

## The Apostles' Creed: The forgiveness of sins (15)

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord*

*Who was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell*

*The third day He rose again from the dead*

*He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty*

*He will come again to judge the living and the dead*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit*

*The holy catholic Church; the communion of saints*

***The forgiveness of sins***

*The resurrection of the body*

*And the life everlasting*

- We continue in this study our consideration of the section of the Apostles' Creed that unfolds the person of the Holy Spirit and His work. At first glance it might seem a bit odd to see the subject of the forgiveness of sins under His work, and realize that we did not confess this under the previous section dealing with the work of Son.
- To understand the reason why *The forgiveness of sins* is under the work of the Holy Spirit we need to remember what we saw concerning each of the members of the Trinity and our salvation. It is the **Father's** work to **allocate** or choose those who will be saved. It is the **Son's** work to **accomplish** the salvific acts necessary for redemption (living a perfectly obedient life and dying the death sin deserves). And, it is the **Spirit's** work to personally **apply** the Son's work, to all that the Father has chosen.
- Notice how the *Westminster Confession of Faith* articulates all of this, in perfect cohesion with the Apostles' Creed, in Chapter 11, "Of Justification", the 4<sup>th</sup> section,

***God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did, in the fullness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification: nevertheless, they are not justified until the Holy Spirit doth, in due time, actually apply Christ unto them.***

- This is what the Creed is getting across by putting the *forgiveness of sins* under the work of the Holy Spirit. The point is that there is an eternal, historical, and personal aspect to each individual's salvation. And no one is saved unless they partake in the threefold work of God for sinners. That is, your sins are not forgiven unless and until the Father has chosen you, Christ has died for you, and the Holy Spirit applies Christ's death to you personally. If the Father had only chosen you, but the Son had not died for you, you would still be in your sins. If the Son died for you, but the Holy Spirit has not yet applied His death to you personally, you are still in your sins. Thus John can say in John 3:36, *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*
- To appreciate this at an even greater level—and particularly to see why forgiveness of sin is placed under the work of the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to review Chapter 10 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, "Of Effectual Calling"

I. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased in His appointed and accepted time effectually to call, by His Word and **Spirit**, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being

made willing by His grace.

II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by **the Holy Spirit**, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.

- We see then that it is the special work of the Holy Spirit to apply the work of Jesus Christ to sinners, by drawing them to Him and enabling them to embrace Him as He is offered in the Gospel. Thus the Creed gives us Christ's necessary, historical work on the cross and the Spirit's necessary, personal work in the believer. Thus we are not forced to choose between an historical and personal work of salvation... Christians have always confessed both.
- But having established that the personal forgiveness of sin is the specific work of the Holy Spirit, we need to consider what it means to have our sins forgiven. The forgiveness of sin was prophesied throughout the OT:

Jeremiah 31:34c *For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Jeremiah 33:8 *I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against Me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against Me.*

Psalms 103:2-3, 10-12 *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ... He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth so great is His steadfast love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.*

- So, the forgiveness of sin is the complete removal of them from us. We are rendered "Not guilty" in the sight of God and restored to fellowship with Him, because He has forgiven us for our sin. Thus, forgiveness has both a judicial aspect to it, like in a courtroom, and a personal aspect to it... since it restores the broken relationship that we had with God.
- This article also defines the basic need that man has before God. That is to say, man's problem before God is that man is a sinner, and this article of the Creed makes that fact clear, echoing as it were, Romans 3:23, *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*
- Finally, we should consider that this article falls under the present, active work of the Holy Spirit because there is a conscience alleviating aspect to forgiveness of sin as well. Oddly, because of our Western obsession with human rights, the amazing grace of forgiveness has largely been rendered passé. We virtually consider it a right, and not a totally gracious gift, that God would forgive our sin. The sacraments were given to enable us to believe that God really does forgive our sins... but they have somewhat lost their efficacy with us because we have lost the sense of awe at being forgiven.
- But when one feels the weight of their sin before a holy God, they will begin to wonder again at the grace that is spoken of in this little article, and a greater appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit in applying Christ's work of redemption to us.
- Thus, let us pray that God might restore in us a renewed amazement as we consider the benefits that have been showered upon us in our salvation and sealed to us by the Holy Spirit:

*David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." (Romans 4:6-8; cf. Psalm 32:1-2)*