



The Life and Writings of St. Paul

Lesson 7

Lesson 7 Commentary

Paul's Theology of Salvation

Lesson 8 Questions

Paul's Theology of the Church and Wrap-up

Introduction

N. T. Wright, a leading Pauline scholar, makes the following point, when describing Jewish Theology subjects. “The main two [points of Jewish Theology] are God and God’s people: monotheism and election. In the last session, we saw how Paul redefined monotheism giving us the basis for what became the doctrine of the Trinity. Wright goes on to say, “Paul has described the Exodus-God as the son-sending, Spirit-sending God. It is as though he is saying, you either have this God, known in this way, or you have paganism. From here on . . . one might conclude that if the doctrine of the Trinity had not come into existence it would be necessary to invent it.”¹ In a similar way, Paul goes on to redefine election or, as I will explain, “justification” and how we are saved (formally known as “soteriology”). Below, we will see that it is clear in Scripture that we will be judged at our death based on what we have done during our lifetime.

Catholic Beliefs Regarding Salvation

We can use “justification” as a verb (action) or as a noun (process).

As an action, justification is the moment when God makes righteous the one who believes in Christ and establishes him or her in a covenant relationship with himself. [i.e., converts and is baptized]. As a process, justification is the growth in righteousness and grace that takes place in the believer who embraces the demands of the gospel and yields himself or herself to the leading of the Spirit [i.e., habitual grace and good works].²

¹ Wright, *Paul: Fresh Perspectives*, 98.

² Scott Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 2009), 496.

“Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is *favor*, the *free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.”³

The first effect of grace is conversion, where we turn away from sin and turn toward God. I am not saying that we cannot fall away. We can. That is why Christ established the sacrament of reconciliation. Just as the grace of conversion turns us away from sin and toward Christ, mortal sin turns us away from God and we lose the sanctifying grace that we received in the first place. Through grace, though, God can turn us back and with the sacrament of reconciliation, we can once again be justified.

[T]he new life received in Christian initiation [Baptism] has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.⁴

“Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith.”⁵ “With justification, faith, hope, and charity are poured into our hearts, and obedience to the divine will is granted us.”⁶ Justification is not just the forgiveness of sin, it changes us. We are transformed. “Justification establishes *cooperation between God’s grace and man’s freedom*. On man’s part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent.”⁷

Once we have this grace from God, it is up to us to respond to all He asks us to do. “Sanctifying grace is [a] habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, *to act by his love*.”⁸ Paul tells us, “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *let us exercise them*.”⁹

Having received the graces of God, having been justified, having exercised our gifts, what happens at the end of our lives? When we die, we cannot change how we lived our lives. We will experience the “Particular Judgement” at that time. “Each man receives his eternal retribution in his immortal soul at the very moment of his death, in a particular judgment that

³ CCC 1996.

⁴ CCC 1426.

⁵ CCC 1992.

⁶ CCC 1991.

⁷ CCC 1993.

⁸ CCC 2000, emphasis added.

⁹ Rom 12:6. All Biblical citations are from the NABRE.

refers his life to Christ: either entrance into the blessedness of heaven—through a purification or immediately, —or immediate and everlasting damnation.”¹⁰

But how will we be judged? I think that Jesus makes this clear:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’ Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’ He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”¹¹

While this is probably the clearest affirmation that we will be judged based on our good works during our lifetime, there are others.¹² So how does this differ from Pelagianism (saving ourselves by our own good works)? The difference is that our works are meritorious because of the grace of God. We store up treasures in Heaven by what we do!¹³ The “judgement” at the final judgement will not be different than the Particular judgement. However, at that time, our glorified bodies will join our souls wherever they may reside.

¹⁰ CCC 1022.

¹¹ Matt 25:31–46.

¹² See, for instance, Matt 16:27, 1 Pet 1:17, Rev 2:23, Rev 20:12, Rev, 22:12.

¹³ See Matt 6:20, Matt 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 12:33, Luke 18:22

What Did Paul Say?

