

JUSTIFICATION IS FOR ALL

Rev. Takeshi Nidaira
Lutheran Evangelical Christian Church (Japan)

The theme of my essay is, "Justification is for all." I would like to develop this theme according to the outline as shown below:

- I. Justification is God's grace given not to the righteous, but to sinners.
- II. The Savior was promised to all people.
- III. Jesus himself declared the gospel to the whole world.
- IV. The history of the early Christian Church proves this theme.
- V. Together we confess that this truth is biblical.
 - I. Justification Is God's Grace Given Not to the Righteous, but to Sinners.

A. The Definition of Justification

1. "Dr. Luther declared: 'Where this single article remains pure, Christendom will remain pure, in beautiful harmony, and without any schisms. But where it does not remain pure, it is impossible to repel any error or heretical spirit . . . ' The Article of Justification by faith is 'the chief article of the entire Christian doctrine'" (FC III 6, p. 540). Dr. John T. Mueller in his book, *Christian Dogmatics*, defines justification as follows:

Justification does not consist essentially in the inward transformation of the sinner, or in his sanctification, but rather in the divine act by which God declares a sinner righteous for Christ's sake. That is to say, justification is not essentially a change by which man is made just, but a change whereby he is declared just on account of the perfect righteousness of Christ which he appropriates by faith (*Christian Dogmatics*, p. 374).

2. We can also find the definition of justification in our Confessions. I will quote some of them to you, because they are useful to understand the meaning of the word "justification."
 - a. "To be justified means to make unrighteous men righteous or to regenerate them, as well as to be pronounced or accounted righteous" (Ap IV 72, Tappert, p. 117).
 - b. "To be justified is to be reconciled with God or to be made acceptable before God" (Ap IV 181, p. 132).
 - c. "Justify means 'absolve,' that is, pronounce free from sin" (FC Ep III 7, p. 473).
 - d. "Justify means to declare free from sins and from the eternal punishment of these sins on account of the righteousness of Christ which God reckons to faith" (FC SD III 17, pp. 541,542).
3. The definitions of Dr. Mueller and of our Confessions are in accordance with the Bible. They teach us correctly that justification consists in the divine act and that justification is God's gracious declaring of sinners righteous on account of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Jesus came to the world "not to call righteous people but sinners" (Matthew 9:13), "to look for and save the lost" (Luke 19:10). In the letter to the Romans the apostle Paul also testifies, "The ungodly," that is, sinners, "are justified freely by grace, through the ransom Christ Jesus paid to free them" (Romans 4:5; 3:24).
4. Quoting Luther's words, Dr. Mueller refutes the false doctrine that God can justify only those who really are just. He writes as follows:

Luther rightly called this doctrine "the venom of Satan" and "the most pestilential pest," since it deprives the sinner of all true consolation and robs God of the honor which is

due him as the gracious Lord, who freely forgives sin for Christ's sake (Christian Dogmatics, p. 375).

B. All human beings are sinful by nature.

5. Adam and Eve were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26). God's image is not a physical body, because he is a spirit (John 4:24). "Man was created holy and sinless" (W. H. Franzmann, BHC, OT, p. 31); (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24). At the very moment that they broke God's law, however, Adam and Eve were polluted by sin. Sin-pollution has not stopped with them. After the fall they had children in their image (Genesis 5:1-4). This shows all human beings are sinful by nature. Paul comments on this, "One man brought sin into the world" (Romans 5:12). Luther writes in his Commentary on Romans, "Paul is clearly speaking of original sin" (p. 93). Jesus, as well as King David, speaks of original sin (Psalms 51:5; John 3:6).
6. Professor E. H. Wendland says in his book, "Original sin is a serious malady." It is "revealed only in the Word and comprehended only by faith" (ILCW Ep-A, p. 127). "From the moment of Adam's transgression, he was spiritually dead, and the germ of physical death was in his nature" (ILCW Ep-A p. 126). No other germ which scientists have found in the past or may find in the future is more malignant, more contagious, and longer-lived than original sin. It results in temporal and eternal death for all people. Concerning this Paul said, "One man brought sin into the world, and his sin brought death; and so because all have sinned, death spread to all people" (Romans 5:12).
7. Therefore babies and adults, men and women, you and I, Mary and every famous saint, and even the Pope are all sinful by nature (Luke 1:48; Romans 7:15-24a). All people of all times are sinful from their birth. Though original sin is enough reason to be sentenced to eternal punishment by God, it also produces actual sins like bad thoughts, words, and deeds in our lives. If someone says, "I don't have any sin, he deceives himself, and the truth isn't in him" (1 John 1:8). All people are "people with whom God was angry" (Ephesians 1:8). "God's holiness, justice, and truth cannot allow him to overlook the sins of mankind, or treat him as if he had not sinned" (Rev. Erwin Ekhoﬀ, Lutheran Synod Quarterly, March 1995, Vol. 35 Number 1, p. 38). The barrier between mankind and God can never be taken away without the cleansing of all sin. Sin-polluted mankind can not get into the kingdom of heaven and would have to be punished in hell forever. But "no one is justified before God by doing what the law says" (Gal. 2:16; 3:11). Therefore God has shown mankind his righteousness. It comes without the law, but only by believing in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21,22). Everyone needs to receive this righteousness to be saved. Everyone is an object of God's justification. God, through Paul, clearly says that "he wants all people to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4; Rom. 5:18,19).

