



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 19.3 – The Doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins

God Has Forgiven All Sins

Since Jesus was the Substitute for the entire human race in His sufferings and death, the sins of the entire human race (past, present, future) have been taken away. For this reason, God forgives all sins of all sinners, and the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus is the announcement of that fact to the world. John the Baptist, God's special messenger to prepare the Jewish nation for the coming of their Savior, did not tell the people that Jesus was the Savior of Israel only, but for the whole world: **"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"** (John 1:29).

Paul, God's chosen apostle to the non-Jews emphasized this point in his sermons and letters. He wrote to the Christians in Corinth (made up of both Jews and non-Jews): **"We judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all"** (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). In other words, God counts the death of Jesus on the cross as equal to the death of every sinner. Jesus was punished on the cross with the punishment deserved by all sinners. Therefore, since the sin of all has been punished in the punishment of Christ, no punishment remains for sinners. God forgives them all because Jesus suffered and died for them all. This means that since Jesus died for each one of us, God forgives each one of us.

Paul wrote to these same Corinthians: **"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them"** (2 Corinthians 5:19). God does not impute (count) the world's trespasses (sins) against the world, because He has already counted the world's sins as the sins of Christ, and He has already punished the sins of the world when He punished Christ. Paul explained this amazing substitution of Christ for the world in these words: **"He (God) made Him (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ, the Righteous One, became the One counted as a sinner – the only sinner – because God transferred the world's sins to Him. The world, on the other hand, although guilty of sin, is given Christ's righteousness, and therefore the world is counted righteous because of Jesus and His vicarious atonement, that is, His suffering and dying as the world's Substitute.

Since Christ reconciled the world to Himself, Paul can say to the Corinthians: **"God ... has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ"** (2 Corinthians 5:18). Every sinner can include themselves in the number of those for whom Jesus died, and every sinner can then also conclude that God has forgiven them their sins for Christ's sake, that is, because of what Christ did on the cross. The apostle John wrote: **"He Himself (Christ) is the propitiation (payment) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"** (1 John 2:2). Not only did Jesus pay for every sin by His suffering for the whole world, but John also teaches us that every sin has been taken away. He says: **"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"** (1 John 1:7). All sin includes the original sin that we inherited from our parents as well as the many actual sins we have ourselves added by our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. God has forgiven all sins of all people because of Christ's redemption.

Was there any good quality in us that led God to send His Son to reconcile the world to Himself? Was there any merit or worthiness in us that moved Christ to take our place under God's wrath against sin and suffer and die on the cross as our Substitute? Is the forgiveness of sins something that God owes to us because of our character, personality, or behavior? God's answer to all such questions is "no". The

only answer God gives to explain His motivation for doing what He did to save us is love. It is undeserved love, which the Bible calls grace. It is written: **“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). Paul testified: **“In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace”** (Ephesians 1:7). The book of Revelation speaks of Jesus as **“Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood”** (Revelation 1:5). In His parable of the forgiving king Jesus spoke of the king as one **“moved with compassion”** (Matthew 18:27). It was this compassion that led the king to release his servant and forgive him his debt.

Questions

1. Why can we call Jesus the Substitute for the whole human race?
2. How can each one of us say that he or she died on the cross?
3. What does it mean to impute trespasses to someone?
4. How can God not impute the trespasses of the world to the world?
5. What transfer took place on the cross?
6. Why can each one of us consider himself or herself forgiven by God?
7. What good thing did we do to deserve God’s forgiveness?
8. What led God to work out His plan for saving the world from its sin?
9. What is meant by the term “grace”?