



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Chapter 12

The Doctrine of Sanctification



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Lesson 12.1 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Sanctification: Broad Sense and Narrow Sense

The entire work of the Holy Spirit can be called “sanctification”. This includes the initial work of the Holy Spirit in conversion through the means of grace, as well as the production of the fruits of faith and preservation of faith to the end. The Bible sometimes uses the word “sanctification” in this broad sense. For example, the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: “**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). In a similar way the apostle Peter calls his readers “**elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ**” (1 Peter 1:2).

But in this chapter, we will concentrate on only one phase of the Holy Spirit’s entire work of sanctification. We will be using the word “sanctification” in the narrow sense, which refers only to the work of the Holy Spirit that enables those who are already believers in Christ to live Christian lives and to grow in holiness. For this purpose, the Holy Spirit uses the same means He uses to create faith in Christ, namely, the Gospel in word and sacrament. The Bible sometimes uses the word “sanctification” in this narrow sense. For example, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: “**For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality**” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Here the apostle is speaking of sanctification in connection with the living of a moral and godly life in contrast to the immoral lives of the heathen.

Many of the letters of the apostle Paul are divided into two sections. The first part presents the basic teaching of the Gospel; the second part generally presents the effect the Gospel should have on our lives, that is, sanctification. For example, Galatians 1-4 concentrates on the doctrine of justification by faith, but the last two chapters (5-6) emphasize “**the fruit of the Spirit**” (Galatians 5:22). The first three chapters of Ephesians stress the love of God and the work of Christ for believers, whereas the last three chapters encourage the Christians “**to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called**” (Ephesians 4:1).

Paul follows this same pattern in his letter to the Romans, explaining the Gospel in great depth in chapters 1-11, and then he begins the last section of his letter (chapters 12-16) with this encouragement to live a Christian life of sanctification: “**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God**” (Romans 12:1-2).

A good summary of sanctification in the narrow sense is presented in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians: “**Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**” (2 Corinthians 7:1). Sanctification is growth in holiness, growth in love, growth in appreciation of the Gospel that motivates the believer to live a life pleasing to God, but yet in great weakness because of the continuing presence of the sinful flesh.

Sometimes the New Testament speaks of sanctification as a renewal that begins the moment we are brought to faith in Christ. Paul writes: “**Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day**” (2 Corinthians 4:16). As we grow older, our bodies become weaker, but through the Gospel of Christ the Holy Spirit strengthens our spiritual life. “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new**” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Sanctification involves putting off “**the old man**” and putting on “**the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness**” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Questions

1. What is meant by sanctification in the broad sense?
2. What is meant by sanctification in the narrow sense?
3. Which person of the Triune God is especially concerned with sanctification?
4. What means does God use to bring about sanctification in both the broad and narrow senses?
5. Which two sections do many of Paul’s letters contain?
6. How can we present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord?
7. What is the difference between the outward man and the inward man?
8. When does the renewal of our spiritual life begin?
9. What does a Christian put off and what does a Christian put on?



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Lesson 12.2 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

The Connection between Justification and Sanctification

At the very moment that the Holy Spirit brings a person to faith in Christ, that person receives the total gift of forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ that Christ won for all sinners by His life, death, and resurrection. Unbelievers receive none of this gift of forgiveness, even though the gift has been won for them too and is offered to them in the Gospel. Through faith in Christ believers receive 100% of the forgiveness available to them and are thus considered totally holy and righteous in the sight of God. They are justified (declared not guilty) by faith in Christ and have peace with God (Romans 5:1). Jesus said to His disciples: **“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you”** (John 15:3). But He also said: **“You are clean, but not all of you”** (John 13:10). **“For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not all clean’”** (John 13:11). As far as justification is concerned, a person is either 100% clean by faith in Christ, or he is totally unclean because there is no connection between him and Christ by faith.

Jesus compared the connection between Himself and His believers to the attachment of branches to a vine. He said: **“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). The branches that are attached to the vine, the believers in Christ, have complete forgiveness of sins; they are justified. As soon as they are believers in Christ, they become branches bearing good fruit. The bearing of this good fruit is sanctification, and sanctification is never 100% in this life because the believer retains a sinful flesh that constantly hinders their production of good fruit. That is why Jesus said: **“Every branch that bears fruit He (the Father) prunes, that it may bear more fruit”** (John 15:2). But notice that there can be no fruit at all unless there is a continuing attachment to the vine. **“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me”** (John 15:4).

Thus, the attachment or connection with the vine must come first; after that the fruit will come. In this way we understand that justification must precede sanctification. Jesus explained the connection between justification and sanctification by saying: **“Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit”** (Matthew 7:17). God creates the good tree by bringing someone to faith through the Gospel. That is justification. The good tree then, because it is good, bears good fruit. That is sanctification. A tree does not become good by bearing good fruit. A tree is first good, and then it bears good fruit. Thus, sanctification is the result of justification. Justification comes first, and sanctification follows. It is never the other way around: that a person first does good works, and then, because of their good works, God declares them righteous. No, first God declares a person righteous, and then they bring forth fruit.

Jesus and His apostles frequently admonished and encouraged Christians to bring forth good fruit, that is, to live godly lives, lives worthy of the Gospel. These words of encouragement are always based on the justification and forgiveness that is already theirs. In other words, they are not encouraged to save themselves or win forgiveness by the good things they do. But they are encouraged to do good things because of what God has already done for them by giving them forgiveness and pronouncing them holy through Christ.

Jesus' apostle John explained this in very simple language. He wrote: **“In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live**

through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:9-11). God’s love for us come first. Our love follows. We dare not reverse this, so that we say: We love one another; therefore, God loves us. No! God’s love for us is not a result of our loving Him, as though we could earn His love by our love for Him. Most simply John says: **“We love Him because He first loved us”** (1 John 4:19).

Jesus’ apostle Peter explains that first God calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light, and then we proclaim His praises. And since we are now the people of God, he earnestly pleads with us that we should **“abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul”** (1 Peter 2:9-11). In fact, all of the apostle’s admonitions in the verses that follow (1 Peter 2:11 ff.) are based on the prior fact that God has made us His people through the Gospel.

James, the brother of our Lord, follows this same pattern. First comes a reminder of what God has done for us, and then comes his admonitions to live a Christian life. **“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”** (James 1:18-19). First comes our conversion through the Gospel; then comes the behavior worthy of the Gospel.

Notice how the apostle Paul presents justification first, as the basis for his encouragement for sanctification in the following examples:

- **“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”** (Titus 2:11-14).
- Having reminded Titus and us that we have been **“justified by His grace”**, Paul calls on Titus to encourage sanctification: **“These things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works”** (Titus 3:7-8).
- To the Christians in Corinth Paul writes: **“Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us”** (1 Corinthians 5:7). The leaven is the sin in their lives that they are to get rid of. Why? Because they already are unleavened, that is, without sin. They have been forgiven in God’s sight, because Jesus made the sacrifice to take away their sin. Justification is perfect: you are unleavened. Sanctification is imperfect: keep on getting rid of that leaven.
- In the second major section in his letter to the Romans Paul encourages the living of the Christian life. But he introduces this section by reminding his readers of what God has already done for them in His mercy. **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service”** (Romans 12:1).

Unbelievers always tend to think that we must do good things first, and then God will reward us for the good we do. This is natural man’s tendency to work-righteousness – salvation through our own efforts. The Gospel of free forgiveness in Christ is, in their eyes, license to sin, and therefore should not be proclaimed. Their argument is that no one will do good works if they do not need to do them in order to earn eternal life. They just cannot understand the Gospel. **“The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

But the fact is that a godly life is possible only for those who appreciate God’s love for them in Christ. For only the obedience that flows out of faith in Christ and love for a loving God is pleasing to God.

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (God) (Hebrews 11:6). Those who believe in Christ and His gift of forgiveness have the proper incentive to please God in their lives. “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Notice how it works in real life: Paul says: **“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ has loved us and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor”** (Ephesians 4:32–5:2). First God forgives us, and then we forgive one another. First Christ loves us by giving Himself for us, and then we walk in love – reflecting and responding to His love for us.

First God makes us His children by bringing us to faith in Christ. As His adopted children who love Him, we begin to behave like children of God. **“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). We begin to purify ourselves because of the sure hope for eternal life we have through Christ. Paul assures the Corinthians: **“You are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ ... Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”** (2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1).

Is it possible for a person to believe in Christ and never bring forth any fruit? The branches attached to the vine, which is Christ, will always bring forth some fruit – some more, some less. **“Faith without works is dead”** (James 2:26) and is not faith at all. Sanctification without justification is impossible. Likewise, the one who is justified by faith in Jesus will always bear fruit. Jesus said: **“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away. ... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned”** (John 15:2,6). Thus, justification and sanctification are inseparable. The presence of sanctification points to the reality of justification. The absence of sanctification is evidence of the absence of justification.

In summary, justification is a declaration of God by which He **imputes** to the individual sinner a righteousness that is **outside of the sinner**, namely, the perfect righteousness of Christ. Sanctification is a **medicinal** act of God performed **within a person**, by which God begins to produce in that person a righteousness of life (**incipient** righteousness as opposed to imputed righteousness). Both justification and sanctification happen at the same time: the moment of conversion. Yet justification comes first as the cause, with sanctification as the effect.

It is dangerous, even fatal, to reverse the order and think of sanctification as the cause and justification as the effect. Such a reversal leads to the loss of faith and a return to heathenism with its hypocrisy or despair. Remember the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable who figured that the good life he was living was earning for him favor from God. He boasted of his good life, saying: **“I am not like other men – extortioners, unjust adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”** But what did Jesus say of him? He said he was not justified: **“This man (the tax collector) went down to his house justified rather than the other (the Pharisee)”** (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee thought he could gain justification by his sanctification. But this is impossible. The justification must come first, and then sanctification is the result.

Questions

1. At what point does a person receive total forgiveness from God?
2. When was that total forgiveness won for that person by Christ?
3. Who are the only ones who can bring forth good fruit?
4. What enables them to bring forth this good fruit?
5. Which is correct: "Good fruit makes a tree good", or: "A good tree brings forth good fruit"?
6. What is the difference between justification and sanctification?
7. In the passages from Paul's letters above (Titus 2, Titus 3, 1 Corinthians 5, Romans 12), underline the words that refer to justification, and circle the words that refer to sanctification.
8. What is it that leads a Christian to love God?
9. What is it that motivates a Christian to do good works?
10. Why would an unbeliever think they should do good works?
11. How do we become children of God?
12. How can we show in our lives that we are children of God?
13. What is the proper connection between justification and sanctification?



