

When Jesus blesses us, he does two things. First, he gives us his promise. Second, he trains us to bear the cross. His promise makes us who we are. We don't become Christians because of anything we do. There is no inward quality within us that turns us into saints. No, God sets us apart as his saints – he makes us Christians – only through his promise of Christ our Savior. Faith lays hold of the promise that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake who made full satisfaction for our sins. Faith lays hold of the promise that eternal life and salvation are freely bestowed upon us by the merits of Jesus. Faith continually rests in every promise of God in Christ. Faith comes from hearing the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17). That is how our Lord blesses us. As the Psalmists often say, "Blessed is everyone who trusts in him."

The promises of Christ give blessing. All of his disciples can be certain of his promises. He begins his Sermon on the Mount with these promises. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them. They will be comforted. They will inherit the earth. They will be satisfied. They will receive mercy. They will see God. They will be called God's sons. He then repeats the first promise: The kingdom of heaven belongs to them. These promises do not include any of our own virtues or qualities. Only faith can rely on God's promises in Christ. Faith lays hold of them and lives on them. This is what makes us Christians. This is what makes us saints. This is therefore how Christ blesses us.

But Christ's promises are not like rebates or gift cards. He doesn't leave us alone with his promises, as if we are supposed to figure out how to use them on our own. No, he is always with his promise. He is always accompanying his Word. This is why, after sending his Apostles out to teach and baptize all nations, he assures them, "I am with you always to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20) He doesn't merely give us a symbol of his absent body and blood in his Supper. No, he communes with us by giving us his true body and blood in the bread and wine (1 Cor 10:16). In baptism he covers us with himself (Gal 3:27). His own blood washes us clean and makes us white as snow (Rev 7:14). He not only clothes you with his own righteousness (Is 61:10). He also dwells in your heart by faith with his Holy Spirit (Eph 3:17). He makes his home in you with his eternal Father (John 14:23). So if you have his words and promises, then you can know that he is with you, leading you, guiding you, training you, and helping you bear whatever affliction God places upon you.

This is why Jesus also trains us to bear our crosses here on earth. Even as he promises his kingdom, his righteousness, his life, and his salvation – even as he assures us that we are God's children – he also teaches us to live as God's children and saints in this world. Through such teaching and training, he continues to bless us. As Psalm 94 says, "Blessed is the man whom You instruct, O LORD!"

All the doctrine our Lord teaches us out of his Word is for the sake of preparing us to bear our crosses. St. Paul says that anyone who wants to live a godly life must endure persecutions (2 Tim 3). When you think of the faithful saints who have departed this world, and you admire their example of trust in Christ, how do you think they were able to endure to the end? Do you think it was just because they had nice personalities? No, it was because they were taught by God's Word. They learned the Ten Commandments and the Creed. They learned to pray the Lord's Prayer. They learned about what their baptism gave them. And they came to church to learn the Scriptures, receive the absolution, and eat and drink the body and blood of their Savior. They learned Christian doctrine. And this faithful teaching and instruction from God's Word prepared them to face temptations, opposition, sickness, and finally death itself.

If you are not taught God's Word – if you are not trained in the doctrine of the Lord – then you will quickly forget the promises of Christ, you won't be prepared for the trials that rise up against you, and you will finally lose your faith and the blessing of Christ.

This is why Jesus teaches us and trains us for the fight. He instructs us in his doctrine so that we would lead godly lives here in time and forever in eternity.

The first thing Jesus teaches you is that your soul is completely impoverished. You can't find any wealth or treasure in yourself or in this dying world. You have been conceived and born with a sinful nature. Nothing good dwells in your flesh. None of your possessions, no amount of your own strength or fortitude – nothing in you or in this world at all – can gain God's grace and blessing. Instead, you are poor in spirit. You learn from your Savior what the prophet Jeremiah says, "The heart is deceitful beyond all things and desperately wicked" (Jer 17:9). As David says in Psalm 32, "When I kept silent, I wore out my limbs, groaning all day long. Day and night Your hand lay heavy on me." And as Jesus says, "The flesh avails nothing," and "Out of the heart comes every sin" (John 6; Matt 15).

