Section: Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

Sam Jones

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q80. What is saving grace?**

**Saving grace is God’s love, forgiveness, and redemption freely and effectively given in Jesus to the elect, who are undeserving of this.**

**Grace: Unmerited favor (or an undeserved gift) given by an unobligated giver.**

**Q81. What is opposed to God’s grace?**

**Opposed to God’s grace are the lies that we are worthy or that we can work hard enough to earn God’s love and forgiveness or that we can seek, will, or choose Jesus without the Holy Spirit giving us new life and saving faith.**

Good evening church. My name is Sam Jones, I am a covenant member here at Disciples Church. I am also part of the teaching team and in that role, I am excited to share this this lesson with you tonight. If we have not met, I would love to meet you and hear how Christ is at work in your life. I love the unity of the body that we have in Christ and the closeness we develop through attending midweek and the relationships that are fostered in our groups.

As we teach through the Catechism we are working through Doctrines or areas of theology. You can find these in the table of contents in your Word of Truth Catechism. The last time I taught on question 70, “How is Jesus our righteousness?” we were studying the Doctrine of Christ, or Christology. Starting last week Pastor Joshua started us into the next section of the Word of Truth Catechism. The Doctrine of Salvation, or Soteriology, which should be of paramount interest to us as Christians.

I want to reiterate an encouragement that Pastor Joshua opened with last week as we dive into the Doctrine of Salvation.

**The doctrine of Salvation is one of THE most important doctrines we MUST get right. Understanding who God is and then How, WHO and WHY He saves is so fundamental to our understanding of the gospel, our testimony of it and worship of God!!**

**The problem is, there is a tendency in our flesh to lean too hard on human rationale or feelings instead of the authority of the eternal holy word of God.**

**As a result, many people and likely many of you in the room, Including me at one point in my faith journey form or hold views of who God is and how He acts (or doesn’t act) based more on our personal feelings or human logic instead of the revelation He gave us in Scripture.**

**But, if we are to be faithful Christians, we need to acknowledge the full authority of the Bible—the full authority of what God has said about all things—and then submit to God while conforming to His image and not trying to make Him conform to our ideas.**

Tonight’s lesson covers two questions on the subject of God’s grace. This subject is heavily steeped in today’s Christian and secular vernacular. When we are asked how we made it through a tough time, our usual response might be “Only by the grace of God.” The name Grace has been in the top fifty most popular girl’s names for over a century. If a person is said to respond well to a distressing situation that can be called grace. And if a dancer is particularly fluid or light in their movements, they are considered graceful.

I say all of this to bring Pastor Joshua’s encouragement back into focus. When we are learning about God, or speaking about God, we must lean on the authority of the Bible for what is true. So, that is my aim tonight; to walk through these two questions and answers based on the truths we find in Holy Scripture, and I am excited to get started.

With that, lets pray and then we will dive in.

I am going to start by reading both questions and answers.

**Q80. What is saving grace?**

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**Grace: Unmerited favor (or an undeserved gift) given by an unobligated giver.**

**Q81. What is opposed to God’s grace?**

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Question 80 asks, “What is saving grace?”, and the answer starts, “Saving grace is God’s….”

The word focused on is “grace” and although we just read this, I want to define the word so can work from that definition as we move through the lesson.

**Word of Truth Catechism definition of grace:**

**Grace: Unmerited favor (or an undeserved gift) given by an unobligated giver.**

So, grace is a free gift given to someone who does not deserve it, specifically from someone who had no need to give the gift. They were not coerced into giving the gift. When the gift giver looks at the gift receiver there is nothing in that person that merits the gift, and in the case of God’s saving grace when the gift giver looks at the receiver, they not only do not merit the gift, but in fact, they actually deserve the opposite of a gift. They deserve His wrath.

There are many illustrations I could use to try to unpack God’s grace, but I told you that I am going to use Holy Scripture as the basis for my lesson so let’s look to what the Bible says about grace.

I want to encourage you to listen to this passage with new ears. It is likely you have heard or read this passage many times and our imperfect bodies contain imperfect memories, imperfect patience, and imperfect attention. We are here to study God’s saving grace, so listen closely and let what God has to say land on fresh ears.

**Ephesians 2:1-9**

**1And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

God chose to reconcile us to Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ while we were his enemies. This should wreck us and at the same time cause us to overflow with gratitude and worship.

**Word of Truth Catechism definition of grace:**

**Grace: Unmerited favor (or an undeserved gift) given by an unobligated giver.**

Ok, let’s look back at our answer. It says, “Saving grace is God’s love, forgiveness, and redemption freely and effectively given...”

We are now expanding from what grace is or means, to the mechanism of God’s saving grace. So, if grace is an unmerited gift given to an underserving person, then what specifically is the gift? When we unwrap the present that God gives to us, what do we find inside the gift?

