

The Divine Service (Preparation): Confession & Declaration of Grace

- P** Almighty God, our maker and redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto You that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against You by thought, word, and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Your grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- C** **O most merciful God, who has given Your only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of You and of Your will and true obedience to Your Word; to the end that by Your grace we may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**
- P** Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To those who believe on His name he gives power to become the children of God and has promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. Grant this, Lord, unto us all.
- C** **Amen.**

[Mark 16:16; John 1:12]

As in the left-hand or “indicative-operative” form, the right-hand or “declaration of grace” form has us agree with God that our very nature is “sinful and unclean” and that his Law has shown us to have sinned against him by “thought, word, and deed.”

We pray, then, that God the Father, who sent his Son to die for us, would have mercy on us and for his sake grant us remission (forgiveness) of all our sins. On top of that, we pray that by his Holy Spirit he would lead us in “newness of life,” in true knowledge of him and his will, and in true obedience to his word. All this, so that by his grace “we may come to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

What is the cause here of the forgiveness of sins? It is not our sorrow over sin, or that we have turned over a new leaf, or promised to make amends. We do these things at best half-heartedly. Shame on us! But the ground of forgiveness is not that, but Christ’s death for us, so that we might be sure of it (Col 2:13–14).

What is the cause of new life, of a turning from sin to living for God? This, too, is included in the prayer for God’s grace, and this, too, is work for the Holy Spirit. How does Paul describe the new life we live as those who believe Christ has forgiven us our sins, and how is it reflected in this prayer? (Gal 3:1–9; Rom 6:1–14)

To this prayer for forgiveness and renewal in the Holy Spirit, the pastor adds the assurance of the Gospel (Mark 16:16; John 1:12), while continuing in the form of a prayer, “Grant this, Lord, unto us all.” This is not strictly speaking an *absolution*. Rather, we together seek again what God is ready to grant: the forgiveness of sins that abides for us in Baptism, that is present to us in the hearing of the Gospel, and that awaits us in the eating of Christ’s holy Supper. In this way, ears and hearts are prepared for the Divine Service.