Laying the Foundation

Lesson 10

FAITH THAT WORKS

Catechism Two, Lesson 10

Reading: Romans 5:1–11; James 2:21–26

1. Does Justification Include Assurance Of Salvation?

Assurance is a subjective experience, an inner sureness resulting from the exercise of faith. Justification is a judicial decree or declaration of God. Since God cannot lie, and He does not change, this judicial decision makes our restoration to His favor an objective and eternal reality. Justification is the exact opposite of condemnation; it is God’s acquittal. The God who has declared the case decided in our favor on the basis of the merits of Christ to whom we are joined by faith and He will never again bring up the matter. For this reason justification gives us peace with God.

A. Justification eliminates any legitimate source of condemnation.

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us (Rom. 8:33, 34).

B. Justification changes our position in relation to God.

God no longer looks upon us apart from our union with Christ. Since He sees us “in Him,” our acceptance is complete and final.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1).

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6).

C. Justification includes forgiveness of sins on the basis of the penalty already paid by Christ.

God’s wrath has already been fully placated (propitiated), and His holiness perfectly satisfied through Christ’s self-sacrifice in payment for our sins (expiation). Christ declared that His work was finished; God continues to consider it finished.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him (1 Thess. 5:9, 10).

2. What Is God’s Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is closely related to justification. God takes the initiative in forgiving us of all sin and iniquity, apart from anything we can do to merit this forgiveness. It is given freely as grace. But like justification, forgiveness is only given to us in the form of pardon from penalty and release from guilt because sacrifice or atonement has already been paid. Forgiveness does not mean, as so many seem to think, that penalty is set aside. To the contrary, in both the Old and New Testaments, forgiveness follows the payment of penalty as prescribed.

… as he did with the bullock for a sin offering, so shall he do with this: and the priest shall make atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them (Lev. 4:20).

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28).

The effectiveness of forgiveness differs in the Old and New Testaments for the simple reason that adequate payment or sacrifice to completely remove sin was not available until the offering of Christ Himself. Sins under the Old Covenant were forgiven and covered by the blood of animals offered as substitutionary sacrifices for the sinner who both confessed these sins and exercised faith in God’s promise to forgive him. Under the New Covenant, God is free to entirely separate the sinner from his sin, sending all remembrance of it away. Many times we use the stronger term “remission of sin” to translate the same Greek word for forgiveness, aphesis.

The central purpose of God’s forgiveness is to restore His fellowship with man. By destroying all remembrance of sin, God can demonstrate His love and favor without restraint. God guarantees under the New Covenant to forget our sins.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more (Heb. 8:12).

He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:37–39).

3. By What Means Were We Justified?

God’s decision to declare sinners righteous came from His own initiative. Nothing made Him do it. But from before the foundation of the earth—even before all men sinned—God had planned a means of reconciliation through Christ. He had determined to justify man by identifying him with Jesus Christ.

A. By grace (unmerited favor).

Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24).

B. By the blood of Christ.

Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him (Rom. 5:9).

C. By the resurrection of Christ.

But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from, the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:24, 25).

D. By faith.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

E. By works.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only (James 2:24).

4. Are Grace And Works Compatible?

Not in the sense of relying upon one or the other for salvation and God’s favor. Grace by definition means “unmerited favor, something we cannot earn or repay.” There is nothing man can do or give to God to secure His favor. Instead man must be receptive. Faith is simply our outstretched hand to receive all grace has to give. As the result of grace working in us, changing our nature, we become able to do the good works God always purposed from before the beginning of the world. But apart from redemption, we could not fulfill God’s plans for us. These good works are only the result of His working in and through us. All else are but dead works, and abominations in God’s sight.

A. Grace is not a reward for works.

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness (Rom. 4:4, 5).

B. Reliance upon works nullifies grace.

And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work (Rom. 11:6).

C. The salvation we receive by faith in grace expresses itself in good works.

… work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12, 13).

D. One part of the new creation is being made able to fulfill God’s will.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10).

5. Is The Law Of Moses Applicable To Believers?

No. This question caused more controversy than any other doctrinal area in the New Testament. Judaizers were constantly insisting that Christians submit to the ordinances of the Jewish law in order to be saved. This included not only observing the Sabbath, but physical circumcision and dietary restrictions. In Christ these requirements are all done away with, and all reliance is put upon Him to save us.

A. Historically this question was settled at the Council of Jerusalem once for all.

After Paul and Barnabas had reported notable success preaching among the Gentiles, certain leaders became concerned that these Gentile converts conform to the law of Moses. Controversy continued until the apostles all met together. Finally James became the spokesman voicing the direction of God when he said:

Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day (Acts 15:19–21).

B. Those who keep the law place themselves under a curse if they fail to keep all of it.

The law is a whole system in itself. You cannot decide to do some of the commandments and neglect others. The blessings and the curses of the law depended on submission to the total Mosaic covenant.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them (Gal. 3:10).

Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen (Deut. 27:26).

C. Men fall from grace when they attempt to follow both the law and the gospel.

God will tolerate no mixtures. It is either grace or law. You can add nothing to grace. The urge to add works to grace usually comes from inadequate trust and lack of assurance.

For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:3, 4).

D. Jesus clearly defined the works of God as believing or relying upon Him.

Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (John 6:28, 29).

E. Faith works by a love that only God can give to us.

The law is summarized in the one word “love.” Some of the Church Fathers sought to make love the work that justified, but this cannot be for the one simple reason that man cannot love God or others, apart from the gracious working of the Holy Spirit within him. Love is a fruit of our union with God. It is an outworking of the new relationship we enter into by faith.

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love (Gal. 5:6).

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us (Rom. 5:5).

Home Study: Lesson 10

Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. What is the difference between assurance and justification?

2. How is forgiveness related to justification?

3. List the five means by which we are justified.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

4. Why are grace and works not compatible?

5. Why do believers not have to keep the Law of Moses?