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Lesson 12.3 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Sanctification as the Work of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace

The New Testament ascribes the work of sanctification (in both the broad and narrow senses) particularly to the Holy Spirit. In Peter's Trinitarian greeting, he speaks of the foreknowledge of the Father, the blood of the Son, and "**sanctification of the Spirit**" (1 Peter 1:2). The apostle Paul likewise speaks of "**sanctification by the Spirit**" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). In his letter to the Galatians Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with "**the fruit of the Spirit**" and lists as such fruit godly attitudes and emotions such as "**love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**" (Galatians 5:22-23). These things certainly describe a sanctified life.

The Holy Spirit actually dwells within the Christian. Paul told the Christians in Corinth: "**Do you not know that you (plural) are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?**" (1 Corinthians 3:16). He repeated this truth a bit later when he wrote: "**Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's**" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This work of the Holy Spirit within us is necessary, for Paul explains: "**You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. ... For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God**" (Romans 8:9, 13-14).

But the Father and the Son are also named as participants in the work of sanctification, and sometimes the work is simply ascribed to God. The writer to the Hebrews concludes his letter with this prayer: "**Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever**" (Hebrews 13:20-21). The work of sanctification is described here as the work of God in making us complete in every good work, and in working in the Christian that which pleases Him. In his letter to Titus Paul ascribes the work of sanctification to Jesus Himself by saying: He "**gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works**" (Titus 2:14). Also, in his letter to the Ephesians Paul speaks of Christ as the Sanctifier: "**Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word**" (Ephesians 5:25-26).

As the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to strengthen our faith in Christ, He is at the same time strengthening us in our desire to live a life that is pleasing to God. Notice how Paul motivates the Christian life of the Christians in Rome by appealing to God's mercies, which center in the Gospel: "**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God**" (Romans 12:1). Likewise in his second letter to the Corinthians, he presents the promises of God in Christ as the motivation for living the Christian life: "**Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

To the Christians in Colossae Paul reminds them of the Gospel by calling them "**the elect of God, holy and beloved**", and then he continues by encouraging them to "**put on tender mercies, kindness,**

humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another” (Colossians 3:12-13).

Notice that the Holy Spirit does not strengthen our faith in Christ by means of the law, nor does He try to motivate us to live the Christian life by means of the law. Christian pastors in this New Testament age are **“ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life”** (2 Corinthians 3:6). The Spirit gives life through the Gospel. The Spirit uses the law to make us aware of our sin and our inability to save ourselves. The law with all its commands, threats, and promises cannot produce or motivate a single good work. If we are forced to do a work by the law, it cannot be a good work, because a good work is a work that is done out of faith in Christ and out of love for Him who loved us first. **“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin”** (Romans 8:2-3).

In chapter 18 we will consider in greater depth how the Holy Spirit uses the law as a mirror to show us our sin, as a curb on unbelievers and on the sinful flesh of believers, and as a standard for the Christian to know which works please God and which works displease Him. Christians still need the law in these three ways because of the sinful flesh, which remains with us until death. But it is the Gospel that the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen our faith in Christ and to motivate the living of the Christian life.

Questions

1. Which Person of the Triune God is known as the Sanctifier?
2. What does every Christian have living in his body?
3. How does the Holy Spirit motivate Christians to do good works?
4. Give some examples from the letters of Paul to explain your answer to question 3.
5. Why does the Holy Spirit use the Gospel, rather than the law, to motivate Christians to do good works?
6. What are the three uses of the law mentioned in this lesson?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.4 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

The Struggle between the Old Man and the New Man

The Bible clearly teaches that conversion is altogether a work of God, and that a person cannot contribute anything at all to their own conversion because they are, by nature, dead in their sins. But after the Holy Spirit has brought a person to faith in Jesus Christ, that person has two forces working within him: the new man and the old man. The new man is the creation of the Holy Spirit. The new man is in total agreement with the Holy Spirit in every way and cooperates with the Holy Spirit. The old man is the sinful flesh inherited from Adam and is often called “the old Adam”. The old man resists the work of the Holy Spirit at every turn and is in total agreement with Satan and the unbelieving world.

The psalmist David referred to the creation of this new man in Psalm 110, which is a psalm that foretells the days of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Speaking of the Messiah, David says: **“Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power”** (Psalm 110:3). Thus, there is this new man in the believer that wants to do God’s will and that is happy to serve the Lord. As Paul says, **“I delight in the law of God according to the inward man”** (Romans 7:22).

Jesus said that He Himself abides in His disciples, and that His disciples abide in Him (John 15:4-5). As long as this connection remains, Jesus’ disciples will bring forth fruit, that is, they will do those things in their lives that are pleasing to God and glorify His name. In order to help His disciples in bringing forth fruit, Jesus assured them: **“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you”** (John 14:16-17). A bit later Jesus said to them: **“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. ... But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”** (John 14:23, 26).

Thus, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all work within the believer. The new man in the Christian is God’s creation, and this new man in the Christian cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification – in the bringing forth of good fruit. Confessional Lutherans declare: *“The reborn ... cooperates in all the works of the Holy Spirit that He accomplishes through us”* (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 561, ¶88). God and the new man are not equal partners in sanctification, however, since God is the Creator and sustaining power of the new man.

After his conversion, the apostle Paul saw himself as a worker cooperating with God. He wrote to the Corinthians: **“We are God’s fellow workers”** (1 Corinthians 3:9), and Paul called himself and his associates **“workers together with Him”** (2 Corinthians 6:1). But at the same time Paul admitted: **“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God”** (2 Corinthians 3:5). He also said: **“We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”** (2 Corinthians 4:7).

The new man in the Christian is a creation of God. The apostle Paul wrote that the **“new man ... was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness”** (Ephesians 4:24). He said that the **“new man ... is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him”** (Colossians 3:10).

Thus, the new man is the restoration of the image of God, which was lost in Adam's fall into sin. The apostle John was certainly speaking of the new man when he wrote: "**Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him, and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God**" (1 John 3:9). If a Christian sins, it is not the work of the new man that God has created in the Christian, but it is the work of the "**old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts**" (Ephesians 4:22).

Jesus said: "**That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit**" (John 3:6). The new man in the Christian is called "**spirit**" – something new created by the Holy Spirit. This new man is also sometimes called "**the inward man**" that "**is being renewed day by day**" (2 Corinthians 4:16), in contrast to "**the outward man**" that "**is perishing**" (2 Corinthians 4:16). Paul wrote: "**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new**" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Because the Holy Spirit has created this new man in the Christian at his conversion, and yet the Christian still retains his sinful flesh, the life of the Christian involves a continuing struggle between the new man in him and the old man in him. The apostle Paul presented this struggle in detail in chapter 7 of his letter to the Romans, using his own life as an example. In verses 1-6 he describes his former life as an unbeliever as being "**in the flesh**", and at that time his "**sinful passions ... were at work ... to bear fruit to death**" (Romans 7:5). He speaks of his conversion as a deliverance that now enables him to "**serve in the newness of the Spirit**" (Romans 7:6).

In Romans 7:7-13 Paul described his struggles with God's law prior to his conversion when he began to realize that he was a doomed sinner. He used the past tense in that description. But in verses 14-25 Paul uses the present tense to describe the struggle within himself after his conversion. This was a struggle that was continuing within him as he was writing this letter. We need to take a close look at his words in order to understand this struggle between the new man and the old man that every Christian experiences.

The new man is the defining influence in Christian's life. Paul says: "**What I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 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. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me**" (Romans 7:15-20). The real Paul, controlled by the new man, wants to do the good things that God wants him to do. But he finds himself doing things that the new man hates – things that the real Paul hates. Why is this? It is because of the sin that dwells in him. It is because of the sinful flesh that remains in him. There is nothing good in his flesh.

Paul is unable to carry out in his life all the good things that he wants to do, according to his new man, because of the continuing presence of the old man. This is what Paul says in Romans 7:21-25: "**I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.**"

There is no Christian that does not have the same struggle that Paul had. There are these two forces that Paul calls by different names. In his conclusion he uses the terms "**mind**" and "**flesh**". His true mind is the new man that controls him, but the flesh always remains as an obstacle. Thus, sanctification remains a gradual process, a striving to do the right thing according to God's will, but always failing to be perfectly successful. But notice that in his wretchedness the apostle Paul turns to Christ as his Deliverer. The Christian in his struggle against the flesh repents of his sins daily and turns to Christ daily

for forgiveness. He also prays that the Holy Spirit will continue to work together with his new man to wage continual war against his sinful flesh.

There are other references to the struggle between the old man and the new man in Paul's letters. To the Galatians he wrote: "**Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish**" (Galatians 5:16-17). He then lists "**the works of the flesh**" (Galatians 5:19-21) and "**the fruit of the Spirit**" Galatians 5:22-23).

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul stresses the importance of continuing the struggle. A Christian who no longer struggles against his flesh will lose not only the battle but also the war. "**For this you know,**" he says, "**that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience**" (Ephesians 5:5-6).

For this reason the apostle Paul in all his letters calls on Christians to "**put off ... the old man**" and "**put on the new man**" as he does in the long section from Ephesians 4:20 to 6:20, which he begins with these words: "**But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness**" (Ephesians 4:20-24).

What needs to be put off? Lying, stealing, hurtful words, bitterness, anger, fornication, filthiness, idolatry, drunkenness, and other sins that are listed in Ephesians 4:20 to 6:20. What needs to be put on? Speaking the truth, hard work, generosity, kind words, love, thanksgiving, avoidance of evil, use of the Word of God, carrying out one's duties as wife, husband, child, parent, master, servant, and continuing in prayer.

A similar section is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapters 3:5 to 4:6. It is because of Paul's presentations of the struggle between flesh and spirit in the Christian that Martin Luther liked to use the Latin phrase: *simul justus et peccator*, which means "righteous and sinner at the same time". We are just and righteous through the imputed forgiveness of sins, but we are still sinners because of our sinful flesh and only beginners in living the Christian life.

