

DOCTRINES

DRAMA

DOCTRINE

DOXOLOGY

DISCIPLESHIP

JUSTIFICATION

The Spirit gives us faith to embrace Christ. The first gift is the justification of the ungodly.

Not only forgiven, the elect are justified—declared righteous even while they are in themselves unrighteous. Christ's righteousness is imputed to them.

"What shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?... Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?"

We live from, not toward, the verdict of justification. For all who trust in Christ, the sentence or the Last Judgment has been rendered: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Joy, not fear, is the basis of the Christian life.

SANCTIFICATION

The same act of faith that receives Christ for justification receives Christ for renewal of the inner self (sanctification) and one day the outer self (glorification).

While justification is a legal verdict made once and for all, sanctification is a gradual process by which the Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ through the gospel.

Holy in Christ already, believers are more and more conformed to Christ. What can be more glorious than being made like Christ?

While sanctification is God's gracious work, faith bears the fruit of good works. We are exhorted to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to bear the fruit of the Spirit. United to Christ, we grow in communion with his body. Since our good works cannot serve God or ourselves, they go out to our neighbors who need them.

GLORIFICATION

"Those whom he justified he glorified." While our sanctification remains incomplete in this life, we will be instantaneously changed into Christ's incorruptible glory at the resurrection of the dead.

Glorification is the public display of God's saving work, when the elect are no longer subject to the fallen condition and the whole creation shares in the victory that Christ has won. Sin, ugliness, and death will yield entirely to righteousness, beauty, and life.

Faith in the "already" of our election, calling, and justification is often tested by the "not yet" that we discern in our sanctification. Hope in our future glorification renews our strength to praise God even in our trials.

We live now in the hope of this future promise. Not only our souls, but our bodies; and not only we, but the whole creation, will be changed forever. This future hope, guaranteed by Christ's glorification already, changes the way we live in the world now.

BAPTISM

Replacing circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, baptism was instituted by Christ to deliver himself with all of his benefits to believers and their children.

Baptism involves the sign (washing with water) and the reality (union with Christ). These cannot be separated or confused. A means of grace, baptism is used by the Spirit to ratify God's promises to us.

We receive baptism as God's pledge, assuring us that he is favorable toward us in his Son. The Spirit creates faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel and confirms it by his sacraments.

Once again grounding our assurance in God's promise, baptism also calls us to faith and repentance throughout our lives. "Living out our baptism" is the character of Christian discipleship.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

In the Upper Room after the Passover meal, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as the ratification of his sacrificial death.

We participate in Christ's sacrifice by feeding on him through faith. This reality is conferred by the Spirit when we receive the bread and wine in faith.

Since the Supper is not only a memorial of Christ's death, but a feeding on Christ himself—his true body and blood—by faith, we are regularly assured that he died not only for others, but also "for you."

Nourished at Christ's table, we are made one family with co-sharers and are motivated to go out into the alleys of our neighborhood to invite guests to the feast that participates in the wedding supper of the Lamb.

THE INVISIBLE CHURCH

Before the creation of the world, the Father gave a bride to his Son, being now gathered by the Spirit in union with Christ.

So called because for now its membership is known to God alone, the invisible church is the full number of the elect in all times and places.

We praise and glorify the triune God for including us in the worldwide family that the Father has chosen for his Son.

Although the church seems difficult to discern at times in this world, God's promise guarantees that there will always be a true church. We live by faith, not by sight.

THE VISIBLE CHURCH

Although the invisible church will be fully visible on the last day, Christ promised that he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

A true visible church exists wherever the Word is properly preached and the sacraments are properly administered, and discipline is exercised.

Called out of the world by God's Word and Spirit, we find our communion with Christ in his visible body. Here we receive his gifts and respond in joyful fellowship and worship with his people.

Union with Christ is inseparable from communion with his church. Those who claim to be Christ's disciples are members of his visible church, sharing their gifts, suffering, and experiencing hope with each other.

LAST THINGS

Christ will come again, bodily, to claim his bride and to judge the world.

The bodily return of Christ to judge the living and the dead is an essential Christian doctrine.

A centerpiece of Christian worship is the joyful celebration, "Christ had died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." It is this hope that animates our hearts to pray, "Even so Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Living in the light of the future judgment and restoration of all things, we acknowledge a dual calling today: to call sinners to repentance and faith, and to love and serve our neighbors in our callings in the world.

EVERLASTING LIFE

After the judgment, Christ will hand over all authority to the Father and the whole creation will be under his sovereign sway.

At death, the body is separated from the soul, with believers entering immediately the presence of the Lord (the intermediate state). At the last day, the soul will be reunited with the body. The "sheep" will be raised to an eternal inheritance of life (heaven) while the "goats" will suffer everlasting death (hell).

While believers rejoice that at death they will be received into God's presence, their ultimate hope is the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting in a renewed creation beyond the reach of sin and death.

It makes all the difference in the world (literally) if Christians see "going to heaven when we die" as the ultimate goal of salvation. Rather, this is the intermediate state. Our ultimate hope is that this whole creation, redeemed by Christ, will share in the unending and evernew beauty of true justice, righteousness, and life in a cosmos with Yahweh as the fountain of joy.

