

# Christian Doctrine

#1 - This lesson takes up the critically important work of the Holy Spirit. Recall from Lesson 1 that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God. He is equal in every way to God the Father and God the Son, and his work is indispensable. It's indispensable because he is the one who takes everything Christ has done for all people and makes it personally beneficial to individual people.

*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26).*

The Spirit's tool or weapon for carrying out his work is the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. We begin our study of the Spirit's work with words from Martin Luther's Small Catechism.

#2 -

## THE THIRD ARTICLE

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

*What does this mean?*

I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers.

On the Last Day he will raise me and all the dead and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

#3 - Our Natural Condition

While newborn children appear to be pure and innocent, the scriptures give us a different description.

*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me (Psalm 51:5).*

*...every inclination of his [man's] heart is evil from childhood (Genesis 8:21).*

Original sin, like all other sin, is damning. Being born with original sin means that our condition condemns us. Our natural will wants what is contrary to God's will. People are not naturally good; they are naturally evil.

#4 - Our Natural Condition (dead)

The Bible uses several vivid pictures to describe this natural, sinful state in which we are born. One of the most vivid is that by nature we are spiritually dead.

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3).*

#5 - Our Natural Condition (blind)

By nature, sin makes us blind to the truth that the true God loves us and saved us through Christ.

*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4).*

**#6 - Our Natural Condition (enemies of God)**

When we enter the human race through conception and birth, we are neither good nor neutral. We are naturally hostile toward God.

*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).*

**#7 - Who chooses whom?**

As those whom God's Word describes as spiritually dead, spiritually blind and enemies of God, it would hardly seem appropriate to say that we can choose to come to God and take hold of Jesus on our own.

**#8 - God's incredible grace**

The conversion of Saul (read Acts 9) is a description of what takes place every time a person is brought to believe in Jesus. Trusting in Jesus for forgiveness is not an act of the will or a human decision. Faith in Jesus is a gift from God. Conversion from unbeliever to believer is due only to God's incredible grace.

**#9 - God's incredible grace**

The Holy Spirit miraculously gives spiritual life (faith in Jesus) to those who were spiritually dead.

*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved (Ephesians 2:4-5).*

**#10 - God's incredible grace**

God called us out of the dark blindness of unbelief into the light of faith in Christ's forgiveness.

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).*

**#11 - God's incredible grace**

Jesus' death reconciled us to God. While our sinfulness gave us the status of being God's enemies, Christ's sacrifice has changed our status to that of friends of God.

*For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life (Romans 5:10)!*

**#12 - Who chooses whom**

As dead, blind enemies of God, we could not choose God. God chose us to be his own and gave us faith to believe in him. It is the special work of the Holy Spirit to create the gift of saving faith in our hearts. Our entire salvation, including the faith to believe in Jesus, is all God's gift.

*"Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus be cursed,' and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3).*

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

*"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, 'Here am I, here am I'" (Isaiah 65:1).*

*Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:16-18).*

*It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30).*

#13 - Has God ever called you on the telephone to share with you some vital piece of information about the Christian faith? Has God ever spoken to you from the blue sky to teach you some point about the Trinity? Have the beauties of nature ever spoken to you God's word of forgiveness while you were out for a weekend camping trip in the woods? The Holy Spirit isn't jumping anybody in the alley this week. The Holy Spirit accomplishes the miracle of bringing people to faith in a unique way. He always and only brings people to faith through the means of grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10-11).*

*“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ (Romans 10:13-17).*

*But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).*

*For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21).*

The scriptures are not only the message of how God has saved us. They are also the very means by which the Holy Spirit brings us to believe in Jesus. It is through the scriptures that God works repentance in people's hearts.

#14 - “‘To repent’ literally means ‘to change one’s mind.’ In the strictest sense, repentance is the change of mind that takes place when a person no longer desires or expects to be saved through his own good works, but wishes instead to be saved through the work of Christ. In other words, repentance is the change which takes place when a person becomes a Christian” (Dr. S. Becker. Revelation, p. 48).

*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news”(Mark 1:14-15)!*

*“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:15-18).*

*And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:24-26).*

Repentance is not the work of man but the work of God in man.

“Repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believes that, for Christ’s sake, sins are forgiven, [which] comforts the conscience, and delivers it from terrors” (Augsburg Confession - Art XII).