II. The Savior Was Promised to All People.

A. The Testimony of the Old Testament

8. It was right after the Fall that God promised the Savior to Adam and Eve. There the Savior is called "the woman's Descendant" (Gen. 3:15). That was the sunrise of "the Sun of Righteousness" who heals sinners by God's grace and love. Just as the sun is not glaring at first, but by getting higher and higher, it becomes brighter and shines on more and more people. It may seem that, in Genesis 3:15, "the Sun of Righteousness" was not meant to shine on all human beings. As time goes by, however, it becomes clear that the Savior will shine on "the whole world" with the light of God's grace and love.
9. The promise God gave to Abraham is the effective passage in order to prove that "justification is for all." "In you all the people in the world will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3c.). Later God said to Abraham, "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). Though God said "in you" to Abraham, Galatians 3:8 and 3:16 help us to understand the meaning of Gen. 12:3 and 22:18. "The Bible foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith" in the Savior who would be born as a descendant of Abraham (Gal. 3:8). "The

promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but to your seed, meaning one person, Who is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). Because of the Holy Spirit's inspiration which was given to Paul, we can be sure that, not Abraham, but the Savior would bless the nations. The Savior was promised not only to the Israelites, but also to all nations. Romans 3:22 also testifies: "God's righteousness comes to all who believe, just by their believing in Jesus Christ. There is no difference" (cf. also 2 Cor. 5:18,19).

10. It is repeatedly written in Isaiah that God invited all people to his saving grace. "Turn to Me to be saved, all you most distant parts of the world," the Lord God said in Isaiah 45:22. Dr. August Pieper has a good comment on this passage: "The invitation includes the ends of the earth, all nations without exception" (Isaiah II, Translated by Erwin E. Kowalke, p. 287).
11. Isaiah 49:6 is also worth remembering. There the Lord said to his Servant, the Savior: "It is not enough that You're My Servant to raise the tribes of Jacob and bring back those in Israel who have been preserved. I have also made you a Light for the nations that My salvation might reach to the most distant parts of the world." Dr. Pieper goes on to say:

The high point of the message of verse 6 lies in the second half. The Servant is to accomplish more than just the deliverance of Israel. The Lord made Him to be a Light unto the gentiles to bring His salvation to the end of the earth. This is that mighty prophecy, already contained in Noah's blessing, in the promise to Abraham, and which was confirmed to David and Solomon, repeated and expanded by nearly every prophet, but especially by Isaiah, that the gentiles should be received into the kingdom of God. This prophecy is the basis of the mission command of the risen Savior (Matt. 28; Mark 16) who gave his Gospel to us of the gentile world (Isaiah II, p. 360).

B. The Testimony of the New Testament

12. It seemed that "the Sun of Righteousness" was covered with "the cloud of the Intertestamental Period" for 400 years. When he emerged from behind the cloud, however, "the Sun of Righteousness" had almost reached the highest point and the light of the gospel shone on sinners more brightly than ever before.
13. The birth of the Savior was declared to the shepherds by the Lord's angel. The message of the angel was "a great joy to all people" (Luke 2:10). Forty days after the Jesus' birth, his parents took the Christchild to the temple of Jerusalem. There was in Jerusalem a man by the name of Simeon. He was waiting for the One who would comfort Israel. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple. When he saw the Christchild, he took him in his arms, praised God, and said:

Lord, now You are letting your servant go in peace as you promised, □because my eyes have seen Your salvation □that You prepared for all people to see, □a light to shine on the Gentiles, □and the glory of Your people Israel (Luke 2:25-32).
14. Not only to Israel did God announce the birth of the Savior. "By the leading of a star he also brought Gentile wise men to Bethlehem to kneel before their Savior. Thus, at the very beginning of Jesus' life, God made it plain that he is the Savior of all men" (Paul E. Eickmann, The Wonderful Works of God, p.25-D).

