

Lesson 19: Questions 35, 36, 37, and 38

In our last lesson we considered how the Holy Spirit applies the redemption purchased by Christ. We saw that we are made partakers of Christ's redemption by the effectual application of it to us by His Holy Spirit (Q32), that the Spirit applies redemption by working faith in us and uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling (Q33), and that effectual calling is the Spirit's work of convincing, enlightening, renewing, persuading, and enabling sinners to embrace Christ freely offered in the gospel (Q34). Now we look at what benefits belong to those who have been effectually called.

35-38

Question 35: What benefits belong to believers?

- Q. What benefits do they that are effectually called partake of in this life?
A. They that are effectually called do in this life partake of justification, adoption, sanctification, and the several benefits which in this life do either accompany or flow from them.

This question is a doorway into the riches of salvation. Once the Spirit has effectually called us, worked faith in us, and united us to Christ, we receive justification, adoption, sanctification, and the benefits that accompany or flow from them.

Notice the phrase "in this life". The catechism will later speak of the benefits believers receive at death and at the resurrection, but here it teaches that salvation is not only future. We are not yet glorified, but already, in Christ, we are justified, adopted, and sanctified.

Romans 8:29-30 gives us the golden chain of God's saving purpose:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Paul does not treat predestination, calling, justification, and glorification as uncertain possibilities. Those whom God predestines, He effectually calls. Those whom He calls, He justifies. The call reaches its saving end because it is the call of God's grace and power.

Ephesians 1:5 says that God "predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will". Adoption is not an afterthought. It belongs to God's eternal purpose in Christ. God did not merely intend to pardon criminals while keeping them at a distance. He purposed to receive pardoned sinners as sons.

Then 1 Corinthians 1:30 gathers the whole matter into Christ Himself: "And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption". Every saving benefit comes to us in Christ. We do not receive justification over here, adoption over there, and sanctification somewhere else, as isolated gifts detached from the Savior. We receive Christ, and in Christ we receive all His benefits.

That is why Question 35 belongs immediately after effectual calling, in which the Spirit unites us to Christ, in Whom we partake of what belongs to Him as our Mediator: righteousness in justification, sonship in adoption, and renewal in sanctification. The benefits flow from union with Christ and only from union with Christ.

This should keep us from shrinking salvation. Salvation is not only forgiveness, nor only moral transformation, nor only a changed identity. The catechism is more balanced and more biblical: the effectually called receive justification, adoption, sanctification, and all accompanying blessings.

So Question 35 gives us the map. The next questions begin to unfold the territory. What is justification? What is adoption? What is sanctification? We need all three. Guilty sinners need pardon and righteousness. Orphans need to be received as sons. Corrupt sinners need to be renewed in holiness. Christ gives to His people the whole salvation that they need.

Question 36: What is justification?

Q. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Justification is one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith. If we misunderstand **justification**, we will misunderstand **the gospel**. The catechism defines it carefully. It is "an act of God's free grace". That means justification is **not a process** by which we slowly become acceptable to God. It is God's act as Judge, declaring the sinner righteous in His sight on account of Christ.

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. (Romans 3:23-25, ESV)

Justification is **free** to us, but it is **not cheap**. It is by grace as a gift, but it comes through redemption in Christ Jesus and through His propitiating blood. God justifies sinners without compromising His justice, because Christ has satisfied divine justice.

The catechism says that in justification God "pardoneth all our sins". **Romans 4:6-8** says,

*just as 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."*

Justification includes **real pardon**. The believer's sins are not ignored, minimized, or excused. They are **forgiven** because Christ bore them.

But justification is **more** than pardon. The catechism also says God "accepteth us as righteous in his sight". That matters because forgiveness alone would not answer the whole problem. We do not merely need our sins removed. We need a righteous standing before God.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:18-21, ESV)

So in justification, our sins are **not counted against us**, and Christ's righteousness is **counted to us**. That is why the catechism says this happens "only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us".

Romans 5:17-19 contrasts Adam and Christ.

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

The catechism's word "imputed" is essential. It means counted or reckoned. Justification is not God **pretending** we are righteous, nor waiting until we **become righteous** enough in ourselves. It is God **counting** Christ's righteousness to us, **crediting** His representative obedience to believers.

Finally, the catechism says this righteousness is “received by faith alone”.

...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16, ESV)

*Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ **and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith**—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:8-11, ESV, **emphasis added**)*

Faith does not earn justification. Faith receives Christ. It is an empty hand, not a price paid. The ground of justification is Christ’s righteousness. The instrument is faith alone.

This should humble and steady us. If you are justified, you are not more justified on your best day and less justified on your worst day. Your standing rests on Christ, not on the shifting quality of your obedience. That does not make obedience unimportant. It makes obedience grateful rather than desperate. The justified sinner obeys not to create peace with God, but because peace has already been made through Christ.

Question 37: What is adoption?

Q. What is adoption?

A. Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God.

If justification brings us into the courtroom, adoption brings us into the household. God not only pardons and accepts us as righteous in Christ; He receives us as children. Adoption, like justification, is “an act of God’s free grace”. It is not earned by our worthiness, but granted freely in Christ.

1 John 3:1 says, “*See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*” John does not present adoption as a small thing. He calls us to behold it. “*See what kind of love*”. That is the language of wonder. The holy God does not merely acquit guilty sinners. He calls them His children.

