Scripture Reading: Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; [4] perseverance, character; and character, hope. [5] And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Know Your Benefits

Let us pray. Father God, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Thank you for your holy word which explains in detail the riches of your grace that you have lavished on us. May we please you as we open, examine, appreciate, and use these treasures that you have so freely given us. In the name above all names we pray. Amen.

When you buy a medical insurance policy, you read it carefully to understand what benefits are included and which are not. If you are named in a will, you want to know what has been left to you. We exercise and eat right, hoping to reap the benefits of good health. When we enter into the kingdom of God, many benefits are given to us, and we will profit from understanding what they are. We have been exploring the benefits that God gives us as his children when he effectively calls us into his family: primarily justification, adoption, and sanctification. Now we go on to examine what God has revealed to us about the benefits that come with these gifts in this life. The benefits that in this life go with or come from justification, adoption, and sanctification are: the assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, and growing and persevering in grace to the end of our lives.[1] Let us look at each of these four, one at a time.

First, the assurance of God's love. In verse 5 of our scripture reading this morning, we hear that "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Every Christian should have

a deep inner awareness of God's love for us. Paul wants us to experience this love in a big way: "poured out." Paul tells us how this is done: by the power of the Holy Spirit. We must walk in the Spirit and be filled with the Spirit in order to be aware of God's love. In Romans 8:9 we see that every Christian has the Holy Spirit: "You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ." We also know from Ephesians 5:18, however, that not every Christian lives in the fullness of the Spirit: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit."

The assurance of God's love is the persuasion that we are the children of God and the heirs of eternal life. The assurance of God's love is not essential to one's salvation, but it is essential to one's spiritual well-being. The Bible teaches that we should desire and seek such assurance in 2 Peter 1:10 and Hebrews 6:11. If we lack this assurance, we should pray for faith and its fruits to enable us to attain it.

Second, peace of conscience. This is an inward quietness that is a result of being justified by faith. Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We have assurance of our reconciliation to God and his love and peace. Third, joy in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in the bodies of believers. We are His temple. The Holy Spirit gives us the joy of salvation, and a sense of God's favor. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23 ESV).

Fourth, growing and persevering in faith. Growing in faith refers to growth in holiness and progress in piety. This work of the Holy Spirit progressively produces more faith, love, submission, patience and meekness. Perseverance in faith refers to God's perseverance, not ours. God will keep us to the end. A believer can never fall totally or finally from grace, due to God's promises and faithfulness, and due to the Holy Spirit within the believer, and the believer's union with Christ.

These are the benefits that come to us in this life. In the life to come, there are eternal benefits. When believers die, their souls are made perfectly holy and immediately pass into glory. Their bodies, which are still united to Christ, rest in the grave until the resurrection.[2] We read in Hebrews 12:23 that the soul is made perfect and passes into glory. In 1 Corinthians 6:15, we read that our bodies are members of Christ. They remain in mystical union with him until the resurrection, when the resurrected body will be united with the soul. This resurrection is the last and general resurrection of all the dead on the last day as we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. We read in Philippians 3:21 that our new bodies will be like Jesus' glorious body. We can be assured of this because the promises of God are sure and true, made even before the world began (2 Timothy 1:9). There is no reason to doubt.

We read in Daniel 12:2 that the bodies of unbelievers will also awake on the last day – but to "shame and everlasting contempt." Unbelievers' bodies shall be released from the grave and they shall see Christ as their final judge. They shall stand before His judgment Throne and shall have their sins read out of the books and they will be eternally cast into hell (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, Revelation 20:12). In Matthew 25:33-34 we read, "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. **34** Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

In the resurrection, believers are raised up in glory, acknowledged and acquitted, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoyment of God for all eternity. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:42-45:

> "So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. **43** It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. **44** It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. **45** And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit."

This glory is the glory of the resurrection, when the body will be restored and no longer subject to death and dissolution. We read in Philippians 3:21 that we will "be transformed to be like Christ's glorious body."

Christ will say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). Believers will be publicly acknowledged as the redeemed children of God, their faith vindicated. “At that time each will receive their praise from God” (1 Corinthians 34:5). The declaration will be made that all their sins are pardoned.

The greatest blessing of them all will be the full enjoyment of God. Believers will ever be with the Lord and will receive the inheritance prepared for them. There the believers will behold their Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, and will finally be able to trace the ways in which the Lord has led and saved them. At the resurrection, believers, raised in glory, will be publicly recognized and declared not guilty on the day of judgment and will be made completely happy in the full enjoyment of God forever.[3]

This concludes our lessons on the first part of the Westminster Shorter Catechism which we started on May 3. We addressed 38 questions about what man is to believe about God. In the past, all children were taught these basic tenets of the Christian faith, and adults were expected to know them. It is a summary of Christian doctrine for beginners, and a useful framework for building core theological understanding and lifelong learning for adults. Section two of the Catechism addresses what duty God requires of man, and section three, the ordinary means of grace. I plan to begin section two next week.

In the first section, we looked at man’s primary purpose, the authority of the word of God and its teachings, the persons and decrees of God, creation, providence, the fall of man, Christ as our redeemer, prophet, priest and king, his humiliation and exaltation, our effective calling, and the benefits that are given to us in our effective calling. Today we examined the benefits of justification, adoption, and sanctification in this life, then when we die, and at the resurrection.

We live in a world filled with many false teachings. Paul wrote to Timothy about dealing with this in 2 Timothy 2:14-17: “Keep reminding God’s people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words;

it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene." We have great need of studying our Bibles so that we will not be misled.

The church is to keep focused on the gospel. The church is constantly tempted to become an entertainment center, a social service agency, a mutual admiration society, or any number of other things. Furthermore, as Paul goes on to say, the church should not become a debating society. Endless discussion or strife over things that are not of central importance leads to animosity and division, and will ruin the hearers. The word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Spurgeon said, "Swords are meant to cut and hack, and wound, and kill with, and the word of truth is for pricking men in the heart and killing their sins. The word of God is not committed to God's ministers to amuse men with its glitter, nor to charm them with the jewels in its hilt, but to conquer their souls for Jesus."[4] We must *rightly* divide the word of truth. This means that we must know it well enough to realize when it is *wrongly* divided, for then it becomes like gangrene or a cancer that spreads fast and captures an audience, leading to death and hell.

Let us pray. Almighty Father, keep us safely in your truth and in your loving arms. Thank you for bringing us righteous wisdom from your word leading to eternal life. Keep us on the narrow way. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

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[1] https://westminsterseminaryuk.org/westminster-shorter-catechism-modern-english#section-1Re, 36.

[2] https://westminsterseminaryuk.org/westminster-shorter-catechism-modern-english#section-1Re, 37.

[3] https://westminsterseminaryuk.org/westminster-shorter-catechism-modern-english#section-1Re, 38.

[4] Spurgeon, Charles Haddon The New Park Street Pulpit, Volumes 1-6 and The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Volumes 7-63 (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1990).

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