III. Jesus Himself Declared the Gospel to the Whole World.

A. By the Words on the Cross

15. When "the Sun of Righteousness" reached the apex, the gospel message reached the climax. That happened on the cross at Golgotha. On the cross, Jesus spoke the seven famous words. Let us note the first, second, and sixth word. The first word is, "Father, forgive them: they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus prayed, "to ask forgiveness for those who are inflicting death upon him" (Victor Prange, The People's Bible, Luke, p. 250).

“Jesus showed a Savior’s concern for others who are not his followers. Jesus prayed for his enemies, for the eternal welfare of their souls” (BHC NT Vol. 2, pp. 788,894). By the second word, “I tell you the truth. Today you will be with Me in Paradise,” Jesus declared the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to the criminal who repented of his sins and believed in Jesus as his Savior (Luke 23:43).

16. The sixth word is, “It is finished.” Prof. Franzmann explains this short but important passage as follows:

- a. That was the solemn report that Jesus made to his Father: “I paid the full ransom for all sinners of all times.”
- b. That was a proclamation that all present on Golgotha that first Good Friday were to hear. Moreover, the Holy Spirit saw to it that Jesus’ shout of triumph could be heard by all men everywhere. He had his sacred writer record it in the Scriptures. As a result, our Redeemer’s cry of “Victory!” has gone ringing down the corridors of time until at last it has reached our ears and hearts.
- c. With that shout Jesus declared for all to hear: “I have paid the debt in full for you, leaving nothing for you to pay.”
- d. With that shout Jesus directed all sinners to himself as their only and sure refuge (BHC NT Vol. 2, pp. 926,927).

B. By the Great Commission

17. Jesus said to the Canaanite woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). “During his ministry here on earth as he worked out mankind’s salvation, Jesus’ preaching and teaching was for the most part restricted to the Jews. Now, however, having accomplished man’s redemption, his gospel message was to be preached to all people” (Harold E. Wicke, PB, Mark, p. 239). “Go everywhere in the world and preach the good news to the whole world” (Mark 16:15). With clear words the risen Lord gave that privilege to all disciples. Thus “on the basis of Jesus’ Name, repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

18. Matthew 28 vv. 19 and 20 have more details on the Lord’s Great Commission. Jesus, who has been given all power in heaven and on earth, spoke to the disciples: “Go and make disciples of all people: Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to do everything I have commanded you.” Not only were the disciples ordered by Jesus to baptize, they were to teach those who would be baptized to do everything Jesus had commanded. Therefore, justification which had been prepared by Jesus for all people should be defended and taught to all nations until the Last Day. Through baptism, the forgiveness of sins is given even to babies.

IV. The History of Early Christian Church Proves This Theme.

A. The Holy Spirit Comes Down on the Disciples

19. The 50th day after Passover, on the day of Pentecost, “there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. Jesus’ disciples were also all together in one place” (Acts 2:1,5). “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house they were sitting in. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:2,4). Prof. R. D. Balge in his book explains this event: “The apostles’ speech was coherent and intelligible speaking of foreign languages” (PB, Acts, pp. 23,25). The disciples were now equipped and prepared for carrying out the assignment to be Jesus’ witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:46-49).

20. Prof. Balge goes on to say:

The Holy Spirit had equipped the apostles to proclaim God's great saving work in many languages. The confusion of tongues which resulted at Babel when men tried to glorify themselves by building a great tower (Genesis 11:1-9) was reversed on Pentecost. Then the Spirit moved men to glorify God in languages that were understood by all who heard. This 'reversal of Babel' still occurs when missionaries learn new languages in order to declare the wonders of God to people in world mission fields (PB, Acts, p. 25).

21. "On the day of Stephen's martyrdom a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1,4). "Now Jesus' foretelling began to happen, as an indirect and unintended result of persecution" (PB, Acts, p. 89).

