

FIRST CLASS:

Module 6

The Christian Life: The Holy Spirit and the Church

Review of Module 5: The Gift of Eternal Life: The Soteriological Mystery

Here are the summary points from Module 5. If you have any further questions and want to dialogue, please contact one of Trinity's pastors!

***Luther's explanation captures the main point of Module 5—"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel. . ."**

***The Bible teaches that the work of conversion is totally and completely the work of God the Holy Spirit. This He does through the Gospel—the Word of God, and, as we will learn in this lesson, Baptism. These means are by His design. They are His way. They are His miracles. It is not only a false teaching that is not found in the Bible, it is a false teaching that contradicts the Bible, to say that we human beings must find within ourselves an agreement, a cooperation, and then make a commitment of our will—a decision—to become a Christian. Faith is a gift given to us. The gift of faith from God actually enables us to do what we cannot, to keep God's command to believe in His Son.**

***Therefore faith is not a human response to the Gospel. It is the gift of God the Holy Spirit gives to us that enables us to believe the Gospel.**

***We also learned that the Holy Spirit not only works conversion, but also sanctifies (makes holy) the Christian, that He nourishes and preserves the gift of faith He gives in believers. Such gracious, miraculous, and wonderful gifts we receive from His work!**

In this lesson we will learn even more about the Holy Spirit's work and presence in our lives. Read from your Catechism, in the Explanation section, pages 205-221.

What is the Church?

What is different about the Christian Church from other groups, organizations, clubs, etc. that people join?

Why would we say God's gift of the forgiveness of sins is perhaps the most important of the many gifts God gives to us sinners?

When a sinner needs God and desires to seek and find Him, where is God to be found? Where has God directed us to find Him present?

How does this design of God, to bind Himself to specific means where He promises always to come and meet us, require faith in us?

What is the doctrine of justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith? What does this central teaching of Christianity actually mean?

What are the marks of the true Christian Church?

Why are there so many different denominations and groups of Christians?

The existence of so many different Christian churches, disagreeing with each other's teachings and practices. . .is this a good thing, a bad thing, or does it really matter?

If the church is composed of people who remain sinners, disagree so much with each other, continue to sin and fall away from Christ, and even at times are hypocritical, is it really necessary in remaining a Christian, to join and be active in a church?

Now read from the Explanation in your Catechism, pages 314-321:

The Church is not a voluntary organization composed of believers who, by virtue of their personal relationship with Jesus, decide whether or not they will join this church or that church on the basis of how it agrees with what they believe. The teachings and practices of a church are not designed and carried out by a group of like-minded people in competition with other churches and church groups.

The Church was instituted by Jesus Christ Himself, and He remains the Head of His Church. He has given the Church its doctrine and teachings, and any church that does not remain faithful to His Word is not a faithful church. He has designed how the Church is to work, what its mission and vision is, and what truths must guide its practices and methodologies.

What is the main purpose of Christ's Church on earth? What authority has He given to the Church to carry out this mission?

What is the Christian absolution?

Why must the Church also be involved in the discipline of members?

How does the Church publicly carry out its mission and ministry?

Christ Jesus has also instituted the office of the holy ministry—the pastoral office—for servant leadership in His Church. This is the only divinely established office in the New Testament Church. Congregations and church bodies can create any number of other offices to assist in their ministry and mission.

What are the Biblical qualifications and requirements for one to serve in the office of the public ministry? (pastor)

Write below any questions or comments you want to communicate with Trinity's pastors regarding these or other issues about the Church:

In preparation for the next two modules, read the following article:

The Means of Grace

There are two basic approaches in Christianity today in understanding the presence of the invisible, almighty, all-present, and all-powerful God of the universe in our human lives. One approach might be called the *means of grace approach* and the other the *experiential approach*.