Because of the new man created by the Holy Spirit, the Christian is able to exercise power over the old man. When we were baptized or when we were first brought to faith in Christ, "**our old man was crucified with Him (Christ), that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin**" (Romans 6:6). Why, then, should the Christian allow the old man to be in control? Paul asks: "**How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life**" (Romans 6:2-4). Therefore Paul writes to the Christians in Rome: "**Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. ... Sin shall not have dominion over you**" (Romans 6:12-14).

The sinful flesh in us cannot be converted or reeducated. It must be put to death, crucified, buried, or drowned, as Martin Luther wrote in his *Small Catechism*. The old man is constantly seeking to regain control of the Christian. Therefore he must be put to death daily. Paul says: "**If you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live**" (Romans 8:13). Paul himself had to kill his own sinful flesh daily, for he says: "**I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified**" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Continuing in the struggle against our sinful flesh is difficult but altogether necessary. A refusal to fight against the flesh is a rejection of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote: **“God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit”** (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8). **“For this is the will of God, your sanctification”** (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

This struggle requires seriousness and perseverance, for the devil is on the side of our flesh: **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world”** (1 Peter 5:8-9). We should also expect persecution to threaten us, for, as Paul says: **“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”** (2 Timothy 3:12). Throughout the world Christians are generally a persecuted minority, for Jesus said: **“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”** (John 15:19).

The struggle of the Christian against all the forces of evil is described by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10-18. In the strength of the Lord, using the spiritual weapons He has provided for us, we are **“able to stand against the wiles of the devil”** (Ephesians 6:11), **“to withstand in the evil day”** (Ephesians 6:13), and **“to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one”** (Ephesians 6:16).

Questions

1. To what extent does the Christian cooperate in his own sanctification?
2. What are the names the Bible gives to the two forces in the Christian?
3. What are the major differences between these two forces?
4. What are some of the works of the flesh?
5. What are some of the fruits of the Spirit?
6. What is meant by the phrase *simul justus et peccator*?
7. What must every Christian expect to face in his or her life?
8. Why is it so important that we persevere in this struggle?
9. What tools has God given us for this struggle (see Ephesians 6)?



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.5 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

The Christian's Desire to Do Good Works

Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, every Christian desires to do truly good works because of their faith in Christ, love for God, and gratitude for all of God's blessings. David wrote concerning the Messiah in Psalm 110:3: "**Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power.**" In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus describes His disciples as children of God who imitate their heavenly Father by loving their enemies, blessing those who curse them, doing good to those who hate them, and praying for those who persecute them (Matthew 5:43-48). Paul writes: "**Be imitators of God as dear children**" (Ephesians 5:1).

The Holy Spirit creates this desire to do good when He creates a new heart within us (Ezekiel 36:26), when He creates a new man that is renewed in the image of God (Colossians 3:10). The Holy Spirit strengthens this desire within us to do good by reminding us of the mercies of God, that is, the blessings of the Gospel. Paul introduced his encouragement to Christians to bring forth good fruit in chapter 12-16 of his letter with a reminder of God's mercies, which he presented in the first 11 chapters. Paul wrote: "**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service**" (Romans 12:1). Thus, the Holy Spirit moves Christians to please God in their lives with their attitude and behavior. The first fruit of the Spirit is love. So Paul writes: "**Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments ... are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law**" (Romans 13:8-10).

The good works that God desires that Christians do come from willing hearts, hearts that are happy because of God's blessings. Because of the grace of God, the congregations in Macedonia were happy to contribute to the fund for the poverty-stricken Christians in Jerusalem, even though they themselves were very poor. The apostle Paul testified concerning these Christians: "**According to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints**" (2 Corinthians 8:3-4). It is not the size of the gift or its value that counts, but the willingness with which the gift is given or the work is done. Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth: "**If there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have**" (2 Corinthians 8:12). "**God loves a cheerful giver**" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The good works of Christians are a good advertisement for the Gospel of Christ and its power to change lives. The apostle Peter told the Christians in his care: Have "**your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation**" (1 Peter 2:12). Thus, the good works of a Christian may even lead to the conversion of unbelievers. Peter says: "**This is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men**" (1 Peter 2:15).

When Christians respond to the evils that are done to them by doing good it really makes an impression on others; in doing this, a believer follows the example of Christ, "**who, when He was reviled, did not revile again; when He suffered, He did not threaten**" (1 Peter 2:21-23). As Jesus made it the aim in His life to do the will of His loving Father, so also those who believe in Jesus wish to do those things

that please their Father. Jesus said: **“My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work”** (John 4:34).

The works that please God may not be magnificent or spectacular in the eyes of the world. They include doing the humble duties of one’s station in life. For example, the apostle Paul lists the duties of wives, husbands, children, parents, masters, and servants in his letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, and his assistant Titus (Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9; Colossians 3:18 - 4:1; Titus 2:1-10). When John the Baptist was asked what kind of fruits they should bear that were worthy of repentance, he responded by saying they should share their good things with others, they should not cheat others, and they should be satisfied with their pay (Luke 3:8-14).

The only one who can determine whether a work is good or not is God Himself. But we are not left in the dark as to what works God considers good. God has given us His Word in the Bible to help us determine which works please Him. When a lawyer asked Jesus: **“Which is the great commandment in the law?”**, Jesus responded: **“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets”** (Matthew 22:36-40).

The first three of the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses summarize how we show our love for God: by worshiping Him, by using His name rightly, and by listening to His Word. The last seven of the Ten Commandments show us how we show love to our neighbor: by honoring our parents, by helping (not hurting) our fellowman, by sexual purity, by honesty, by truthful words, and by being satisfied with what God has given us and how He is treating us. The details are spelled out for us in particular by the admonitions of the apostles in large sections of their letters, for example: Romans 12 – 15; Galatians 5 – 6; Ephesians 4:17 – 6:9; Colossians 3:5 – 4:6. A careful reading and study of these passages in Scripture will give us a very good idea of what God considers to be good works.

Not all the Law God gave to Moses in the Old Testament tells us what is right and what is wrong for us today. Many of the commandments and regulations God gave to His people through Moses were intended only for the Israelites, as we learn from a careful study of the Scriptures. God gave other commands to certain individuals at certain times, such as when Jesus told the rich young man to sell all he had and give to the poor (Mark 10:17-22). This command was certainly not meant for all Christians of all times, but only for this young man. Only Scripture can reveal to us which commandments in Scripture were only temporary precepts, and which are binding on all human beings, at all times and in all places.

For example, the external regulations in the Third Commandment that talk about the Sabbath Day are no longer binding for us. The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Colosse: **“Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ”** (Colossians 2:16-17). That is why Martin Luther wrote in his *Large Catechism* concerning the Third Commandment: **“According to its outward meaning this commandment does not concern us Christians. It is an entirely external matter, like the other regulations of the Old Testament associated with particular customs, persons, times, and places, from all of which we are now set free through Christ”** (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 397).

While many of the laws in the Old Testament were address only to the Israelites, the New Testament is addressed to all believers. One good work that is stressed in the New Testament is obedience to the authorities that God has placed over us in the government, in our work, and in our homes. Paul says: **“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God”** (Romans 13:1). The apostle Peter taught the very same thing: **“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good”** (1 Peter 2:13-14). Such obedience is the will of God for us,

except when these authorities forbid us from obeying God or command us to do something that is clearly contrary to God's will. In such cases we follow the example of Peter and the other apostles and say: "**We ought to obey God rather than men**" (Acts 5:29).

Because of our sinful flesh it often happens that professing Christians think they know better than God which works are really good. In the Old Testament the Lord told the people through Moses that they should "**remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them**" so that they would "**not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined**" (Numbers 15:39). The days of the judges were especially ungodly because "**everyone did what was right in his own eyes**" (Judges 17:6; Judges 21:25).

God commanded King Saul to attack the Amalekites and told him: "**Utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey**" (1 Samuel 15:3). To our human point of view this seems extreme, and King Saul thought he knew better than God. And so "**Saul and the people spared Agag (the king of the Amalekites) and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them**" (1 Samuel 15:9). When Saul tried to defend his actions and say that he saved the animals for sacrifice, God's prophet Samuel bluntly told him: "**To obey is better than sacrifice, ... for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king**" (1 Samuel 15:22-23). To do what God commands is always a good work; to disobey God is always evil.

When the united kingdom split into two parts after the death of Solomon, Israel (the northern kingdom) was ruled by King Jeroboam I. But Jerusalem, the place where God commanded the people to worship Him, was in Judah (the southern kingdom). Since Jeroboam did not want his subjects to go to Jerusalem in the south to worship God, he set up two other places for worship at Bethel and Dan. He claimed he was still worshiping the same God, but his worship was self-chosen worship, not the worship God had commanded. His sin was called "**the sin of Jeroboam**" (2 Kings 13:2 and many other verses), and all the kings of Israel continued in this same sin. But self-chosen worship is not obedience to God.

As the years went by, the Jewish elders added many rules and regulations to God's laws, and eventually their own laws were considered more important than what God had said. The Pharisees in Jesus' time accused Him of sinning because He did not follow the tradition of the elders. Jesus replied to their accusations with an accusation of His own: "**Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ... You have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'**" (Matthew 15:3-9).

The Christians in Colosse were being misled by teachers who were burdening them with all kinds of regulations about food and drink and the Sabbath, as well as with new doctrines like the worship of angels. The apostle Paul wrote to them: "**Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths. ... Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels. ... Why do you subject yourselves to regulations – 'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,' which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh**" (Colossians 2:16-23). To the Corinthians Paul wrote: "**You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men**" (1 Corinthians 7:23).

So too today there are professing Christians who make up their own rules, and there are religious groups, organizations, and individual leaders who make rules for others to follow and claim that these rules must be followed in order to please God. The Roman Catholic pope claims to have the authority

to tell all Christians everywhere how they must worship God. He claims to have the authority to determine for his people which works are good and which works are not good, implying that his rules must be obeyed if people want to please God.

There are religious groups that prohibit the eating of certain foods and prohibit all drinking of alcoholic beverages. There are groups that forbid Christians from participating in civil affairs or from serving as soldiers. There are those who call for revolution against government to correct injustice. There are those who promote abortion, homosexual behavior, sexual immorality and same-sex marriage – all things that are contrary to the clear Word of God. There are religious groups like the Muslims who believe that the persecution of non-Muslims is approved by God. But God's prophet Isaiah says: "**Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil! ... Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!**" (Isaiah 5:20-21).