B. Jesus' Chosen Instrument to Carry His Name before Many People

22. Paul, who was breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples, was converted by the Lord as he neared Damascus on his journey. Jesus spoke to Paul, who could see nothing but the sudden flashing of a light from heaven: "Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. "Ask for Paul," Jesus told Ananias. He could not obey the Lord's order willingly at first because Paul was a persecutor. "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their Kings and the people of Israel'" (Acts 9:1-15).
23. Then Ananias visited Paul. "Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again" (Acts 9:17,18). Paul repented and was baptized. According to God's promise, through baptism, the free gift from God was given to the persecutor, and his sin was forgiven and he was saved. Once again I would like to introduce you to Prof. Balge's comment here:

Amazing grace! A Pharisee who had persecuted Jews for believing in Jesus would carry Jesus' name to the Gentiles. He who had believed that salvation is in doing the works of the law would teach that salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Saul did carry Jesus' name to the Gentiles, Gentile rulers and his own people. Much of the book of Acts tells the story. He would witness to Jesus' salvation before governors and kings, including Caesar himself (PB, Acts, p. 102).

C. Peter Saw a Vision

24. By means of a vision, the Lord taught Peter that "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34,35). Peter saw something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. There were ceremonially unclean animals and birds in it. The Lord ordered Peter to kill and eat them. But Peter answered, "Oh, no, Lord! I've never eaten anything common or unclean" (Acts 10:14). Then Jesus told Peter, "Don't make unclean what God has made clean" (Acts 10:15).
25. "What Jesus taught Peter about food was going to apply to people. Neither Peter nor anyone else was to regard them as unclean" (PB, Acts, p. 113). Having understood that teaching correctly, Peter confessed that Jesus Christ was Lord of all (Acts 10:36). "When Peter went up to Jerusalem, those who still believed in circumcision disagreed with him and said: 'You visited uncircumcised men, and ate with them'" (Acts 11:2,3). After he had told them the vision, Peter asked them, "If God gave them the same gift he gave us when we began to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I—could I stop God?" (Acts 11:17). "When they heard this, they kept quiet. And they praised God, saying, 'Then God has given repentance also to non-Jewish people so that they will live'" (Acts 11:18).

V. Together We Confess That This Truth Is Biblical

26. One of the most remarkable characteristics of the Bible is its consistency. According to the testimony of the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Lord himself, and the history of the early Christian Church, the testimony that justifying grace is universal is consistent. "Christ is the Savior of the whole world (John 3:16; 1:29; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11). God earnestly desires that each individual person be saved (2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 33:11; 18:23,32). Salvation has been secured even for those who reject the grace of God and are thus lost on account of their unbelief (Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51; 1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Pet. 2:1)" (Mueller, CD, p. 248). It is surely a biblical truth that Jesus' atonement is for all. The word, "world," in the above passages means not merely the elect, but all men without exception.

27. Our Confessions also add as follows:

The passage, "Many are called, but few are chosen," does not mean that God does not desire to save everyone. The cause of condemnation is that men either do not hear the Word of God at all but willingly despise it, harden their ears and their hearts, and thus bar the ordinary way for the Holy Spirit, so that he cannot work in them; or, if they do hear the Word, they cast it to the wind and pay no attention to it (FC Ep XI 12, p. 496).

28. Reminding us of Jonah who did not want God to forgive the repentant Ninevites, Prof. Wendland asks us this question in his book: "Jesus' death on the cross and his glorious resurrection were accomplished for the salvation of all people. Does this make us angry? Are we, too, unwilling to preach repentance to them?" (ILCW OT-B, p. 81). Of course, together all member churches of the CELC will reply to this question: "We are not angry with that at all. Jesus has atoned for the sins of all mankind. With God and the angels we rejoice in the sinners' salvation."

29. Together we confess that "Jesus Christ, the God-man, was sent by the Father to humble himself for the redemption of mankind and that he was exalted as evidence that his mission was accomplished. Jesus came to fulfill the law perfectly (Matt. 5:17), so that by his perfect obedience all men should be accounted righteous (Rom. 5:19). He came to bear the iniquity of us all (Isa. 53:6), ransoming us by his sacrifice for sin on the altar of the cross (Matt. 20:28)." Together we confess, "He is the God-appointed Substitute for man in all this: His righteousness is accepted by the Father as our righteousness; his death for sin, as our death for sin (2 Cor. 5:21)." Together we confess that "Jesus' resurrection gives full assurance that God has accepted this atonement in our behalf (Rom. 4:25)" (Ernst H. Wendland, *Missiological Perspectives*, p. 78, para. 3).

30. Thus, together "we believe, teach, and confess that the Savior-God reconciled the world unto himself, that God declared his verdict of righteousness to all sinners. Upon this objective truth we build our message. We proclaim an unconditioned gospel, saying with Paul: We therefore are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:20,21)" (E. H. Wendland, MP, p. 94 #3).

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Abbreviations

Lutheran Confessions (all quotes from the Tappert Translation):

Ap Apology of the Augsburg Confession

FC Ep Epitome of the Formula of Concord

FC SD Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord