

JUSTIFICATION: A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

Having agreed on the key Scriptural passages relevant to the issue, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) next formulates a consensus on the basic truths of the doctrine itself.

First, justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. Justification is intrinsically bound to the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works. [JDDJ, #15]

All people are called by God to salvation in Christ. We are justified through Christ alone when we receive this salvation in faith, which is itself a gift from God through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works in the community of believers through word and sacrament, leading us into that renewal of life which God will bring to completion in eternity.

The message of justification directs us to the heart of the biblical witness to God's saving action in Christ. We are sinners whose new life is due solely to God's freely-given mercy, received by us in faith, and never merited by us in any way.

Justification is more than just one part of Christian doctrine:

It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other. It is an indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ. [JDDJ, #18]

Lutherans can emphasize the unique significance of justification without denying the interrelation and significance of all truths of faith. Catholics can see themselves bound by several criteria, while not denying the special function of justification's message.

Lutherans and Catholics share the goal of confessing Christ in all things, who alone is to be trusted above all things as the one Mediator (1 Tim 2:5f) through whom God in the Holy Spirit gives himself and pours out his renewing gifts. [JDDJ, # 18]