Since we are saved by God's grace, why do we say that Christ is our Savior?
5. Why can we also say that we are saved by the Gospel?
6. In what way did the apostle Paul save those who listened to him?
7. Why do Baptists reject baptism as a way by which God saves sinners?
8. Defend this statement: "God saves us by grace through Christ's redemption."