



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.13 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Longing for Eternal Life

After their conversion to Christ most Christians live a good number of years on earth before they are taken to be with their Lord and Savior in heaven. During this time, whether it is short or long, they have work to do: Christians are witnesses – lights in the world – shining the bright rays of the Gospel into the dark corners of this sinful world and conducting themselves as children of light in a dark world of selfish ungodliness, human arrogance, and, at times, hopeless despair. Even though they themselves are still sinners, Christians tend to improve the quality of earthly life wherever they are located through their attitude and behavior. They do good work in their appointed vocations because they are serving the Lord in their work. The account of Sodom and Gomorrah so us that the very presence of believers in a city or country holds back or delays God's threatened judgments. The apostle Paul told the Christians in Philippi that they were **"children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life"** (Philippians 2:15-16).

But while living as Christ's witnesses in this world, Christians long to be with their Lord in their eternal home. To the same Philippians Paul wrote: **"Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself"** (Philippians 3:20-21).

The Old Testament people of God looked forward to the coming of the promised Messiah and they rejoiced in His coming. While blessing his twelve sons, the patriarch Jacob cried out: **"I have waited for Your salvation, O LORD!"** (Genesis 49:18). And the people rejoiced when the Messiah came! The priest Zacharias, **"filled with the Holy Spirit,"** said: **"Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began"** (Luke 1:67-70). Simeon was another who was **"waiting for the Consolation of Israel"** (Luke 2:25) and he rejoiced when he was able to say: **"My eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples"** (Luke 2:30-31).

In a similar way Christians today are waiting for Jesus' return. We are sure that Jesus' prayer to His Father will be answered when Jesus returns: **"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me"** (John 17:24). And so, together with all Christians, we are **"eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ"** (1 Corinthians 1:7).

The apostle Paul was looking forward to that promised day when he faced condemnation and execution; he wrote to Timothy: **"The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing"** (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Those who believe in Jesus are most surely **"looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"** (Titus 2:13). **"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come"** (Hebrews 13:14).

Unbelievers do not share this sure hope in a blessed hereafter based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They may have a false hope for a blessed end, thinking that they just might be rewarded with a pleasant hereafter because they have lived a pretty good life in their own opinion. Some may wrongly hope for another chance through reincarnation, which has become a popular belief among many in our time. The best some may hope for is annihilation, that is, simply ceasing to exist, but we know from God's word that they will not be annihilated, but suffer eternal torment. Among many there is a desire to postpone any thoughts of death. Many try to make themselves look as young as possible. They try to cover up the inevitable aging process with cosmetics or through some kind of fitness program. The sinful flesh of Christians leads them also to be afraid of death at times, and these fears must be put to death anew through the hearing of the Gospel of Christ.

The expectation of Jesus' coming again is a powerful incentive for us as Christians to continue to live the Christian life, trusting in Jesus for forgiveness and salvation and walking the Christian walk as children of light. We have the promise of the angels God sent at Jesus' ascension: **"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven"** (Acts 1:11). The apostle John assures us: **"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure"** (1 John 3:2-3). Notice that this hope that we Christians have motivates us to follow Jesus' pure example in our lives, but we shall not be entirely like Him until we see Him as He is.

As we face persecution, distress of various kinds, the death of loved ones, and our own death, we need to **"comfort one another with these words"** (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Which words? These words: **"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord"** (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Questions

1. What should we be doing as Christians while we await Jesus' return?
2. What does it mean that Christians are citizens of heaven?
3. What were the Old Testament believers waiting for?
4. What are New Testament believers waiting for?
5. List some views of the hereafter that are prevalent in your locale.
6. Why can we be sure that Jesus will come again?
7. How can we be ready for His coming?
8. If we do not believe in Jesus as our Savior, what hope do we have?
9. Why are Christians still sometimes afraid of death and dying?
10. What can be done to overcome our fears of death?
11. With which words may Christians comfort one another?
12. How does the hope of heaven motivate us to live better lives?
13. On what do we base our hope for a blessed hereafter?