The answer is God’s love, forgiveness, and redemption… But what do those terms mean?

I went to the Webster’s Dictionary of 1828 to find these definitions and not surprisingly the definition of love contains a verb form and a noun form. These are then split into many types of love but for the purpose of this lesson we are looking at the love of God, not romantic love, not love for a created thing, but God’s love.

Webster’s Dictionary of 1828

Love (noun)

Benevolence; good will.

**1 John 4:7-12**

**7Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.**

Next, we will define forgiveness.

**FORGIV'ENESS**, noun

1. The act of forgiving; the pardon of an offender, by which he is considered and treated as not guilty. The forgiveness of enemies is a Christian duty.

2. The pardon or remission of an offense or crime; as the forgiveness of sin or of injuries.

Next, we will define redemption.

**REDEMP'TION**, *noun*

1. Repurchase of captured goods or prisoners; the act of procuring the deliverance of persons or things from the possession and power of captors by the payment of an equivalent; ransom; release; as the *redemption* of prisoners taken in war; the *redemption* of a ship and cargo.

2. In theology, the purchase of God's favor by the death and sufferings of Christ; the ransom or deliverance of sinners from the bondage of sin and the penalties of God's violated law by the atonement of Christ.

**Ephesians 1:3-10**

**3Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.**

**Colossians 1:13-14**

**13He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

Ok, we have defined our terms and looked to Scripture to see that our definitions are true, so let’s flesh out the portion of the answer we just reviewed.

It says, “Saving grace is God’s love, forgiveness, and redemption freely and effectively given...”

Reworked with our definitions it takes on more depth. It says, saving grace is God’s benevolence, His good will, to pardon the offenders, to consider them not guilty, and to purchase His good favor, to pay the ransom of prisoners.

So, God’s saving grace is His good will to pay the price to ransom the same people that committed crimes against Him.

And on top of this, our answer continues that this grace is “freely and effectively given in Jesus to the elect, who are undeserving of this.”

Church praise God for saving grace, praise God for His good will to save undeserving sinners.

Before we move to our next question, I want to go over the last part of the answer a little more.

The answer says, “freely and effectively given.”

At this point in the lesson, I hope that the word freely is not a surprise. We have defined grace and know that it is an unmerited gift from an unobligated giver. I want to focus now on the word effectively. We have another lesson coming up that will focus on the “effectual call” so I won’t go into that to deeply, but for the sake of clarity, when I say the “effectual call” this is referring to the call on the heart of one of the elect, by God, that is irresistible. This differs from the “general call” which is expressed through the preaching of the word and other means, which is broadcast generally to the elect and unelect alike

The main thing I want to point out about the word effectively is that for something to be effective means that it accomplishes its purpose. If a tool is effective, then it works the way it is designed or intended to. If a medicine is effective, then it treats the symptoms, disease, or sickness that it was designed to. If something is effective, then it accomplishes its task. And so, church, this word “effectively” in the answer should be of great interest and encouragement to all of us. It helps us understand that God’s saving grace, is effective, it accomplishes its task, it cannot be stopped or turned away. If you are of the elect, then you will effectively receive saving grace.

And if that isn’t enough to get you excited, then I’ll add one more miraculous fact. Once saving grace is effectively given, and a sinner is effectively transformed into a saved saint, once that has happened, it is effectively permanent.

**John 6:35-40**

**35Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”**

AMEN

Now we will move onto our second question for the evening.

**Q81. What is opposed to God’s grace?**

**Opposed to God’s grace are the lies that we are worthy or that we can work hard enough to earn God’s love and forgiveness or that we can seek, will, or choose Jesus without the Holy Spirit giving us new life and saving faith.**

Pastor Joshua spent a good portion of last weeks lesson unpacking three aspects of God’s plan for salvation. He taught us why God chose to save the elect, who will be elect, and when the elect were chosen. I want to review two terms from his lesson as a basis for unpacking the answer to this question.

You can find these terms in the glossary of your Word of Truth Catechism.

**Unconditional Individual Election: Before creation existed, God chose which individual human beings would receive salvation from sin, death, and God’s eternal wrath. This choice to redeem certain ones is not based on any so-called goodness, will, or work in them; rather, it is based on the freedom and grace of God in Christ Jesus alone.**

**Predestination: In love, based on the perfect will of the Triune God, the destiny of salvation unto eternal life for God’s chosen people was planned and ordained from start to end before creation began. Predestination is not based on foreseen deeds or faith in anyone; it is based on God’s will alone.**

Each of these terms and their definitions are proved throughout Scripture and that is what last week’s lesson taught us so if we find that all of this is true then let’s look at the lies that push back against these truths.