There are some Lutherans also who have been influenced by pietism, so that they regard certain activities as sinful in themselves that God has not forbidden in His Word. For example, some of the pietists have condemned such activities as playing games, playing cards, any kind of dancing, taking walks for recreation, telling jokes, going to plays or movies, or enjoying a festive banquet. But Christians should not adopt rules of behavior that go beyond God's Word. Nor should we go in the other direction and approve of behavior or activities that are plainly contrary to God's Word, such as allowing women to become pastors or church leaders, or allowing parents to kill their unborn children. All our doctrines and rules of behavior must come from God's Word. Since our God wants us to be "**zealous for good works**" (Titus 2:14), we must permit God to tell us which works are good works. For that purpose, He has given us His Word in holy Scripture. "**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (breathed out by God), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Questions

1. Who are the only ones who can do good works in the sight of God?
2. What is a good work in the sight of God?
3. How can we determine which works are good, and which are not good?
4. What would be a very bad reason for trying to do good works?
5. What should motivate Christians to do good works?
6. How can Christian good works contribute to the spread of the Gospel?
7. How can we imitate Jesus when we are persecuted by Christ's enemies?
8. Why is it not necessary for us to keep all the laws of Moses?
9. Give some examples of self-chosen worship of God.
10. What is the Christian's duty to government authorities?
11. When should a Christian disobey government authorities?
12. Who is the final authority on what is right and what is wrong?
13. Give examples of religious groups that make laws for behavior that go beyond the Scriptures.
14. Which are the groups in your locale that make rules for worship and behavior that do not agree with Bible teaching?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.6 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Actions Neither Commanded nor Forbidden: Adiaphora

There are many activities and behaviors that are neither good nor bad in themselves. For example, a Christian is free to drink a glass of beer or wine or some other alcoholic beverage. God has not commanded us to do this. God has not forbidden us to do this. It is the Christian's individual choice whether he wants to drink this glass of beer or not. Activities like this that God has neither commanded nor forbidden are called *adiaphora*: "indifferent things", "things in the middle", or "in-between things". Under certain circumstances these "in-between things" may be wrong, and under other circumstances these "in-between things" may be necessary, but in themselves they are neither right nor wrong.

Sometimes one may need to make difficult decisions regarding adiaphora. One problem is knowing which things are adiaphora and which are not. Some people tend to extend the list of adiaphora to include things that God has definitely forbidden. For example, there are some professing Christians today who say that homosexual behavior is an adiaphoron (the singular form of adiaphora) that Christians are free to do or not do, even though God has definitely forbidden it. Others go to the opposite extreme and narrow the list of adiaphora so that there are very few activities that God has not forbidden. Some of the pietists, for example, made the playing of games a sin. Thus, it is easy for Christians to go too far in either direction. Only a careful study of Scripture can give us a good understanding of the things God has truly commanded and the things that God has truly forbidden.

Another problem that arises is that Christians come from different backgrounds and are brought up from their youth in different ways. If a person has been taught from his youth that drinking beer or any alcoholic beverage is a sin, that person's conscience has been trained in that way. For that person it is a sin for him to drink beer as long as his conscience tells him that it is wrong, for it is always wrong to sin against one's conscience, that is, to do something that one believes is wrong to do, even if it is not really wrong according to God's Word. In a situation like this it is necessary for the Christian to become convinced in their mind that drinking beer is not wrong according to God's Word before they drink beer.

In many cultures and in various religious backgrounds there are taboos, that is, things and activities that are considered off limits by most of the population. There may be taboos about certain foods, kinds of clothing, or the way men and women behave toward each other. When people of different backgrounds and cultures get together, it may take a certain amount of time and Christian training before they feel comfortable with each other.

Among the early Christians there was a big difference between the way Jews were brought up and the way non-Jews (Gentiles) were brought up. The Jews circumcised their male children; the non-Jews did not. The Jews did not eat what they considered to be unclean food, such as pork. The Gentiles did not follow such practices. The apostle Paul had to deal with this question in many congregations that were made up of both Jews and Gentiles. In chapters 14-15 of his letter to the Romans he deals with this question, as well as in chapters 8-10 of 1 Corinthians.

As we examine what the apostle says in these chapters, we can propose some principles as general guidelines for our Christian life of sanctification. The first principle is that regarding genuine adiaphora Christians are free either to do it or not do it, as they themselves determine in their own mind. That

is, a person can drink beer or not drink beer; we are free to do as we choose in this matter. For Paul says regarding food and drink: **“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself”** (Romans 14:14). Paul condemns those who make rules regarding food and drink and other things that go beyond what God Himself requires. He wrote to Timothy: **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer”** (1 Timothy 4:1-5).

The second principle is that when we are in the company of others who believe that certain activities are sinful, we will not practice what we are free to do otherwise, out of respect for those who in their consciences believe these things are wrong. The Bible term that is used for this is offense. We will try not to offend them. That is, we will not do things in their presence that these others consider wrong. We do not want them to follow our example and sin against their own conscience. The proper conduct in this case is to help someone understand what God says so that in time their conscience will understand that what we are doing is not wrong. Perhaps they will even feel free to join us in what we are doing after they are convinced from Scripture that it is not wrong. Such Christians who believe certain things are wrong when they are not wrong are called weak Christians.

This what the apostle has to say about such circumstances. **“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat”** (Romans 14:2-3). Again Paul says: **“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died”** (Romans 14:14-15). **“Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is made weak”** (Romans 14:20-21).

In the same way Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **“Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved”** (1 Corinthians 10:32-33). Paul was willing to give up his freedom to do certain things that were not wrong out of love for those who were still weak in their understanding of what was right or wrong according to Scriptures. His principle was this: **“Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant of all, that I might win the more. ... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”** (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

The third principle is that when we are in the company of teachers who insist that eating certain foods or practicing certain activities is sinful for us, we will defend our freedom to do those very things that others insist we must not do. Such persons who insist that others follow their rules are no longer weak Christians but false teachers whom we must oppose. Paul warns such false teachers: **“Let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has received him. Who are you to judge another’s servant?”** (Romans 14:3-4). To the Galatians Paul wrote: **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”** (Galatians 5:1). In a similar way he wrote to the Colossians: **“Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths”** (Colossians 2:16).

Paul followed these principles in the case of his assistants Timothy and Titus. Timothy had a Jewish mother and a Greek father. His father did not circumcise him in his youth, even though he had a Jewish mother. For the sake of his mission work among the Jews, Paul thought it best that Timothy should be circumcised. No one was insisting that he must be circumcised to be saved. In their freedom to circumcise or not to circumcise as they saw fit, they decided have Timothy circumcised.

But when some false teachers insisted that his Gentile helper Titus must be circumcised, Paul refused to have Titus circumcised. He wrote to the Galatians: **“Not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”** (Galatians 2:3-5). If Paul had agreed to have Titus circumcised under such pressure, he would have denied the Gospel principle that we are saved alone by faith in Jesus Christ, for these false teachers were insisting that circumcision was necessary for salvation.

In teaching the Gospel of Christ to people of a different culture, it is important to learn what activities are taboo in that culture, so that the Christian can avoid doing those things that may lead weak Christians to sin against their own conscience, or may lead persons of another religion to react in a negative way to Christianity before even knowing what Christianity really is. The attitude that Christians need to have in such circumstances is love, love for others that will lead them to do whatever may help them bring the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who need to hear it. Christians should gladly refrain from practicing their Christian freedom to do certain things, if it will help bring the Gospel of Christ to others. We need to follow Paul’s principle, stated above: **“Though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant of all, that I might win the more. ... I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some”** (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

Questions

1. What is the term used for things God has neither commanded nor forbidden?
2. What are the two extremes that people tend to take in these matters?
3. If you can, name some groups in your locale that go to one or the other of these extremes.
4. What are the taboos in the culture of your locale?
5. Do these taboos agree with Scripture, or not? Give some examples.
6. What problems developed between Jews and Greeks in the early churches?
7. What three principles should guide us in dealing with adiaphora?
8. Explain the Biblical basis for each of these three principles.
9. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy but not Titus?
10. What should we always keep in mind when teaching the Gospel to people of another culture?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.7 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Sanctification as a Gradual Process

When the Holy Spirit leads a sinner to trust in the redemption won by Christ for all persons everywhere, he receives the gift of 100% justification, 100% forgiveness of sins. There is no such thing as partial justification or partial forgiveness. But when it comes to sanctification (in the narrow sense), progress is gradual, and there can also be backsliding at times. The many times the apostles of our Lord encourage growth in holiness of living show us that this is true. In fact, all the encouragements given by the apostles regarding Christian living are necessary for the very reason that none of us has reached the point of perfection. Our righteousness of life is called incipient because it is still in the beginning stages of development and is always in need of improvement.

For example, the apostle Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Christians: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you” (1 Thessalonians 3:12). “We urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how ought to walk and to please God” (1 Thessalonians 4:1). “You yourselves are taught by God to love one another, and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more” (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

In his second letter to these Thessalonian Christians, Paul indicates that there has been growth among them. He writes: “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other” (2 Thessalonians 1:3). At the same time, he warns them against backsliding: “Do not grow weary in doing good” (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

The apostle Peter also wrote about growth in his two letters. “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). Just as babies grow by drinking milk, so Christians grow by drinking the pure milk of God’s Word. Just as the Holy Spirit uses the Gospel Word to create faith and produce the fruits of faith, so He uses the Gospel Word to increase faith and produce more fruits of faith. In his second letter Peter wrote: “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. ... But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:3, 5-8). Peter concluded this letter by again encouraging growth. He wrote: “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Peter also presents a strong warning against backsliding: “If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

During this process of sanctification, the Christian has total forgiveness of all sins as long as he turns to Christ for forgiveness. “**The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy**” (Psalm 147:11). “**The LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation**” (Psalm 149:4). The Christians to whom Peter wrote his two letters were encouraged to grow in their faith and love, but at the same time the good things they were already doing as fruits of their faith were pleasing to God. He says to them: “**You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ**” (1 Peter 2:5). Even though the good things we do are imperfect and in need of further growth, God is pleased with them because Christ’s perfect sacrifice covers their imperfection. As long as we are walking in the light as Jesus is in the light, “**the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**” (1 John 1:7). “**If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins**” (1 John 2:1-2), not only the sins we committed before we were Christians but also the sins we still commit as Christians.

