

## THE JUSTIFIED: RESISTING SIN & DOING GOOD WORKS

In paragraphs 28-30, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) considers the ongoing relationship of the justified person to sin. God's unconditional justifying grace is not only a liberating force at one's baptism, but a continuing source of strength and redemption in the daily struggle against the power of sin.

*We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person. But the justified must all through life constantly look to God's unconditional justifying grace. They also are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks (cf. Rom 6:12-14) and are not exempt from a lifelong struggle against the contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam (cf. Gal 5:16; Rom 7:7-10). The justified also must ask God daily for forgiveness as in the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:12; 1 Jn 1:9), are ever again called to conversion and penance, and are ever again granted forgiveness. [JDDJ, #28]*

Lutherans consider the Christian to be at the same time righteous and sinner. Righteous, in that God has forgiven their sins and justified them in Christ. Sinners, in that they turn repeatedly to false gods and do not give God the undivided love required by the Creator. This contradiction to God is truly sin. Yet the Christian is not ruled by this sin, but rather is ruled by Christ, who has power over sin. Thus the Christian can in part lead a just life. This sin does not separate the Christian from God, because in the daily return to baptism, the person who has been renewed by the Holy Spirit is forgiven and this sin does not bring damnation and eternal death.

*Despite sin, the Christian is no longer separated from God, because in the daily return to baptism, the person who has been born anew by baptism and the Holy Spirit has this sin forgiven. Thus this sin no longer brings damnation and eternal death. Thus, when Lutherans say that justified persons are also sinners and that their opposition to God is truly sin, they do not deny that, despite this sin, they are not separated from God and that this sin is a "ruled" sin. [JDDJ, #29]*

Catholics hold that the grace of Christ in baptism takes away all that is sin. Yet there remains an inclination toward sin, but this in itself is not authentically sin since it lacks the personal choice required for a sinful action. This inclination does not correspond to God's original design for humanity and is something that poses a lifelong struggle.

*This inclination in contradiction to God does not merit the punishment of eternal death and does not separate the justified person from God. But when individuals voluntarily separate themselves from God, it is not enough to return to observing the commandments, for they must receive pardon and peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation through the word of forgiveness imparted to them in virtue of God's reconciling work in Christ. [JDDJ, #30]*

Since Christians struggle against sin throughout their lives, are they capable of doing good works, that is, living in faith, hope, and love, which are the fruits of justification? Paragraphs 37-39 emphasize that Christians not only can – they must. The justified must live in Christ and act in the grace they receive, as both Jesus and the Sacred Scriptures admonish.

Good works, made possible by grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, contribute to growth in grace, preserving the righteousness given by God and deepening the Christian's communion with Christ.

*When Catholics affirm the "meritorious" character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works. Their intention is to emphasize the responsibility of persons for their actions, not to contest the character of those works as gifts, or far less to deny that justification always remains the unmerited gift of grace. [JDDJ, #38]*

Lutherans emphasize that righteousness is always complete, but at the same time there can be growth in its effects in Christian living.

*When they view the good works of Christians as the fruits and signs of justification and not as one's own "merits", they nevertheless also understand eternal life in accord with the New Testament as unmerited "reward" in the sense of the fulfillment of God's promise to the believer. [JDDJ, #39]*

In sum, we are justified – made righteous – by God's gracious gift, which obliges us to bring forth the good works that are the fruits of justification. We struggle with our innate inclination to sin, taking responsibility for our actions. We know that living righteously will strengthen the bonds which put us into communion with Christ as we await the fulfillment of God's promise of eternal life, an unmerited reward that is our hope.