



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 19.1 – The Doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins

The Main Thing

We have now discussed the major teachings of the Bible. But before we conclude this study, we want to return once more to a discussion of the main thing. In his *Large Catechism* Martin Luther stated in his discussion of the Third Article of the *Apostles' Creed*: *"Everything in this Christian community is so ordered that everyone may daily obtain full forgiveness of sins through the Word and signs (sacraments) appointed to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live on earth. Although we have sin, the Holy Spirit sees to it that it does not harm us because we are a part of this Christian community. Here there is full forgiveness of sins, both in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with, and aid one another. Outside this Christian community, however, where there is no gospel, there is also no forgiveness"* (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 438).

This is what we have as Christians – as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ – that is not to be found anywhere else on earth: the forgiveness of sins. This means both that God forgives us and that we forgive one another. Surely the greatest gift the Holy Spirit can give us is the forgiveness of sins, won by Christ for all by His life and by His death, and conveyed or transmitted to us by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

After Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead and had opportunity to talk to His disciples, what did He say to them? **"Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations"** (Luke 24:47)

What did the Holy Spirit move the apostle Peter to say on the day of Pentecost after he accused the assembled crowd that they were guilty of crucifying the Son of God? When they asked him what they should do, Peter replied: **"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"** (Acts 2:38).

What did the missionary Paul say as he traveled through towns and villages, speaking to both Jews and Gentiles? This was his message: **"Let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man (Jesus) is preached to you the forgiveness of sins"** (Acts 13:38).

Our Need for the Forgiveness of Sins

All human beings need forgiveness of sins, because all human beings are sinners. Listen to what God tells us in His Word. Ecclesiastes 7:20: **"For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin."** Romans 3:9-10: **"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one.'"** Romans 3:23: **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** Romans 5:12: **"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."**

Because we sinners tend to minimize our faults and excuse our wrongdoing, God wants His law to be proclaimed loudly and clearly, for it is God's law as written in our hearts and as taught in the Bible that shows us our sins and our innate sinfulness. God's law condemns us all because we have not obeyed it. The man who wrote Psalm 130 understood this, for he cried out to God: **"If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You"** (Psalm 130:3-4).

It is not only the unbelievers who need the forgiveness of sins. Those of us who are true believers in Jesus Christ need forgiveness of sins also, for we sin every day. That is why Jesus taught His own disciples to pray: **“Forgive us our debts”** (Matthew 6:12) and: **“Forgive us our sins”** (Luke 11:4). Even those who are leaders and teachers among the believers need forgiveness. King David was the leader of God’s people, a servant of God, and yet he said: **“Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous”** (Psalm 143:2).

The apostle Paul certainly confessed that he was a sinner, not only in his early days when he persecuted Christians in his hatred of Christ, but also after he was converted and called to be Christ’s apostle and missionary to the Gentiles. Listen to what Paul had to say about himself: **“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. ... So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin”** (Romans 7:18, 25). Paul realized he was far from being perfect, for he told his fellow-believers in Philippi: **“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me”** (Philippians 3:12).

John wrote: **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him (God) a liar, and His word is not in us”** (1 John 1:8-10). God is not a liar. He says we are sinners, and so we are.

For this reason, Martin Luther wrote in his *Large Catechism*: *“Forgiveness is constantly needed, for although God’s grace has been acquired by Christ, and holiness has been wrought by the Holy Spirit through God’s Word in the unity of the Christian Church, yet we are never without sin because we carry our flesh around our neck”* (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 438). We Christians continually need the forgiveness of sins, because our sinful flesh continually leads us into sin.

Questions

1. What did Martin Luther say about the forgiveness of sins?
2. What did Jesus say about the forgiveness of sins?
3. What did Peter and Paul say about the forgiveness of sins?
4. Why should we be concerned about the forgiveness of sins?
5. Who are the only persons who do not need the forgiveness of sins?
6. Why can we be sure that believers in Jesus need forgiveness of sins?
7. If we deny we are sinners, whom are we calling a liar?