The sinful flesh that remains within Christians cannot be converted or educated, but it must be put to death by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the means of grace. This implies the daily killing of the old Adam by the confession of sin and a renewed trust in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness. As this process continues in our lives from day to day, the flesh loses more and more of its power, and the spirit created by the Holy Spirit gains in strength and control over more parts of the body, such as the mouth, the hands, and the inner desires of the mind. But sometimes the flesh gains strength through our neglect of the means of grace and a failure to persevere and be serious in our fight against sin. Jesus’ parable of the sower and the seed warns us against the danger of other interests crowding out and choking the good seed of the Word, and the danger of giving up and turning away from the struggle against sin when the Christian walk becomes extremely difficult (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23; Luke 8:4-15).

Martin Luther wrote about the Christian’s gradual progress in sanctification 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. ... Meanwhile, because holiness has begun and is growing daily, we await the time when our flesh will be put to death, will be buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously and arise to complete and perfect holiness in a new, eternal life. Now, however, we remain only halfway pure and holy. The Holy Spirit must always work in us through the Word, granting us daily forgiveness until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness*” (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 438).

Questions

1. How can a Christian be perfectly holy in one way and yet only partly holy in another way?
2. What is the difference between imputed righteousness and incipient righteousness?
3. What does the apostolic encouragement to grow teach us about sanctification?
4. What does the Holy Spirit use to lead Christians to progress in living the Christian life?
5. What is meant by backsliding? How does God warn against it?
6. How can a Christian be forgiven when he continues to sin after he has been forgiven?
7. How can God accept a Christian’s good works even when they are imperfect?
8. In what way is it true that we are only halfway pure and holy, as Luther wrote?



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.8 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Perfection and Perfectionism

There is no Christian in this world who is all “new man” without having any of the “old man” in them. For this reason, there is no Christian who has reached or can reach perfection in their life as a Christian. What Paul confessed of himself is true of every Christian: **“I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members”** (Romans 7:22-23). Thus, the good works of Christians are deficient in quality and quantity because of their sinful flesh. This is why Christ’s apostles continue to admonish and encourage Christians to walk worthy of their Christian calling.

Because of this constant struggle against the flesh, the Christian may at times be tempted to give up the effort to walk according to the Spirit. There are so many failures and so many setbacks. But Paul encourages us to keep going: **“He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”** (Galatians 6:8-9).

Sometimes Christians even fall away from the faith temporarily or even permanently. When the falling away becomes obvious, the Christian community may even need to excommunicate a sinning Christian who is impenitent in their sinning, even as the apostle Paul directed the Christians in Corinth to put out of their congregation a man who was guilty of adultery with his father’s wife. Paul wrote: **“Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus”** (1 Corinthians 5:5). The purpose of such an excommunication is to bring the impenitent sinner to repent of their sins and restore them to faith in Christ and Christian fellowship.

The fact that perfection is impossible in this life does not mean, however, that we should set a lower standard for Christian living so that it becomes attainable. Jesus’ words teach us that the perfection of God Himself must remain the standard for Christian sanctification. For He said: **“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”** (Matthew 5:48). Our goal as sons and daughters of God is to imitate our **“Father in heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust”** (Matthew 5:45). So Paul writes: **“As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”** (Galatians 6:10).

The standard for Christian sanctification is the holiness of God Himself. The apostle Peter calls on the Christians in his care to be **“obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’”** (1 Peter 1:14-15).

The apostle Paul tells us that the grace of God teaches **“us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”** (Titus 2:12-14).

There is no sin we should not strive to overcome; there is no quality of goodness that we should not strive to attain. Paul says: **“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”** (2 Corinthians 7:1). And

again he writes: **“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, 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. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection”** (Colossians 3:12-14).

Some Christians have interpreted these passages that call for perfection and holiness to mean that Christians can actually attain perfection in this life. But the fact that God commands something does not mean that it is necessarily something that we are able to do. The main purpose of God’s commands is to make us realize how sinful we are so that we will turn to Christ for forgiveness. The more we strive to live the kind of life that God wants us to live, the more we become aware of the sinfulness within us that makes perfection impossible. Nevertheless, God’s forgiveness in Christ moves us to a life of love and gratitude for His blessings – a life that at least begins to imitate the holiness of our God.

But perfectionism, the idea that we can actually attain perfection in our Christian life here on earth, is not taught in the Scriptures. The apostle John plainly says of us Christians: **“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 a liar, and His word is not in us”** (1 John 1:8-10). The apostle Paul said of himself: **“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call through Christ”** (Philippians 3:12-14).

Despite these clear words from God’s Spirit, individuals and church groups have taught that it is possible to obtain perfection in this life. The Roman Catholic Church has officially adopted perfectionism, saying: “If anyone says that it is impossible also for a justified man and for one who is established under grace to keep the commandments of God, let him be anathema” (Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Canon 18).

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, taught that perfection of a certain kind is attainable. His teachings on perfection have been adopted by the many holiness church bodies, such as the Church of the Nazarene, the Wesleyan Methodists, and various groups calling themselves the Church of God. But God’s Word clearly condemns such perfectionist notions. We read in Proverbs 20:9: **“Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?’** Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7:20: **“There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”** The prophet Isaiah declared: **“We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”** (Isaiah 64:6).

The very fact that Jesus taught His followers to pray the Lord’s Prayer indicates that perfection is not possible in this life. If it were possible, we would not need to pray the Fifth Petition: **“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”** (Matthew 6:12). In fact, some perfectionists have taught that Jesus taught this prayer only to His followers at that time, but since the Holy Spirit has now come to make us holy and perfect, we no longer need to pray the Lord’s Prayer because we no longer need to ask for forgiveness of sins.

Church history shows that those who teach perfectionism as attainable have very clearly not attained perfection in their own lives; they were guilty of the same kinds of sins that the rest of us are guilty of. Those who teaching perfectionism often lower of the standard of perfection so that the goal has supposedly been reached by them. Their definition of sin generally omits sins of the mind or sins of weakness or ignorance. Even then they are generally unable to attain perfection according to their own lowered standard.

Jesus did not sin at all according to God’s high standard. **“In Him there is no sin”** (1 John 3:5). Nor do we ever find Him asking God to forgive some personal sin. But the Bible is filled with prayers of God’s people in which they confess their sins and ask for forgiveness. David prayed: **“I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and**

You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). David prayed: “**Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no one living is righteous**” (Psalm 143:2). Another psalmist wrote: “**If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared**” (Psalm 130:3-4).

There are three Old Testament chapters that contain national prayers of confession: Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, and Daniel 9. Confession of sin is a daily occurrence for Christians and Christian groups. “**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**” (1 John 1:9). James says: “**Confess your trespasses to one another**” (James 5:16). Paul confessed: “**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief**” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Jesus had many disagreements with the Pharisees. The problem with the Pharisees was their lack of recognition of their sins and their failure to confess them. On one occasion “**Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, “We see.” Therefore your sin remains’**” (John 9:41). In other words, if the Pharisees had admitted their blindness and confessed their sins, they would have been forgiven. But since they claimed to have no sins to confess (that is, they said they could see), they remained in their sins. As the proverb says: “**He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy**” (Proverbs 28:13).

Questions

1. Why is it impossible for a Christian to attain perfection in this life?
2. What are the two forces struggling against each other in the Christian?
3. What should Christians do when someone is impenitent in their sinning?
4. What is the standard for Christian behavior and attitude?
5. Why do many Christians attempt to lower the standard?
6. List some passages that declare that perfection is God’s standard.
7. What is the main purpose of God’s commandments?
8. What is meant by Christian perfectionism? What is wrong with it?
9. If there are any religious groups in your locale that teach perfectionism, name them.
10. How should Christians handle the sin in their lives?
11. What was the chief problem with the Pharisees?
12. How does the Lord’s Prayer teach us not to promote perfectionism?



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.9 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

The Value and Necessity of Good Works

When we talk about good works, we must distinguish between genuine good works that are pleasing to God, and those works that are externally good because they benefit society. The so-called good works of unbelievers are simply acts of civic righteousness. For example, the unbelieving natives of Malta did a “good” thing for the apostle Paul and those with him when their ship was destroyed. We read: **“And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold”** (Acts 28:2). Jesus Himself pointed out that unbelievers love those who love them and are kind and helpful to their friends (Matthew 5:46-47). Unbelieving rulers do good for their people when they punish evildoers and reward the law-abiding citizens (Romans 13:1-7). Such works are certainly preferable to crime and vice as far as this life is concerned. In fact, sometimes the outwardly good deeds done by unbelievers may seem to surpass in quantity and quality the genuinely good works of Christians.

But only Christians can do truly good works that please God. God looks at the heart and at the motivation of a person. For example, both Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to God, but God was only pleased with Abel’s offering; He was not pleased with Cain’s offering (Genesis 4:3-5). The difference between these sacrifices was that Abel brought his sacrifice **“by faith”** (Hebrews 11:4), that is, Abel brought his offering as a believer in God’s promise of a Savior. **“Without faith it is impossible to please God”** (Hebrews 11:6). Unbelievers, however, remain **“dead in trespasses and sins”** (Ephesians 2:1) and are **“without Christ”** and are those **“having no hope and without God in the world”** (Ephesians 2:12). On the other hand, God is pleased with the sacrifices of those who believe in Him, for it is written: **“By Him (Christ) let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased”** (Hebrews 13:15-16).

Genuinely God-pleasing good works are valuable for many reasons. They agree with God’s will, they are works of God in Christians, they bring glory to God, and they provide evidence of saving faith in Christ. The author of the letter to the Hebrews concluded his letter with this prayer: **“May the God of peace ... make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen”** (Hebrews 13:20-21). The apostle Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus: **“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:10).

Jesus said to His believers: **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”** (Matthew 5:16). James says: **“I will show you my faith by my works”** (James 2:18). So also on the last day Jesus will publicize the good works of His sheep as evidence of their faith in Him (Matthew 25:34-40).

Our good works are never good enough to merit any reward from God, for every good work of every Christian is still tainted with sin because of their sinful flesh. Nevertheless, God in His grace promises to give us rewards of grace – rewards that we don’t merit or deserve – to encourage us to persevere in His service as long as we live. Jesus describes His believers as **“blessed”** even though they are poor mourners who are persecuted; He tells them: **“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven”** (Matthew 5:3-12). Even good works that appear outwardly small or insignificant

will be rewarded, for Jesus says: “**He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward, And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward**” (Matthew 10:41-42).

We receive these rewards of grace both in this life and in the life to come. Jesus said to His disciples: “**There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life**” (Mark 10:29-30). Likewise the apostle Paul wrote: “**Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come**” (1 Timothy 4:8).

Since the Christian life is difficult and there are many obstacles and temptations, the promise of these rewards of grace encourages us to remain faithful to the end. “**Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal**” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). “**For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us**” (Romans 8:18).

Since Christ alone is our Savior, and we are saved alone by faith in Him, we should never think of any good works we do as being necessary for salvation. We have full salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and His work of redemption before and apart from any good works we may do. Paul says that the Gospel (the Good News of Christ) “**is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes**” (Romans 1:16). We need to always remember what Paul wrote to the Christians in Ephesus: “**By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast**” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

But even though we are saved alone by faith in Christ, and not by our good works, we dare not think or say to ourselves: “I am saved by faith in Christ, and not by my works. Therefore, I will strive to believe in Jesus and that’s all I am concerned about. I don’t need to please God by good works, and so I can do pretty much anything I want as long as I believe in Jesus.” Those who believe in Jesus appreciate what He has done for them, and therefore they want to do those things that please Him. Their good works flow naturally from their faith. They are not coerced by threats or coaxed by promises. Paul writes: “**Now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter**” (Romans 7:6). With joyful hearts Christians show their love for their Savior by doing the things that please Him. In this sense good works are not optional. They are necessary because God has commanded them. Faith in Christ cannot and does not coexist with a stubborn spirit that refuses to do God’s will. John wrote that the good things we do as believers give evidence to others as well as to ourselves that our faith is genuine. “**We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren**” (1 John 3:14). Faith in Christ always produces brotherly love. “**This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another**” (1 John 3:23).

We do not preserve our faith in Christ by doing good works. God preserves our faith by reminding us of the good things He has done for us in saving us from our sins. We “**are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**” (1 Peter 1:5). Evil works, however, destroy faith. For example, Paul says of Hymenaeus and Alexander that they “**have suffered shipwreck**” with respect to their faith (1 Timothy 1:19-20). Those who fall away from the faith, live according to the flesh, and so bring forth in their lives the works of the flesh “**will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (Galatians 5:21). “**If you live according to the flesh you will die**” (Romans 8:13).

Good works are harmful for our Christian faith and life only if we put our trust in them instead of Christ as our Savior. After the apostle Paul knew that Christ was his Savior, rather than his own obedience to God's law, he regarded his former "good works" as rubbish (garbage). Listen to his words: "**If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is of the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith**" (Philippians 3:4-9).

Questions

1. In what sense can unbelievers do good works?
2. Why is God is not pleased with these works?
3. What was the difference between the sacrifices of Cain and Abel?
4. Which are some of the sacrifices or good works that do please God?
5. How do we know which good works are according to God's will?
6. What is the proper relationship between faith in Christ and good works?
7. Why do we say that the good works of believers are the works of God?
8. What is the difference between a reward of merit and a reward of grace?
9. Why is it wrong to say that good works are necessary for salvation?
10. Why is it wrong to say that good works are optional?
11. Why did Paul call the works he did before he came to faith "rubbish"?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.10 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Prayer in the Life of the Christians

As soon as someone becomes a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit in them leads them to talk to God in prayer. The apostle Paul tells us: **“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’”** (Romans 8:14-15). “Abba” is the Hebrew child’s way of addressing his earthly father. It is also the way God’s adopted children address their heavenly Father. If we think of God as a cruel monster who wants to punish us, we will not want to pray to Him. But when we realize that in His love for the human race our heavenly Father sent His Son to save the world from its sins (as the Holy Spirit teaches us in His Word), then we are moved to speak to Him in words of praise and to ask Him for His blessings and His gifts. Paul says: **“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ”** (Galatians 4:6-7).

Old Testament believers in the coming Messiah also talked to God in prayer. In fact, the book of Psalms is God’s own prayer book; David and others spoke and wrote these prayers as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Among the last words of David was this statement: **“The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue”** (2 Samuel 23:2). As we read the accounts of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, and the rest of the prophets, we find them speaking to God very often, bringing not only their praise and their requests to Him, but also their cries of lament and desperation. These men were emboldened to pray to God based on God’s covenant with them that promised mercy and forgiveness through the Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).

Read to Daniel in his prayer recorded in Daniel 9:3-19. Here are some excerpts: **“O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, ... we have done wickedly. ... O Lord, to us belongs shame of face, ... because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. ... We do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God.”** Notice the awareness of our unworthiness and our dependence on God’s covenant and His mercy. At the same time Daniel was bold in His asking for great things: forgiveness from God for himself and his people, deliverance from their enemies, and speedy action in keeping with God’s own promises.

Our Lord Jesus, although He was Himself God on earth, prayed as a man to His heavenly Father. His disciples often found Him in solitary prayer. They recorded some of His prayers. They asked Him to teach them how to pray, and He answered their requests by giving them a model prayer (the Lord’s Prayer) as well as by giving them instructions concerning prayer and a strong encouragement to them to talk to God in prayer.

One of the things Jesus repeated to them often was that they should pray to God in His name, that is, in the name of Jesus. In fact, the only reason we can even dare to pray to God is because God sent His Son to remove the sin that separates us from God. We sinners have access to God only through Jesus, our Mediator. **“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all”** (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

On the evening before His death on Friday, Jesus had much to say about prayer in His name. He assured His disciples: **“Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it”** (John 14:13-14). **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you”** (John 15:7). **“Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full”** (John 16:23-24). **“You will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God”** (John 16:26-27).

Praying in the name of Jesus means that we pray as unworthy sinners, daring to approach God only because Jesus, God’s Son, is our Savior and Lord who has opened the way for us to pray to God by His suffering and death for our sins.

Since there is only one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, those who do not believe in this one God cannot really pray to Him at all. When they pray to a god of their own choosing, their prayers may seem to be as fervent and devout as the prayers of the apostles and prophets of Christ. We have an account of such unbelieving prayers in 1 Kings 18. The true prophet Elijah of the true God proposed to the false prophets of their idol god, Baal: **“I alone am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Therefore let them give us two bulls; and let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bull, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire under it. Then you call on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD; and the God who answers by fire, He is God”** (1 Kings 18:22-24).

The prophets of Baal made their attempt first. All day long they cried out: **“O Baal, hear us!” “They leaped about the altar which they had made. ... They cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them. ... But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention”** (1 Kings 18:26-29).

Did God hear these prayers addressed to Baal? Of course He was aware of them, for He knows all things. But He did not hear them in the sense that He regarded them with favor or was moved to make any response. The apostle Paul wrote: **“What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God”** (1 Corinthians 10:19-20). By their prayers to their idols the unbelievers are actually praying to demons (evil spirits, Satan’s angels), and not to the one true God.

Jesus said this about the prayer of unbelievers: **“When you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words”** (Matthew 6:7). On the other hand, Jesus said to His believers: **“Do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him”** (Matthew 6:8). The purpose of prayer is not to inform God of anything, for He knows us and He knows our needs better than we know ourselves.

For this reason, God does not always answer our prayers in the ways we would like or expect. He says: **“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”** (Matthew 7:7-11). Since our Father gives His children only good gifts, even if we ask for bad gifts, we sometimes get something different from what we asked for, but when that happens, we trust that His gifts are better than our requests. That is why John writes: **“If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us”** (1 John 5:14). Even Jesus Himself prayed: **“Not My will, but Yours, be done”** (Luke 22:42). How much more necessary it is for us to ask God to grant our requests only if it is according to His will!

Christian prayer takes many different forms. There is no place where we cannot pray. There is no time when we cannot pray. There is no posture that we cannot use when praying. Whether we use the words of another, as when we pray the Psalms, or whether we formulate our own prayers, whether we speak the words out loud or whether we say them only in our minds, whether we only think thoughts without putting them into words or whether we write out our prayers, God is pleased to hear the prayers of His children.

The Bible gives us many examples of prayers in various circumstances. Daniel, for example, prayed “**in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem**”; he “**knelt down on his knees three times**” a day, “**and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days**” (Daniel 6:10). Jesus told His disciples: “**When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place**” (Matthew 6:6). Jesus “**fell on His face, and prayed**” in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His death (Matthew 26:39). “**The tax collector**” in Jesus’ parable “**beat his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’**” (Luke 18:13).

When the woman of Samaria asked Jesus whether Jerusalem or Mt. Gerizim was the proper place to worship God, Jesus replied: “**The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**” (John 4:23); they would not concern themselves about a specific place of worship. When Jesus prayed His majestic prayer recorded in John 17, He “**lifted up His eyes to heaven**” (John 17:1). After Jesus ascended to heaven, His disciples often gathered together in one place and prayed to their heavenly Father “**with one accord**” (Acts 1:14; Acts 4:24) Stephen prayed to God as he was being stoned to death (Acts 7:59-60).

Sometimes we do not know what to pray for. The apostle Paul says: “**The Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God**” (Romans 8:26-27). Notice that the Holy Spirit within us is also praying to our heavenly Father, and we can be absolutely sure our Father hears His prayers, “**because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of ‘God’**” (Romans 8:27). The apostle Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians to “**pray without ceasing**” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). To Timothy he writes: “**I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting**” (1 Timothy 2:8).

There is nothing that Christians cannot bring to God in prayer. Paul says: “**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God**” (Philippians 4:6). John wrote: “**If we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him**” (1 John 5:15).

