

## JUSTIFICATION: SIN AND FORGIVENESS

After stating the common understanding reached, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) proceeds to make clear how this understanding affects various aspects of justification. The first two aspects considered are the powerlessness of sinners and God's gracious action of forgiveness.

First, Catholics and Lutherans (and by their ratification of the JDDJ, other churches) together acknowledge that salvation comes only by God's grace, not human effort.

*All persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. ... (They) are incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God's grace. [JDDJ, #19]*

This joint confession of man's powerlessness has implications for each church's expressions of how man reacts to God's saving actions.

*When Catholics say that persons "cooperate" in preparing for and accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities. [JDDJ, # 20]*

When Lutherans say that, as sinners, humans cannot cooperate in salvation and can only receive justification, they do not intend deny that a person can reject the working of God's grace, and that believers are fully involved personally in their faith. *They mean thereby to exclude any possibility of contributing to one's own justification [JDDJ, #21],* which would imply that it was not fully dependent on God's saving action.

*We confess together that God forgives sin by grace and at the same time frees human beings from sin's enslaving power and imparts the gift of new life in Christ [JDDJ, #22].*

These two elements are inseparable – when believers are united with Christ by faith, their sins are forgiven and the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love.

*When Lutherans emphasize that the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness, their intention is above all to insist that the sinner is granted righteousness before God in Christ through the declaration of forgiveness and that only in union with Christ is one's life renewed. When they stress that God's grace is forgiving love, they do not thereby deny the renewal of the Christian's life. They intend rather to express that justification remains free from human cooperation and is not dependent on the life-renewing effects of grace in human beings. [JDDJ, # 23]*

A sinner's justification is completed by God's merciful action, not the recipient's response to God's life-renewing grace. A person who thwarts that interior renewal may be failing to grow in Christ's life, but is not thereby "unforgiven." Just as no human action is needed to complete the justification that God freely bestows, so no human action or inaction can revoke the forgiveness that God has given.

*When Catholics emphasize the renewal of the interior person through the reception of grace imparted as a gift to the believer, they wish to insist that God's forgiving grace always brings with it a gift of new life, which in the Holy Spirit becomes effective in active love. They do not thereby deny that God's gift of grace in justification remains independent of human cooperation. [JDDJ, #24]*

God's forgiveness is always accompanied by a gift of new life, even if the recipient does not always make use of that gift to be renewed and more actively love. God's forgiveness is not conditioned on the recipient's response to the life-renewing grace that goes with it.