The *means of grace approach* answers the basic question, "Where is God to be found?" by the theological statement "He is hidden in His Word and in His Sacraments." This approach can clearly be shown to be the historic approach of Christianity from the apostolic age (Acts 2:42) through the Reformation in the sixteenth century. This approach contends that God offers and dispenses His love and grace to human beings through channels--or *means*--which He Himself has created and instituted in His Church. These means are defined in the Bible as the Word of God itself, and His sacraments. Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Lutherans, and Anglicans (Episcopalians) all promoted this theological approach. These churches do not deny that God is present and operates everywhere throughout all creation, but they hold that the spiritual blessings that come through Christ, namely, forgiveness of sins and all the treasures and gifts connected with His death and resurrection, are communicated and granted to human beings through and only through these external means.

Various churches within this approach teach various things regarding these means of grace. The Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches number seven sacraments, while the Lutherans count only two--Baptism and Holy Communion. Various ideas about how these means are constituted and how they function also exist, as we shall see when we study each.

The *experiential approach* denies that God works through channels or means, and affirms precisely that God does not need such vehicles. This approach answers the basic question, "Where is God to be found?" by the statement "He is to be found everywhere without and around you, and also within the Christian." Contemporary with Martin Luther were other sixteenth century reformers who judged that Luther and his colleagues did not go far enough to purify the Roman Catholic church, and they attempted to do away with everything that sounded like, looked like, tasted like, or smelled like Rome. (The Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli and the group of men known as the Radical Reformers were the most influential. . .) They denied the mystical and sacramental power of Baptism, many of them proposing that baptism be just a sign or public initiation into the church of one who had come to believe. Since only "believers' baptism" was practiced, obviously small children and infants were no longer baptized, a radical departure from 1500 years of practice. These reformers also boldly denied the age-old doctrine of the "real presence" of the very Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament of

Holy Communion. They taught (and often changed the very words of institution used in the liturgy) that only a symbolic presence was truly meant by Jesus' words, that the bread and wine were only a signification of His Body and Blood, which obviously were with Him on the throne of heaven to where He had ascended.

Those who promoted this *experiential approach* to the Christian faith and practice contended that God the Holy Spirit operated not through means but directly to and through the mind and the heart of the believer. The Christian practice of prayer was elevated to new heights--almost "sacramental" heights of importance, curiously enough--as the means and method of soliciting direct answers and guidance from God. Here in the United States of America the growth of the Baptist and Methodist churches, and the Arminianism of the Great Awakening and other revival movements gave great impetus to this approach. The personal relationship between Jesus and the individual believer became the foremost consideration of faith, and a faith that did not profess a rich experience of God's grace and forgiveness was seen as doubtful if not unauthentic. Conversion itself was set within the framework of such an experience of God, and a decision by the individual was sought (and in some groups demanded) before assurance could be given and felt. Emotional experience was an important part of this experience; ritual and formal worship, however rich in content and meaningful it might be, was almost universally rejected in favor of an informal worship experience that allowed for outward and often emotional expression of one's feelings. The content of these worship events were purposefully revised to be more anthropological (human-centered).

The theological situation is much more complex than this simple summary of two approaches might mislead one to conclude. Within both approaches are a number of different theologies and practices. But these two approaches do represent a legitimate definition of two "kinds" of Christianity.

And these two approaches to Christianity remain a dividing line in the church-at-large today. These divisions, unfortunately, are not merely two brands of the same religion; neither side says as much. Those of the *experiential* school warn that the other approach is not capable of producing genuine conversion or true disciples who keep God's commandments faithfully. Those of the *means of grace* approach warn that not only does the other school of thought forfeit the sacramental power God intends the people of His church to possess and use, but that such experiential definitions of conversion, justification, and sanctification do not give all glory to Christ, which God has commanded His Church to do in carrying out the mission and ministry with which He has entrusted her.

Return your answers on this module to

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If you want to ask questions or enter into dialogue on any of the above questions or related issues, we'd love to engage in conversation with you:

wmarler@trinitylutheranspfd.org 417-866-5878 (ask for one of our pastors)