As we search the Scriptures, we find Christians praying to God in their troubles, even as God instructs us through Asaph: “**Call upon Me in the day of trouble**” (Psalm 50:15). David prayed: “**O LORD my God, in You I put my trust; save me from all those who persecute me; and deliver me**” (Psalm 7:1). The prophet Jeremiah saw many days of trouble. On one of these days he prayed: “**I called on Your name, O LORD, from the lowest pit. You have heard my voice. Do not hide Your ear from my sighing, from my cry for help**” (Lamentations 3:55-56). During Jesus’ ministry many sick and troubled persons asked Him for help in prayers, like the prayer of Jairus: “**My little daughter lies at the point of death, Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live**” (Mark 5:23). The early Christians called on the Lord in their troubles as well, saying, for example: “**Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word**” (Acts 4:29).

But Christians talk to God in prayer also when they are not faced with any special need. The apostle Paul instructed Timothy concerning congregational worship: “**I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence**” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). We pray for ourselves, of course, for our own families, and for our friends, but here we are also told

to intercede for all those in authority over us. In fact, Jesus said: **“Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”** (Matthew 5:44). We should pray even for our enemies!

Our fellow-Christians desire our prayers. Ministers of the Gospel desire our prayers. The apostle Paul commands **“praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints – and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel”** (Ephesians 6:18-19). The saints in this verse are our living fellow-Christians.

The Gospel of Luke gives us the account of ten lepers who asked Jesus to help them. **“They lifted up their voices and said, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’”** But after Jesus healed them, only one returned to thank Jesus for this healing. Jesus then said: **“Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?”** (Luke 17:12-19). God is glorified and pleased when we thank and praise Him for what He has done and continues to do for us. Many of the psalms call on us to thank and praise our God. Some examples are: **“Sing praise to the LORD, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name”** (Psalm 30:4). **“I will give You thanks in the great assembly; I will praise You among many people”** (Psalm 35:18). **“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations”** (Psalm 100:4-5).

The entire Christian life is a life in which God speaks to us continually in His Word, as it echoes in our minds. And the Christian life is a life in which we are in contact with God in prayer. The apostle Paul encourages us with these words: **“Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God”** (Ephesians 5:18-21).

Questions

1. What is prayer?
2. How should we think of God when we pray to Him?
3. What did David say about the psalms in which he prayed to God?
4. What attitude did Daniel have in his prayers to God?
5. What can we say about Jesus' prayer life?
6. What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name?
7. Why did the idol Baal not answer the prayers of his prophets?
8. Why does God not give us some of the things we ask for?
9. What does it mean to pray according to God's will?
10. List some different postures that are possible when praying to God.
11. Name some times and places when and where Believers prayed to God.
12. For whom should we pray?
13. What did most of the healed lepers fail to do after their healing?
14. Why should we praise the Lord at all times and places?
15. Why can we say the Lord is good even when we are suffering?
16. How do Christians most often pray in your area in the world?
17. How would you encourage the practice of prayer among others?



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.11 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

Wrong Ideas Concerning Prayer

Non-Christians are not the only ones who have wrong ideas concerning prayer. False notions about prayer have entered in also among Christians. One such false notion is the idea that Christians should pray for those who have already died in an effort to help them attain eternal life or to bring some other blessing to them. The Bible contains no examples of prayers for the dead. God has neither commanded us to pray for the dead nor has He promised to hear or answer any prayers for the dead. Such prayers cannot benefit the dead, for their life has been their time for repentance and faith. It is written: **“It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment”** (Hebrews 9:27). Nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church encourages prayers for the dead, for it teaches that there is a place called purgatory where believers in Christ go after they die, and prayers on their behalf can shorten their stay in purgatory and hasten the day when they can be taken to heaven. But God’s Word says nothing at all about any such place as purgatory. The Bible teaches only two destinies: heaven and hell, and a person’s eternal destiny is determined at his death.

The Holy Spirit teaches us that our prayers should be directed only to God, that is, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Prayer is a form of worship, and Jesus said in response to Satan’s temptation: **“You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve”** (Luke 4:8). When the apostle John was about to worship a created angel whom God sent to him, the angel replied: **“See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!”** (Revelation 19:10). When the apostle Peter was sent to the home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius, the book of Acts says: **“As Peter was coming, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I myself am also a man’”** (Acts 10:25-26).

There are no commands or promises from God with respect to prayers addressed to departed saints, such as Mary or any of the apostles or past heroes of the faith. Yet in the rosary and other official prayers, the Roman Catholic Church claims that Mary should be invoked as a mediator between the sinner and the Savior Jesus Christ. The idea seems to be that it is good to go to Jesus’ mother to ask for her assistance before going to the Son of God Himself. But the apostle Paul told Timothy: **“There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all”** (1 Timothy 2:5-6). We have full access to God through Christ, and we need no other mediator. **“Having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus ... and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith”** (Hebrews 10:19-22).

We are forbidden to worship any idols or images or pray to any god other than the Triune God. Any worship or prayer to any deity that is not defined or described as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is idolatry. Such idolatry is common among many who claim to be Christians, however, for they are willing to worship and pray to some kind of god together with those who do not believe that Jesus is God, such as Jews, Muslims, and practitioners of various heathen religions. But the apostle John wrote: **“Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either”** (1 John 2:23).

Christians can and should pray to God at all times and in all places, and we should pray for all people as well, for Christians and non-Christians alike, for friends as well as for enemies. But this does not mean we should pray for the success of enemies of the Gospel, for that would be praying for the

success of the devil and his cause, rather than for the success of Christ and His cause. Whenever we pray the Lord's Prayer and say: "**Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, and Thy will be done,**" we are praying for the overthrow of all false teaching that does not honor God's name, we are praying against the kingdom of Satan and all evil causes, we are praying that Satan's will will not be done.

Our Lord warns us to "**beware of false prophets**" (Matthew 7:15). In following this, the apostle Paul instructs us: "**Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? ... Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you**" (2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Conducting a worship service or praying a prayer together with those who do not share our confession of Christ is putting things together that should be separated.

The apostle Paul also warns us against worship and prayer with those who teach or promote any kind of teaching or practice contrary to His Word: "**I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple**" (Romans 16:17-18).

On the other hand, it is good when confessing Christians pray with and for one another regularly, as we do in our church services. Jesus said: "**If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them**" (Matthew 18:19-20). The apostle Paul pleaded for the prayers of the Christians in Rome for his ministry: "**I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me**" (Romans 15:30). To the Colossians he wrote: "**Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving, meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ**" (Colossians 4:2-3). Likewise he wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica: "**Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified**" (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

Through prayer great things are accomplished in the world, both in connection with the preservation of the world and in connection with spiritual matters, for God does indeed answer the prayers of His children. The psalmist Asaph assures us that God answers the prayers of His children when he writes in God's behalf: "**Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me**" (Psalm 50:15). Thousands of believers have learned by experience that God answers their prayers and delivers them from many different kinds of trouble. Many nations and peoples have enjoyed periods of peace and prosperity because of the prayers of God's children. The prophet Jeremiah gave this advice to the Jews who were carried off as captives to Babylon: "**Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace**" (Jeremiah 29:7).

One of the strongest encouragements to pray comes from Jesus' own younger brother James, who gives us this assurance: "**Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit**" (James 5:13-18).

No doubt the greatest sin in connection with prayer is our failure to pray. Or perhaps it is our tendency to pray for selfish goals rather than for wanting God's will to be done above all else. James also wrote: "**You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures**" (James 4:2-3). Another fault in connection with prayer is that we don't believe that God will really hear and answer our prayers. James has this to say about that: "**If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways**" (James 1:5-8).

Since we tend to focus our attention on physical problems and on earthly needs, we need to follow the example of the apostle Paul, who prayed especially for the spiritual needs of the congregation in Colosse, a congregation he had never visited personally. Notice the focus of his prayer: "**We ... do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light**" (Colossians 1:9-12).

There are some Christian churches that consider prayer to be a means of grace. But a genuine means of grace is something God does to give us the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen our faith in Christ. God's Word and Sacraments are His means of grace. Our prayers are a response on our part to His means of grace. Our prayers need to be accompanied by the faithful use of the means of grace. God's talking to us precedes our talking to Him. It is always a mistake to pray about something without at the same time considering what God has to say about it in His Word. Some Christians urge unbelievers to pray a prayer to be saved, but it is impossible for an unbeliever to pray to God and ask Him for faith. God must first bring us to faith in Christ through the means of grace before we can pray to Him. As soon as there is the tiniest spark of faith in Christ, however, the new believer will ask God to strengthen his faith. Notice what the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: "**How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?**" (Romans 10:14).

Saying the words of a prayer without meaning them is a wrong use of prayer. This is the kind of worship that the Old Testament prophets Amos and Isaiah condemned. Amos wrote: "**I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments**" (Amos 5:21-23). Why did God despise their offerings and prayers? They were not sincere, and their actions proved it. Amos therefore adds: "**But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream**" (Amos 5:24).

Isaiah spoke similarly: "**When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood**" (Isaiah 1:15). Jesus quoted the following words of Isaiah against the Pharisees, who were among the hypocrites of His time: "**These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me**" (Isaiah 29:13).

Being able to talk to God in Jesus' name is a great privilege. It is possible only because Jesus has taken away the sin that separated us from God. "**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand**" (Romans 5:1-2). Our God wants His children to use this access that Jesus has won for us. Let us pray.

Questions

1. What should we not pray for people who have died?
2. Why should we direct our prayers only to the Triune God?
3. Why should we not consider Mary to be a mediator between Jesus and ourselves?
4. What does the Bible say about praying together with unbelievers?
5. What does the Bible say about praying with those who promote false teaching?
6. With whom should we pray?
7. For whom should we pray?
8. Against whom are we praying when we pray for God's name and kingdom?
9. Give some examples of prayers that were answered in the Bible.
10. If you can, give examples of your prayers that have been answered.
11. List several sins that one may commit in connection with prayer.
12. Why is prayer to God not a true means of grace?
13. Why did God not answer some prayers in the days of Amos and Isaiah?
14. What is meant by free access to God?
15. How should we use this access to God?
16. What things need to be corrected in your prayer life?



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A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 12.12 – The Doctrine of Sanctification

The Crosses of Christians

We know from God's Word that our Christian life in this world will not be easy. There are times of relative calm when God sends earthly blessings in abundance to His beloved children on earth. But there are other times when God in His love for His children sends them difficulties of various kinds to give them an opportunity to exercise their faith in His loving promises. God does not treat all His children in the same way. Some Christians are given heavy burdens, and other Christians are given lighter burdens. But all Christians are given some burdens.

The presence of sin in this world brings difficulties of various kinds to all human beings. Sometimes the word "cross" is used in a general sense to refer to any kind of suffering. But Jesus wants Christians to know that certain difficulties will happen to them just because they are Christians. These specific difficulties Jesus calls "crosses" because they come to Christians because of their connection to Christ and His cross. Jesus' cross is in a class by itself, for He was bearing all human sin and the guilt and punishment of all human sin; this culminated in His being forsaken by God on the cross. Nevertheless, each Christian has his own cross to bear, as he becomes a follower of Christ.

We now examine some of the many Bible passages that discuss the special crosses of Christians and how we should handle them. We need to keep in mind that as long as we are Christians – branches attached to Christ, the Vine – we are God's beloved children, and we are totally forgiven and declared fully righteous in the sight of our God. By faith in Jesus Christ we already have eternal life while we are still living in this world. The crosses God sends to us as Christians are not intended to destroy our faith in Christ but to strengthen it. Satan, however, attempts to use all such crosses for his own evil purposes; he is always trying to destroy our faith both in good times and in bad.

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus assured His followers: "**Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you**" (Matthew 5:11-12). Notice that persecution comes to us for Jesus' sake, that is, because of our connection with Jesus. Therefore, it is something we should rejoice in, rather than complain about. And it means we are in the company of God's prophets, who also were persecuted for Christ's sake.

Jesus did not promise His disciples that His message that we speak would be accepted by all. On the contrary He said: "**You will be hated by all for My name's sake. ... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!**" (Matthew 10:22, 25). Jesus told them that there would be times when they would have to choose between Jesus and their dearest friends and family on earth. He said: "**Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me**" (Matthew 10:34-38). "**If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me**" (Matthew 16:24). "**Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple**" (Luke 14:33).

It would be wrong for us to think that such crosses will be given only to those who are leaders among Christians, such as the twelve apostles and present-day pastors and teachers. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "**All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution**" (2 Timothy 3:12). To his recent converts in Galatia Paul said: "**We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God**" (Acts 14:22).

The apostle Paul in particular experienced many dangers as he traveled throughout the Roman Empire proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. He gave the Christians in Corinth a listing of some of the major obstacles he faced as a missionary (2 Corinthians 11:23-33). Besides the persecutions he endured from Christ's enemies, Paul had some kind of physical problem he called "**a thorn in the flesh**" which he asked God to remove from him. When God denied his requests, Paul realized why God gave him this thorn. He wrote: "**Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure**" (2 Corinthians 12:7). Because God had blessed Paul with such amazing revelations and visions, he was in danger of spiritual pride and needed that thorn to keep him humble and weak and in constant need of God's strength.

The Christians to whom the apostle Peter wrote his first letter were undergoing persecution of various kinds. Christian slaves, for example, were being treated harshly by their masters, and they were tempted to rebel against them. But Peter assured them that when they were punished wrongfully, they were following in the footsteps of Christ Himself: "**Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps**" (1 Peter 2:18-21).

Peter made the same point to all his readers when he wrote: "**Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings. ... If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you. ... If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter**" (1 Peter 4:12-16).

It is not only Christians who suffer in this world. For His own purposes God sometimes sends or allows terrible tragedies to happen to those who do not believe in Him. We think of the ten plagues that God sent to the Egyptians and their Pharaoh when they refused to let their slaves, the Israelites, leave their land, as God demanded (Exodus 7-11). When such tragedies occur in our day, we usually do not know the specific purpose God has in mind. David simply states the fact: "**Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god**" (Psalm 16:4). "**Many sorrows shall be to the wicked**" (Psalm 32:10). "**Evil shall slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned**" (Psalm 34:21). But the evils suffered by the unbelieving in this world are as nothing compared to the woes of eternal damnation. Jesus said: "**He who does not believe will be condemned**" (Mark 16:16). The apostle elaborates on what this means in his second letter to the Thessalonians: "**The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day**" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

We need to be careful that we do not presume to judge those who are undergoing such tragedies as being more guilty than those who are spared such events. We need to remember what Jesus said in connection with two tragedies that occurred in His time: "**Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed**

them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:2-5). These tragedies, whenever and wherever they occur, are calls to repentance for all of us.

When Christians endure especially difficult problems, we must refrain from passing judgment on them also. When the godly man Job was struck by the horrible losses of his property and his ten children all in one day, and then shortly after that was given a terrible disease, his three friends drew the conclusion that Job must have been guilty of some secret sin for which God was punishing him. But Job’s friends were wrong and cruel in their judgments. The book of Job takes us behind the scenes and shows us that through the struggles of Job God was showing Satan that Job was His loyal follower regardless of the evil that came upon him. It was God who allowed Satan to harm Job. **“The LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not lay a hand on his person”** (Job 1:12). It was God who then allowed Satan to go even further. **“The LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life”** (Job 2:6). Notice that Satan can only go as far as God allows in inflicting evil on God’s children. God remains in total control.

The story of Job shows us that it is God who brings hardships of various kinds on Christians, although it is the devil and the unbelieving world that actually inflict the pain and anguish. Job recognized that it was God who was sending him all his troubles, and that was what troubled him the most. Job said: **“God has delivered me to the ungodly, and turned me over to the hands of the wicked. ... He has set me up for His target”** (Job 16:11-12). God spoke through His prophet Isaiah: **“I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things”** (Isaiah 45:6-7). Christians do not believe in two equal deities, one good and one bad, but only in one Lord God, who controls all things.

Yet there is a struggle between God and Satan for the soul of every individual. On the night before His own death, Jesus said to Peter: **“Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren”** (Luke 22:31-32). Peter did disown his Master later that night, but he also repented of his sin and turned to Jesus for forgiveness, as Jesus had prayed. The apostle Paul warned the Christians in his care: **“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”** But then he went on to assure them: **“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it”** (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

The letter to the Hebrews compares God’s chastening of His children with the discipline imposed by fathers on their children for their good. We read: **“If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ... For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peace fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”** (Hebrews 12:7-11).

It is God who sends crosses to His children. It is not for us Christians to impose crosses on our fellow-Christians, supposedly for their good. We are not wise enough to make such judgments. The apostle Paul condemned the false teachers in Colosse who promoted **“self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body”** (Colossians 2:23). Nor is it proper for us Christians to choose our own cross, such as punishing ourselves with starvation or excessive self-discipline, or deliberately inviting persecution or martyrdom. The apostle Paul escaped danger when he could; in one case he **“was let down in a basket through a window in the wall”** to escape from the governor in Damascus (2 Corinthians 11:33).

We Christians may ask God to deliver us from our crosses. Paul prayed for deliverance from his **“thorn in the flesh”** and God answered him by explaining why he had to keep it. Even Jesus prayed to be delivered from the cross in the Garden of Gethsemane. God answered His prayer by strengthening Him

for the ordeal without taking it away. On such occasions we should pray as Jesus did: “**Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done**” (Luke 22:42).

At times Christians are tempted to think that their crosses are punishment for some particular sin they have committed. At such times we need to remember that our sins have already been punished when Jesus suffered for them on the cross, and “**there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus**” (Romans 8:1). God chastens us “**for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ... It yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it**” (Hebrews 12:10-11). Instead of imagining that we are being punished for our sins, we rather ought to “**rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy**” (1 Peter 4:13). The apostles of the Lord had been “**beaten**” by the Jewish council, but when they were let go, “**they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name**” (Acts 5:40-41).

There is no link between certain sins and specific judgments. When Jesus and His disciples encountered a man blind from birth, they “**asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him’**” (John 9:2-3). When Jesus’ friend Lazarus got sick and died, Jesus said: “**This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it**” (John 11:4). God has a reason and purpose for everything He does, but it is not for us to always know what His purpose and reason is. In a general way we can say with Paul: “**We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to his purpose**” (Romans 8:28).

In times of extreme suffering Christians are even tempted to doubt God’s love for them and perhaps even His entire revelation in the Bible. In His parable of the sower and the seed Jesus said that some seed “**fell on rock, and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture**” (Luke 8:6). Jesus explained this, saying: “**The ones on the rock are those, who when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away**” (Luke 8:13). This is not God’s purpose or intention, but it does happen. Satan loves nothing more than to attack a Christian when they are suffering and rob them of their faith in Christ. Satan tried to tempt Jesus when He was hungry after a forty-day fast (Matthew 4:2-3). The Christian is tempted to say with Jeremiah: “**Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time?**” (Lamentations 5:20).

Psalms 37 and 73 contain the laments of believers who wonder why the ungodly have so much more prosperous and pleasant lives in this world than the godly. When we think of the trials that pursued David as he fled from King Saul, who wanted to kill him, we can understand why he was led to say: “**How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?**” (Psalm 13:1). But in this same short psalm David concludes: “**I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me**” (Psalm 13:5-6).

It is God’s ultimate salvation, that is, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, that allows the Christian to rejoice in times of suffering and say with the prophet Habakkuk: “**Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the field, and there be no herd in the stalls – yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation**” (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

After a long period of suffering God blessed Job with twice as much as he had in the beginning and even gave him ten more children (Job 42:12). But even if God does not bring our sufferings to an end in this world, He will compensate for our grief in this world with the joys of the hereafter. Paul said: “**I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us**” (Romans 8:18). James wrote: “**Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to**

those who love Him” (James 1:12). The “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” gives us reason to “greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.” Think of what awaits those who cling to Jesus all the way to the end: “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:4-6).

Questions

1. What is meant by the crosses that Christians must bear?
2. What is the difference between Christ’s cross and the Christian’s cross?
3. What does God intend to do through the crosses He sends us?
4. How does Satan attempt to use the crosses of Christians?
5. Prove from God’s Word that all Christians must bear a cross.
6. Why did God not remove Paul’s thorn in the flesh?
7. What is the difference between Christian crosses and the troubles that happen to all human beings?
8. What is the worst evil that can happen to any human being? Why?
9. What was wrong with the way Job’s friends were talking to him?
10. What temptations come to Christians when they are bearing their crosses?
11. How do we overcome such temptations?
12. What always remains the same no matter what Christians are experiencing?
13. How did Jesus’ apostles react to the crosses they had to bear?



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 write 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 though 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?