The catechism says that in adoption we are “received into the number” of the sons of God. Adoption brings us into a family, not a private spiritual arrangement between isolated individuals and God. We belong with all those who call upon the same Father through the same Son by the same Spirit.

John 1:12 says, “*But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*”. This right does not come by nature. We are not children of God simply because we are creatures. We become children of God by grace, through receiving Christ and believing in His name. Adoption is a privilege given in union with the Son.

Romans 8:14-17 opens this further.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Adoption changes how we approach God. We do not come as slaves terrified of rejection, but as children taught by the Spirit to cry, “Abba! Father!”

The catechism also says we have “a right to all the privileges of the sons of God”. **Romans 8:17** says, “*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*”. That is almost too much to take in. The adopted are heirs. We share, by grace, in the inheritance of Christ. Not because we are naturally worthy, but because God has united us to His Son and received us in Him.

This doctrine has deep pastoral sweetness. Many Christians know how to think of God as *Judge*, and it is right that we do. But believers must also learn to think of God as *Father*. Not indulgent, not soft toward sin, not like fallen earthly fathers, but holy, loving, wise, and faithful. Adoption means you are not merely *tolerated* in the house. You are *received*.

This should also shape how we live. If God is our Father, then we should not live like spiritual orphans. We should not be driven by fear, envy, or the need to prove ourselves. We should live as children: trusting the Father's care, receiving the Father's discipline, bearing the family likeness (this is sanctification; see the next question), and loving the brothers and sisters He has given us.

Question 38: What is sanctification?

Q. What is sanctification?

A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

Sanctification is closely related to justification and adoption, but it must be distinguished from them. Justification and adoption are *acts* of God's free grace; sanctification is "the *work* of God's free grace". In justification, God *declares us righteous* in Christ. In adoption, God *receives us as sons* through Christ. In sanctification, God *progressively renews us in holiness* according to Christ's image.

In **2 Thessalonians 2:13**, Paul says, "*But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.*" Sanctification is not optional. It belongs to salvation. The same Spirit Who calls us and unites us to Christ also *sanctifies* us. Grace *changes* the sinner.

The catechism says sanctification renews us "in the whole man after the image of God". **Ephesians 4:23-24** says we are "*to be renewed in the spirit of [our] minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*" Sanctification is not superficial behavior management. It reaches the whole person: mind, will, affections, speech, habits, desires, physical body, and conduct.

This renewal is "*after the likeness of God*". Sin *ruins* us; grace *restores* us. The goal of sanctification is not mere respectability, discipline, or religious appearance, but likeness to God in true righteousness and holiness. God is making His children resemble their Father.

The catechism then says we are enabled "more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness". **Romans 6:4** says, "*We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*" Union with Christ means union with His death and resurrection. His people are brought into a new life.

Romans 6:6 adds, "*We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.*" Sin is no longer our master. Believers still battle sin, even painfully, but they are no longer its slaves. Christ has broken sin's reigning power.

Romans 8:1 says, "*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" That verse is precious in relation to sanctification. The fight against sin does not begin under condemnation. It begins in Christ, free from condemnation. We do not pursue holiness in order to *become* justified. We pursue holiness because we *are* justified, adopted, and united to Christ.

This protects us from two errors.

First, we must not *confuse* sanctification with justification. We grow in holiness, but it is *not* the ground of our acceptance with God. Christ is.

Second, we must not *separate* sanctification from justification. God sanctifies whom He justifies. Grace pardons and renews. Again, God makes His children resemble Him.

The phrase "more and more" is also pastorally wise. Sanctification is real, but ordinarily progressive. Christians should expect *growth, not instant perfection*. We should not excuse sin, but neither should we despair because the battle continues. The same God Who pardoned and received us also renews us after His image and enables us to fight sin and walk in new obedience.

Conclusion

Questions 35 through 38 show us the richness of the salvation given to those who are effectually called. The Spirit does not unite us to Christ and leave us empty-handed.

- **Question 35** teaches that in this life, believers partake of justification, adoption, sanctification, and the benefits that accompany or flow from them.
- **Question 36** teaches that in justification God pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.
- **Question 37** teaches that in adoption God receives us into the number and gives us a right to all the privileges of His children.
- **Question 38** teaches that in sanctification God renews us in the whole man after His image and enables us more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

Taken together, these benefits answer our need beautifully. As ***guilty sinners***, we need ***justification***. As ***alienated orphans***, we need ***adoption***. As ***corrupted sinners***, we need ***sanctification***. Christ supplies all three. There is no deficiency in His salvation.

So take this lesson with you this week in two ways.

- ***FIRST***, let it shape what you believe. If you are in Christ, God has:
 - ***Justified*** you, accepting you as righteous
 - ***Adopted*** you as His child
 - Begun the work of ***sanctification*** to renew you in holiness.

Do not reduce salvation to one benefit only.

Receive the fullness of what God gives in Christ.

- ***SECOND***, let that corrected belief change what you do.
 - In ***guilt***, rest in ***justification***.
 - In ***fear***, remember your ***adoption***.
 - In the ***fight*** against sin, depend on ***sanctifying grace***.

Do not obey in order to become accepted.

Obey because in Christ you already are accepted, loved, and being renewed.

You ***are justified*** in Christ.

You ***are adopted*** through Christ.

You ***are being sanctified*** by the Spirit of Christ.

And all of it is God's free grace.