This is the fundamental teaching of original sin. Those who don't learn this doctrine won't be able to handle the attacks from the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh. If you think that there is some wealth of good in you, then you are in for a rude awakening. Every error that leads Christians away from the faith and causes so much misery begins with a denial of original sin. Folks think that if it feels right then it must be right. They believe the false promises of utopias, imagining that there is no heaven or hell and that all people can live as one if they just put aside their differences. But we can't put aside our differences if that means putting aside what the Bible teaches. We cannot give up this precious doctrine of our Lord. He teaches us that we are poor in this world. He teaches us that we have nothing to offer by our own works and affections. He does this so that we would not rely on our own righteousness or any political efforts of this world. Instead, he is training us to look outside of ourselves for our true and lasting treasure. He directs us to his kingdom and his righteousness, to his blood shed for us, to his forgiveness and salvation won for us. We will only continue to cling to his Word if we know that we are poor in spirit. When we lose confidence in the wealth of our own souls, then we keep our confidence in the promise of his kingdom. Therefore, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to them."

By teaching us about sin and the true cause of our spiritual poverty, Jesus also teaches us why we mourn. We mourn over death. But we do so knowing why death happens. Death is God's curse on mankind because of sin. And yet, because we know that Christ has died for our sins and been raised from the dead, we do not mourn without hope. We can be honest about why we mourn while also having the confidence that Christ will comfort us.

We also learn from God's Word that Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead. He will bring about a new heaven and earth. So when we see the injustice of this world, we mourn over the attacks on the unborn, the marriage bed, and the reputations and livelihoods of our neighbors, we can have the confidence that Christ has made all things new. He therefore teaches us to be gentle and meek, waiting patiently for God to make things right. Don't take justice into your own hands. God will bring justice.

For this reason, don't be apathetic either. You should desire justice and mercy. When mobs fight for so called social justice, their mistake is not that they think there is injustice in this world. It's that they don't know where to find justice. And by taking matters into their own fanatical hands, they end up

calling evil good and good evil. But you know where justice comes from. You know where mercy comes from. You know that Christ has revealed his righteousness to all people. He has had mercy on all sinners, reconciling the world to himself. You therefore learn from your Savior to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Strive to be righteous. Strive to be merciful. And know that you are blessed by God. Because he satisfies you with good and crowns you with his mercy (Ps 103).

The Sixth Commandment teaches that we should fear and love God that we may lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed. It has become increasingly difficult for Christians to withstand the temptations of sexual impurity and immoral living. In fact, if you speak out against it, then you will no doubt be labeled a prude, a legalist, or even a hateful bigot. But Christ trains us to stand up against this impure culture. Don't be intimidated by those who try to mutilate and defile the body. Instead, fear God who has given you both your body and your soul. And if your body has been defiled and you have fallen into this shameful sin of fornication, then turn again to Christ who does not count your sins against you but cleanses you from every spot. He purifies your heart, and he teaches you to live with a pure heart.

It's truly incredible that he does this. After all, God's Word tells us that our hearts are by nature deceitful and wicked. But the Holy Spirit has given us faith to trust in the blood of Christ, which washes us clean from all sin. And Jesus remains with us in his Word, creating in us a clean heart, not taking his Holy Spirit from us but always renewing in us the joy of salvation. By doing this, he prepares us to face the attacks of this godless and impure world with the confidence that we will see our God and Savior face to face.

Those who fight for so called social justice sometimes chant, "No justice, no peace." Again, they don't know where justice comes from. They don't know where peace comes from. And yet, it's true that there can be no peace without justice. If we don't have justice with God, then we can't have peace with God. If we are not righteous in his sight, then we can never have any rest for our souls. By dying for our sins, bearing the weight of God's righteous wrath and justice in our place, Jesus has established peace with God through his blood. It is therefore only by this blood that the wall of hostility between people and nations can finally tumble down. No amount of democratic or military action can bring this about. Only the gospel of peace, the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, can bring peace on earth. If you want to live at peace, then teach the gospel to your children. Strive to be at peace with one another. Be reconciled with your brother. Don't be so hard on your spouse. Honor your parents. As much as it depends on you, live at peace with all people, even if they stand opposed to your faith and confession. Be prepared to defend what Christ has taught you. And don't be afraid. Because God has called you to be at peace. He has called you to be his child. He even calls you his son, his heir of all he has promised you.

The doctrine and training of your Lord prepares you to face persecution and conflict. You can face these trials with the confidence that you are not living for yourself. You live for Christ, because he is your righteousness. He gives you his kingdom. He comforts you under every affliction. He shares his inheritance with you, satisfies you with his mercy, shines his face upon you, and has made you God's child and heir. If the world mocks you and accuses you falsely, what's that to you? If they call you a hypocrite and a sinner, why should that surprise you? Let them try telling you something you don't already know. You have been taught by Christ himself through his prophets and apostles. Cling to his words. And you will be blessed. Amen.