



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 19.10 – The Doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins

Forfeiting God's Forgiveness in Christ

The Holy Spirit's role in the forgiving of sins is to tell people about Jesus and the forgiveness of sins He won for them. In other words, the Holy Spirit transmits the Gospel of Christ all over the world through those whom He has already brought to faith in Christ, who thus become the ministers of reconciliation bringing the word of reconciliation to groups and individuals everywhere. The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to bring about conversion, that is, to cause people to turn from their unbelieving way of life and to find in Jesus Christ and His Gospel the forgiveness of sins they desperately need. After bringing persons to faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit works in them and through them to produce the fruits of faith.

On His last night before His death Jesus said to His disciples: **“But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”** (John 15:26). **“He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you”** (John 16:14-15). On the evening of Easter Sunday Jesus said to His disciples: **“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them”** (John 20:22-23). Then, on Pentecost, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on His followers, and the Holy Spirit began His work of testifying about Jesus and glorifying Jesus, using the disciples as His tools, as the ambassadors of Christ and ministers of the new covenant.

No Christian on his own and by his own power can convert anyone to Christ. But the Holy Spirit will work through the Word of God the Christian speaks and, in that way, will carry out His will. That is why the apostle Paul wrote: **“No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit”** (1 Corinthians 12:3). Objective justification is the work of Jesus Christ in atoning for the sin of the world and establishing righteousness for all sinners. But it is the Holy Spirit who brings the message of objective justification to all and works subjective justification (or individual justification), by which the sinner is led to accept the forgiveness and justification won by Christ for all. Because of the Holy Spirit's involvement, Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth: **“You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”** (1 Corinthians 6:11).

We must give all credit to God for our justification, conversion, and eternal salvation, as well as for God's decision from eternity to bring us to faith in Jesus Christ, keep us in that faith until the end of our lives, and then usher us into our eternal home with Him. The apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: **“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”** (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Nevertheless, God's gift of forgiveness in Christ, which is offered to all sinners in the Gospel, is forfeited by many through their rejection of God's gift in unbelief. Jesus never promised that all who hear the Gospel will be brought to faith in Him. He told His disciples to bring the Gospel to all, but He also told them in advance that there would be some, even many, who would reject it. His words are plain and clear: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”** (Mark 16:15-16). Jesus had already

taught this truth to Nicodemus: “**He who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God**” (John 3:18). “**He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him**” (John 3:36).

The apostle Paul experienced such rejection and unbelief as the Holy Spirit brought the Gospel through him to the cities and villages of the Roman Empire. What happened in Antioch of Pisidia happened in many other places. After presenting the Gospel of Christ to the Jews in Antioch, Paul addressed those who did not accept his message with these words: “**It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles**” (Acts 13:46). It was not just the Jews, however, many of the Gentiles rejected his message also.

Jesus told a sad story about the way those who are freely forgiven by the Lord can forfeit the forgiveness offered to them: “**Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, “Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.” Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, “Pay me what you owe!” So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.” And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses**” (Matthew 18:23-35).

The sadness in Jesus’ voice is evident when He said the words: “**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate**” (Matthew 23:37-38). It is sad but true: One loses forgiveness in the Gospel for himself if he does not believe it.

Questions

1. How does the Holy Spirit forgive sins?
2. What authority did Jesus give to His followers on the evening of Easter Sunday?
3. How does the Holy Spirit carry out His work of spreading the Gospel?
4. Why is it that all people will not go to heaven, if Jesus died for all?
5. Who must get the credit for the salvation of sinners?
6. Whose fault is it when sinners reject the saving Gospel?
7. Prove that you answer to question 6 is correct based on something spoken by the apostle Paul.
8. When does the wrath of God remain on someone for whom Jesus died?
9. What is the main point in Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant?
10. Why was Jesus so sad when He thought about Jerusalem?