



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 19.11 – The Doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins

Spreading the Word

As persons whom the Holy Spirit has already brought to faith in Jesus, we have the splendid privilege of being used by the Holy Spirit to tell others about Jesus. On the night before He died, Jesus told His disciples: **“You also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning”** (John 15:27). Jesus had been training them for this work for more than three years. Now it was time for them to begin this great work. After Jesus rose from the dead, He told them again: **“As the Father has sent Me, I also send you”** (John 20:21). He said to them: **“Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things”** (Luke 24:47-48).

Jesus' twelve apostles are no longer living, but they are still our teachers through the New Testament that they wrote as the Holy Spirit guided them. The Gospel they proclaimed is now being taught by others who have taken their place. In fact, all those who believe in Jesus transmit His Word to others, and some have been chosen by these believers to preach the Gospel in their name. All of us who believe in Jesus Christ have our roles to play in bringing the Gospel to others and in strengthening the faith of those who are already believers. As we have said before, believers in Jesus are now ambassadors for Christ. As it is written: **“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”** (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

The Church of Christ on earth is made up of all the believers in Jesus Christ. It is the work of the Christian Church to spread the Gospel of forgiveness everywhere. The Holy Spirit works through the Church, that is, through the believers in Christ that make up the Church. Martin Luther says in his *Small Catechism*: **“Daily in this Christian Church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins – mine and those of all believers”** (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert edition, p. 356).

Luther enlarges on this topic in the *Large Catechism*: **“The Holy Spirit effects our being made holy through the following: the community of saints or Christian church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. ... He has a unique community in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. ... In this Christian community we have the forgiveness of sins. ... Here there is full forgiveness of sins, both in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with, and aid one another. ... All this, then, is the office and work of the Holy Spirit, to begin and daily increase holiness on earth through these two means, the Christian Church and the forgiveness of sins. Then, when we pass from this life, in the blink of an eye He will perfect our holiness and will eternally preserve us in it** (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert edition, pp. 435-439).

As ambassadors for Christ, it is our privilege to convey God's forgiveness to others by praising our Lord and telling others what Jesus has done for us. We are to be like the man whom Jesus cured and then sent on his way, telling him: **“Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you”** (Mark 5:19). Each one of us is given the honor of doing his or her part in the great work of spreading the Gospel. The apostle Peter wrote to the

Christians in his care: “**You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy**” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Christians are ambassadors for Christ not only when they talk about Jesus, but also when they live honorable lives according to His Word. Our lives must match our talk; otherwise, what we say will be choked out by what we do. It is our privilege as ambassadors for Christ to convey the Gospel to others by bringing forth the fruits of faith in our daily lives. The first and best fruit of faith is love: love for God, His Word, and His salvation, but also love and concern for our fellow-believers, and, in particular, love and concern for the poor and needy in our surroundings.

Jesus compared Himself to the vine and called us the branches attached to this vine: “**I am the vine, you are the branches, he who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing**” (John 15:5). “**By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples**” (John 15:8).

People form their opinions about Christ based on what they see among the followers of Christ. The apostle Paul told the Christians in Corinth: “**You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart**” (2 Corinthians 3:2-3). It is important that we talk about Jesus and use the Bible to inform our neighbors concerning the only way of salvation in Christ. But even those who do not read the Bible can read us; that is, they can observe us and our way of life and in that way be led to examine the truth about Jesus.

Paul wrote to the Galatians: “**Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith**” (Galatians 6:9-10). What should outsiders see in us who call ourselves Christians? “**The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**” (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus said to His followers: “**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven**” (Matthew 5:16). Missionary Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi: “**Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, 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 2:14-16).

As believers in Christ, we are all ambassadors for Christ, but we do not all have the same gifts. God has given some Christians special gifts for teaching His Word and bringing the Gospel to those who have not heard it or have been confused by false teachers. Those with these special gifts should be chosen by the other Christians to speak in their name as teachers, pastors, evangelists, and missionaries. But whatever our gifts may be, we can use them in the spread of the Gospel and to support those that we send out in our name and in the name of Christ.

The Great Commission, as spoken by Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15-16, gives us our chief assignment as Christians: to make disciples of Jesus by baptizing and teaching, going all over the world to bring the Gospel to everyone. Jesus assures us that He will be with us in this great endeavor. “**Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age**” (Matthew 28:20).

Those who are called by Christians to preach the Gospel in their name need to be supported by those who have called them. We support them by our prayers, by our assistance, by our gifts for their financial support, and by our continual encouragement. Financial support for pastors, teachers, and missionaries is necessary, for the apostle Paul wrote: “**Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel**” (1 Corinthians 9:14). That is, they should receive their living or livelihood from the Gospel. Paul himself was an exception to this rule, for he supported

himself by making tents. This same thing may be necessary in our time also for various reasons. But our goal is always to provide for the preaching of the Gospel by our free-will offerings. **“God loves a cheerful giver”** (2 Corinthians 9:7).

So how can we support the preaching of the Gospel? We can talk about Christ in our community among our friends, neighbors, and relatives. We can support our own congregation and servants of the Word it has called. We can establish Christian schools for the training of the young. We can join together with other like-minded Christians and congregations to support bigger projects, like supporting missionaries in other countries. We can support educational institutions that have been set up for the training of pastors, teachers, evangelists, and missionaries. We can consider offering ourselves with our gifts as church workers in various fields.

One of the summaries of what we believe and teach is the *Brief Statement* of 1932. In that document we state: *“The Christian Church must not remain at home with the means of grace entrusted to it, but go into the whole world with the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. ... The churches at home should never forget that there is no other way of winning souls for the Church and keeping them with it than the faithful and diligent use of the divinely ordained means of grace”* (# 22).

Finally, as ambassadors for Christ, we can make our homes Christian homes, where husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and children love Jesus, their Savior, and strive to live according to His Word. God says to parents: **“You, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord”** (Ephesians 6:4). Jesus’ apostles began their work in Jerusalem where they were before they went out into the world. So too our mission work begins at home with our own families and in our own circles. This means that we learn to confess our sins to one another, and forgive one another, as the apostle Paul wrote: **“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you”** (Ephesians 4:32), **“bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. ... Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”** (Colossians 3:13-16).

Questions

1. Whom does the Holy Spirit use to carry out His work of spreading the Gospel?
2. In what way are Jesus' apostles still spreading the Gospel today?
3. What can you do to help in the work of spreading the Gospel?
4. What are some of the gifts needed for the spreading of the Gospel?
5. In what way is every Christian an ambassador for Christ?
6. Why is it important for Christians to live like Christians each day?
7. Why are Christians called epistles or letters that people can read?
8. Which persons should be chosen as Christian pastors and teachers?
9. How can we support those who are called to special work in the Church?
10. What is the only way in which persons can become Christians?
11. How can Christians do mission work in their own homes?