Our answer one more time:

**Opposed to God’s grace are the lies that we are worthy or that we can work hard enough to earn God’s love and forgiveness or that we can seek, will, or choose Jesus without the Holy Spirit giving us new life and saving faith.**

So, the lies that are opposed to God’s grace are:

I am worthy of God’s love and forgiveness.

I can work hard enough to earn God’s love and forgiveness.

I can seek Jesus on my own.

I can will or choose Jesus on my own.

Now let’s address these lies one by one and see how they line up with our standard of truth, the Holy Scriptures.

We will start with the idea that a person is worthy of God’s grace. The lie being:

**I am worthy of God’s love and forgiveness.**

First we will define the term “worthy” since that is the issue that we are addressing.

**WORTHY, adjective [G.]**

**1. Deserving; such as merits; having worth or excellence; equivalent; with of, before the thing deserved. She has married a man worthy of her.**

To say that I am worthy of God’s grace, is the same as saying, I deserve God’s grace. I merit it or it is due to me because of something inherent in me. I am excellent enough that God’s grace should be given to me.

Isn’t this the way we operate? Assigning worth to ourselves and other things is standard practice for us. This is a very normal thing in the way created beings’ function. When we see a person of wealth we say, “I wonder what he or she is worth?” … how much wealth do they have? If we see a rare car or piece of art or some precious metal we ask, “How much is that worth?” Every economy on earth is driven by how much things are worth. This doesn’t change whether you are bartering for food with beads or buying out a multi-national company. The idea of worth is engrained in our thinking and how we live our lives.

And it’s not just objects that are considered worth more or less. We do this with people too. Do you consider someone that is a close friend worth more than a stranger? If you walk into a fast-food restaurant, do you have a lower estimation of the guy moping the floors than the guy in the business suit you just passed on the way in? We assign worth to everything in life, including ourselves.

Now I do want to say, the concept of worth is biblical. God tells us over and over that He is worth more than gold or silver or delicious food or the entire world. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of Mark:

**Mark 8:36**

**36For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?**

So, how to we determine whether we as created beings are worthy of God’s saving grace? How do we know what our inherent salvific purchasing power is?

We look to the Bible.

**Romans 8:7-8**

**7For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

**Romans 3:10-12**

**10as it is written:**

**“None is righteous, no, not one;**

**11no one understands;**

**no one seeks for God.**

**12All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;**

**no one does good,**

**not even one.”**

That is straight forward isn’t it. Verse 12 plainly says that “all”, meaning all men, have become worthless. When God looks at a sinner, a person that has not received saving grace, their account balance is zero, overdrawn, incapable of purchasing anything. The currency to purchase saving grace can only come from God himself, through Jesus Christ, and by the work of the Holy Spirit on a dead heart.

I said this in my last lesson, but it bears repeating church. God paid God.

The next lie we need to address is:

**I can work hard enough to earn God’s love and forgiveness.**

Work is a creation ordinance, meaning God ordained at the creation of the world that man would work. God ordained that a man is to do work to earn the bread he eats or the money that he uses to buy the bread he eats. Hard work is instilled in us from an early age. We are told if you work hard then you can achieve your goals. This is good and right, however, it also instills in us the idea that we have the power, through our work, to earn whatever we desire. And this idea of working for a reward has infected the way many people read the bible and the theology of many claiming Christianity.

The idea that we can earn our salvation through good works is an insidious lie that has permeated much of the church today. The message may be dressed up in colorful language or inspiring illustrations, but the core issue is the same. The idea that a sinful person can somehow earn the favor of God is a false gospel. Unfortunately, it is also an extremely attractive gospel to many.

So, again let’s look to Holy Scripture to answer whether I can work hard enough to earn God’s love and forgiveness.

**Isaiah64:6**

**6We have all become like one who is unclean,**

**and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.**

**We all fade like a leaf,**

**and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.**

**Romans 3:20**

**20For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**

**Romans 9:15-16**

**15For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.**

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

**8For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

Church, once sin entered the world through Adam and was imputed to all of mankind, there was only one man that could satisfy that sin debt. In order to pay for sin, the entire Law had to be adhered to, meaning no sin could occur in that man’s entire life. Do you see the issue, if we are born into sin, then we will never have the ability to pay for the sin debt we are born with. And getting this wrong is both dangerous and arrogant.

Listen to the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatians:

**Galatians 2:15-21**

**15We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16yet 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.**

**17But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.**

And again, in the letter to the Romans:

**Romans 11:6**

**6But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.**

Church, do you see that a works-based idea of salvation is dangerous because it is a false gospel, anyone who believes that they are saved on the basis of being a nice person or giving away their fortune or any other man centered endeavor is in an eternally damning position.

Additionally, the arrogance of thinking we can work for God’s grace completely negates the truth of what grace is, an unmerited gift. If you can earn it, then it is not grace.

