

## JUSTIFICATION: LAW, GOSPEL AND ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

In paragraphs 31-33, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) considers the relationship of the Gospel to the Law of Moses. In keeping with the Christian teaching since Apostolic times, both Catholics and Lutherans affirm that “Christ has fulfilled the law and by his death and resurrection has overcome it as a way to salvation.” [JDDJ, #31] We are justified by faith in the Gospel, not by following the commands of the Old Law.

Does this mean that the Old Testament commandments are irrelevant and we can ignore them? Not at all. Although we receive our salvation through Jesus Christ and not through the law, God’s commandments still offer us guidance for proper behavior and our failures to follow them can be accusations of our sinfulness. It is not enough for us to **be** justified, we must also **live as** the justified. By his teaching and example, Christ has shown us God’s will, which is the standard for our conduct. Christ is not a lawgiver like Moses, but is the Father’s perfect revelation of himself. Christ did not give us a listing of commands to follow, but rather showed us in his person how to live as children of God.

Even as we recognize our sinfulness when we violate the commandments, we also realize that it is only the mercy of God in Christ that justifies us, not the remedies or practices of the law. “The law as a way to salvation has been fulfilled and overcome through the gospel.” [JDDC, #31] So when we repent of sin, we do not rely on our own penitential actions for our redemption, but rather put our faith in the Gospel and place ourselves at God’s mercy in Christ, our only source of salvation.

What assurance do we have of our salvation? Paragraphs 34-36 of the JDDJ make clear that we have nothing but the trustworthy promise of God through Christ. Despite our weakness, on the strength of Christ’s death and resurrection, we can build on the promise of God’s grace in Word and Sacrament. We do not look to ourselves, but only to Christ, and trust only him.

*To have faith is to entrust oneself totally to God, who liberates us from the darkness of sin and death and awakens us to eternal life. In this sense, one cannot believe in God and at the same time consider the divine promise untrustworthy. No one may doubt God's mercy and Christ's merit. Every person, however, may be concerned about his salvation when he looks upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Recognizing his own failures, however, the believer may yet be certain that God intends his salvation. [JDDJ, #36]*