#15 - Faith is a trust in God which God creates by showing me my need for forgiveness and by meeting that need in Jesus Christ. God credits the faith he gives us as the righteousness he demands of us.

*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see (Hebrew 11:1).*

*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9).*

*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6).*

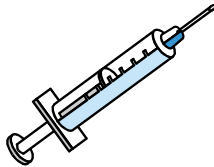
The relationship between faith and salvation can be illustrated in the following way.



Think of sin as a terrible disease which, if left untreated, always results in death.



Think of God's gracious gift of Jesus Christ and his righteousness as the antidote to our sin.



Think of faith as the way God gives you the antidote to sin – the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection.

When you received the injection of that antidote and your life was saved, you probably wouldn't sing the praises of that wonderful hypodermic needle. You'd sing the praises of the antidote. The hypodermic needle had to be there, or you wouldn't have received the antidote. But you know that the needle isn't what saved you.

Likewise, faith has to be there if someone is going to be saved (cf. John 3:16 or Acts 16:30,31). However, we know faith isn't the cause of salvation. Salvation is the result of the object of our faith, Jesus Christ. Through faith we receive the benefits of his work.

#16 - Mainline protestant Christianity offers various but similar versions of "How to become a Christian." A brief examination of this approach to becoming a Christian indicates that 1) the teaching of original sin is being ignored; 2) the gospel is being distorted; and 3) an ability is being ascribed to human beings that they simply don't possess. An approach to becoming a Christian that says God has done his part and we need to do ours ignores "dead in transgressions and sins", turns faith into a work, robs one of the comfort of God's salvation and robs God of the glory due him.

Concerning "free will" Martin Luther wrote the following:

*I wish that the expression "free will" had never been invented. It is not recorded in scripture either and should more justly be called self-will, which is worthless. Why all this boasting about a free will and the powers of man, about the natural light of reason? What is it but blindness and darkness? Can it do anything better than fight against the faith and God's Word? This is why I reject and condemn as nothing but falsehood every doctrine that lauds our free will. Such a teaching is directly opposed to the help and grace of our Savior Jesus Christ. For since, apart from Christ, death and sin are our masters and the devil is our god and prince, there can, then, be neither power nor might, neither wit nor wisdom, by which we may prepare ourselves for righteousness and life or may search for them. On the contrary, we are bound to be blinded, captives of the devil and slaves of sin, to do and to think whatever pleases our masters and is opposed to God with his commandments. Ah, what a fine freedom that is (Martin Luther)!*

#17 - Many Christian groups today proclaim that faith is the individual's part of the "Christianity deal." After presenting the life and death of Christ, many groups leave the rest up to the person, by saying something like, "This can all be yours if you accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior. God has done his part; now you must do your part by receiving Jesus. Invite Jesus into your heart. Make your decision for Jesus. Say 'yes' to Jesus."

Receiving Jesus, however, is nothing else than believing in him.

*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:10-13).*

#18 - Jesus' knock at the door (Revelation 3:20) is nothing else than his call to repentance, sounded forth through the entire message of God's Word. We do not have a weak Savior who is unable to rescue us unless we open the door of our hearts to him. If Jesus' word could raise Lazarus from the dead, then his powerful gospel invitation can certainly raise up a spiritually dead person to believe in him.

*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).*

(The context of Revelation 3:20 is a letter to Christians in Laodicea. In its context, this passage does not refer exclusively to unbelievers.)

#19 - The message by which God brings us to faith is not:

"God will forgive you and you will be his child if..."

The message by which God brings us to faith is:

"Jesus lived perfectly in your place and died to pay for all your sins.  
You have been forgiven. Believe the good news."

#20 - Preservation in the Christian faith.

It is the Holy Spirit alone who brings us to faith in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit alone who keeps us in this saving faith. The means which he used to bring us to faith is the very same means he uses to keep us in the faith – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Scripture provides no support whatsoever for the thinking, "Once a Christian, always a Christian." It offers examples of those who once held the Christian faith only to reject it, as well as encouragements that we do not slip into a false security and fall from the faith.

*Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:18-20).*

*So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall (1 Corinthians 10:12)!*

Just the fact that Christians can fall from the faith does not change what God wants to happen. He wants to keep us in the faith through the Holy Spirit's use of the Word.

*In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:4-6).*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).*

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*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27-28).*

*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones (1 Thessalonians 3:13).*

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).*

*Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:32).*