

The Doctrine of Justification Is the Heart of Christian Theology

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Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28).

This verse from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans reveals the heart of Christian theology. The doctrine that we are justified (declared righteous, or saved) by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, is the central and vital organ in the body of Christian theology; the organ that pumps the blood throughout that body to give life to all other Christian doctrines. As we say in Lutheran circles, the doctrine of justification is the central article of the Christian faith, the article upon which the Christian Church stands or falls.

This is most certainly true. Everything in Christian theology hinges upon this central article. If you get this article wrong, you’ll get other Christian doctrines wrong and you’ll end up with a worldly religion that differs from genuine Christianity. The idea that so many Christians adhere to today, that Jesus has done His part and now it’s up to us to do our part, is a lie straight from the pit of Hell. Satan, the old evil foe, enjoys nothing more than when Christians relegate the salvific work of Jesus to a mere part of the salvation equation.

Jesus is not a mere part of the salvation equation, my friends. He is the entire equation. It is not Jesus’ work plus our works which saves us, but Jesus’ work alone. He declared on the cross, “It is finished!” What did He mean by “it”? He meant our salvation. All of it! He has done everything necessary to win for us forgiveness, life, and salvation. Nothing we do can ever add to or take away from the finished work of salvation Jesus accomplished for us.

This is awesome news for sinners like us who cannot possibly live a perfect life and earn our way into heaven. On our own, we are doomed. But, God saved us. He became one of us to do what we cannot do. He lived the perfect, sinless life we cannot live, and He paid the full price for all of our sins with His perfect, sacrificial death on the cross. He swapped places with us and became our perfect substitute in every way. Jesus the Christ, God in the Flesh, died so that we might live through Him.

That’s the Gospel. That’s the Good News of Christianity. We can’t do it, but Jesus has done it for us. That’s what Christianity is all about—the salvation accomplished by the Son of God for sinful mankind. Christianity is not another religion of the Law (like every other world religion out there), but a religion of the Gospel. It is like nothing else, for in Christianity, sinners are saved not on account of what they do or how they live, but on account of what their Savior has done, and continues to do, for them.

I know, it sounds too good to be true, doesn’t it? And yet, wild and crazy as it sounds, it is most

definitely true. The Gospel defies human reason and logic. It runs contrary to how our sinful human reason operates. We think in terms of work and reward. You work hard and, more likely than not, you will be rewarded for your efforts. But, the Gospel is completely different. The Gospel is freedom from the Law. The Gospel is free gift delivered to undeserving recipients. The Gospel requires nothing from us. Even the faith which grasps hold of the Gospel and believes the Good News it reveals about Jesus Christ and His salvific work is a gift given to us by God (cf. Eph. 2:8-10). He gets all the credit for bringing us to saving faith and also for keeping us in that saving faith as He feeds, strengthens, and preserves us via His Holy Word and Sacraments in the Divine Service.

Oh yes, my friends, the doctrine of justification is the heart of all Christian theology, for the doctrine of justification is all about the Christ. We are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. This is most certainly true! And, there is nothing more joyous, more freeing, more wonderful in all the world than this! All thanks, honor, praise, and glory be to God our Father, to His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, now and forever! Amen.

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