Now let’s move to our final two lies:

**I can seek Jesus on my own.**

**I can will or choose Jesus on my own.**

The ideas of seeking, willing, and choosing are another area that mankind struggles with. We are faced with choices daily, what to eat, what to drink, what clothes to wear, what car do I want to buy, what career do I want, and the list goes on. So, when we talk about God, isn’t it natural to think that we can choose to believe in Him, that we can seek after Him, that it is our will, our desires, put into action that led us to God?

Well once again the problem is sin, so let’s look at the first sin and see where all this started.

**Genesis 3:6**

**6So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.**

With this first sin, this first disobedience to God, our very natures were polluted. Did you notice that the verse said that the fruit was to be “desired” to make one wise. That word “desired” is really the focal point of the issue. The original sin was to “desire” to be like God. Once sin entered the world our desires are set against God. We are unable to seek after Him, we are unable to choose Him, and our entire will is set against Him.

We return to Romans to see this in Scripture.

**Romans 8:7-8**

**7For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

**Romans 3:10-12**

**10as it is written:**

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**12All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;**

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**not even one.”**

Church, apart from the salvific work of Christ, which is worked on a person’s heart through the Holy Spirit mankind is not able to seek, choose, or will for God, mankind is unable to, sin stands in the way.

Now I will say that many of us have experienced times in our lives when we felt a pull to come to church or we felt we were looking for something outside of ourselves to make sense of a longing we felt. I experienced this in 2016, and that led me here to Disciples Church and ultimately to saving faith. But that was not my seeking, it was the Holy Spirit drawing me. I did not choose to be saved; I was saved by grace. Until my will was changed by the Holy Spirit, I did not have the ability to choose anything righteous.

Now before we close, I want to share a passage of Scripture with you that illustrates much of what we have discussed tonight. As I read this think about the lies, we have just covered, worthiness, works, willing, seeking, choosing, and also think about God’s saving grace and how he chooses whomever He wills.

**Luke 18:9-14**

**9He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ 13But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Did you notice the lies that the Pharisee bought into? The Pharisee was an elite person in Jewish culture, and he is living under the old covenant laws so it would have been even easier for him to believe these lies. The Pharisee lives a visibly pious life, he is thanking God that he is not like sinners as he lists them off. He even calls out the tax collector that has come to pray. The Pharisee believes that fasting and tithing and all the other commands he keeps are what counts as his righteousness, his worthiness. He believes he has worked hard enough to earn God’s favor.

Then we look at the tax collector, a hated man amongst the Jews, and for good reason. Tax collectors were known to profit by taking more taxes than required and pocketing the difference. Imagine a state sanctioned burglar that gets to come to your home and take what they want with impunity.

But the tax collector has a right view of himself, he calls himself a sinner and begs for mercy. He does not think that his works have justified him, he does not think that he is worthy. And yet the passage tells us that the tax collector was justified and not the Pharisee.

I went to a conference in 2017 where this passage was exposited as part of the 500th anniversary year of the reformation. The Pastor Andrew Curry delivered a sermon that has stuck with me since I heard it. The admonishment that he gave at the end of the message was that we, in today’s church read this passage and think to ourselves, “Thank God, I am not like that Pharisee.” The point being that we can very quickly lose sight of God’s grace and think that our “good works” make us more appealing to God. The other danger is to think that our acknowledgment of God’s grace removes any reason for us to be broken over our sin. Notice how the pharisee thanked God that he was not like the tax collector. His theology may not be completely off but he is missing the personal application of it. Church it is all Christ. We have nothing to boast in but Christ!

The final part of our answer says:

Opposed to God’s grace are the lies that we are worthy or that we can work hard enough to earn God’s love and forgiveness or that we can seek, will, or choose Jesus without the Holy Spirit giving us new life and saving faith.

The Holy Spirit is the mechanism through which the salvific work of Jesus Christ is applied to a person, transforming them from a sinner to a saved saint. Turning a heart of stone into a heart of flesh. Causing the saved saint to desire God, to seek to know Him better, to understand the Scriptures, and to do the good works that were set out for them to complete.

The Holy Spirit was promised by God to be our helper, meaning that once salvation has occurred the Holy Spirit resides in us and helps us to do all the things I just mentioned.

**John 15:26**

**26“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.**

**Acts 2:1**

**1When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.**

**John 6:63**

**63It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.**

Church, praise God for the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Triune Godhead, through whom we have God indwelling us. Praise God for His grace, praise God that grace is grace and does not require works or worthiness from us because we are unable and unworthy.

In closing I want to share a passage from Titus as encouragement to you. Close your eyes and let Paul’s words encourage and refresh you.

**Titus 3:1-7**

**1Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. 3For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

Let us pray.