Before we get to Paul's words, following N. T. Wright's lead, I believe that Paul sees "justification" as a subset of "election" or "becoming a member of the family of God." When Paul says that God will justify the one who has faith in Jesus,¹⁴ he is redefining the family of God. It is a "point in time" statement, not an "end of time" statement. At the point in time that the individual believes in Jesus, they can be counted in the family of God. Election is no longer based who follows the Torah, whether you are circumcised or what culture you were born in. He is making this point clear in when he says, "Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator. *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.*"¹⁵

Paul also sees baptism as the initiation into the newly defined family of God and that baptism replaces circumcision, which was administered on the eighth day.

- For in one Spirit **we were all baptized into one body**, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.¹⁶
- In him you were also circumcised **with a circumcision not administered by hand**, by stripping off the carnal body, with the circumcision of Christ. **You were buried with him in baptism**, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead¹⁷
- For all of **you who were baptized** into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise.¹⁸ (note here that, supporting Paul's redefinition of the elect, the audience is now "Abraham's descendants.")
- I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.¹⁹

¹⁴ See Rom 3:26.

¹⁵ Col 3:9–11.

¹⁶ 1 Cor 12:13, emphasis added.

¹⁷ Col 2:11–12, emphasis added.

¹⁸ Gal 3:27–29, emphasis added.

¹⁹ Eph 4:1–6, emphasis added.

Paul believes that grace is a free gift of God, based on the ultimate sacrifice made by Jesus Christ.

- But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, though testified to by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through [the faithfulness of] Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. **They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus**, whom God set forth as an **expiation**, through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed, through the forbearance of God—to prove his righteousness in the present time, that he might be righteous and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.²⁰ (“This is the point when we speak of that death as expiation for human sins. **Expiation removes the offense, the guilt, and the consequences.** In this sense Paul could call Christ’s death an expiation.”²¹)
- But the **gift** is not like the transgression. For if by that one person’s transgression the many died, how much more did the grace of God and **the gracious gift** of the one person Jesus Christ overflow for the many. And the gift is not like the result of the one person’s sinning. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal.²²

From the above, one other point is clear, when we enter the newly defined elected family of God and we are baptized, we participate in the life and death of Christ. We become by adoption what Christ is by nature, children of God.

- For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, “Abba, Father!” The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.²³

As we stated previously, Paul believes that we should use our gifts received from God for the good of the Church.

- Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in

²⁰ Rom 3:21–26, I have substituted what I believe is the proper translation of *Xristou* in this case.

²¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991–1998), 411, emphasis added.

²² Rom 5:15–16.

²³ Rom 8:14–17.

generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.²⁴

Paul clearly believes that all will be judged at the end of time based on their good works.

- By your stubbornness and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself for the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God,⁶ who will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life to those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness.²⁵
- For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.²⁶

What Happened Next?

Pelagius was a monk born around 360 AD. He did not believe that man was born with original sin or that man was inclined to sin. “Pelagianism is based on unorthodox presuppositions about the nature of God and humans, and it results in autosoterism.”²⁷ Autosoterism is the position that man can author his own salvation, without the free gift of grace from God. In other words, you can earn your way into Heaven. Pelagianism was rejected by the Council of Carthage in 418 AD.

²⁴ Rom 12:6–8.

²⁵ Rom 2:5–8.

²⁶ 2 Cor 5:10.

²⁷ Andrew David Naselli, *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2010), 276.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 8

Paul's Theology of the Church and Wrap-up

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read CCC 802 – 810.

Summarize in a few sentences what you think the Church is teaching in this section.

Day 3 – Read CCC 866 – 867.

Summarize in a few sentences what you think the Church is teaching in this section.

Day 4 – Read CCC 868 – 870.

Summarize in a few sentences what you think the Church is teaching in this section.

Day 5 – Read 1 Corinthians 12:27, Ephesians 4:15-16, 5:25-27, 2:19-22.

Reflecting on what you read in the Catechism, above, how do you think Paul's words fit into the faith of the Church?

Day 6 – Summarize in a few sentences what we studied and pick out some things that you thought were most interesting