

The doctrine of justification research paper examples

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Justification is the chief article of Christian faith in scripture upon which all others stand or fail. The doctrine of justification is a document that was created and agreed to in 1999 by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for promoting Christian Unity (Stoll, n. d). The core of the document is an agreement that churches share a common understanding as evidenced by justification by the grace of God through the faith that Christians have in Jesus Christ (Newman, 1840). A firm understanding of the doctrine of justification is essential for the understanding of the Christian faith and in particular to God's way of salvation.

Justification is the most crucial article in Christianity. Christians must uphold it as the " first and chief article" and let it rule over all the other Christian doctrines. The Catholic Church is the oldest of all Christian denominations and its interpretation of Biblical principles regarding justification was a bone of contention during the Lutheran Reformation in the sixteenth century (Buchanan, 1867). In other words, justification was the crux of disputes arising in the Christianity faith in ancient times.

Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran Church described the doctrine of justification as the one that decides whether the church stands or fails. By this he meant that when the doctrine of justification of all Christians through the grace of Jesus Christ is preached, understood and believed as was the case during the New Testament times, the church (Catholics, Protestants and Lutherans) shall stand united in unity and remain alive to the transformation of lives (Pink, 2010; Stoll, n. d). On the other hand, if Christians neglect, overlay or deny justification as was the case during the times of medieval

Catholicism then the church shall fall from grace and leave Christians in a state of death, darkness and hopelessness.

Several documents and reports were written and signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church en route to establishing the doctrine of justification. Special reports include “ Church and Justification” (1994) and “ The Gospel and the church” (1972), by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission and “ Justification by Faith” (1983) by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in USA (Stoll, n. d). These dialogue reports and their responses show a high degree of agreement between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches as evidenced by their approaches and conclusions. According to Pink (2010) the present Joint Declaration has the intention to show that the Lutheran Churches and the Roman Catholic Church are now able to articulate a common understanding of the justification of all Christians through their faith in Jesus Christ. The Joint declaration does not cover how either church teaches about justification but it does encompass a consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification. It shows that any remaining differences in its explication shall no longer occasion doctrinal condemnations between Christianity denominations in regard to justification.

The doctrine of justification is deeply founded in scriptures. Historically, justification arises out of God’s dealings with Abraham, “ Abram put his trust in the Lord and because of this the Lord was pleased with him and accepted him” (Genesis 15: 6), Hebrews 11: 8 and Romans 4: 3). In addition, Elijah, Ezekiel and other prophets also emphasized on justification in their teachings. Jesus Christ also emphasized on justification, “ those who believe

in the Son are not judged but those who do not believe have already been judged because they have not believed in God's only son" (John 3: 18, 36 and 6: 29). In Romans 3: 24, Paul provides justification as a fourfold text outline: the fact of justification- " being justified", the manner -" freely", the source-" by His grace" and the ground of justification-" redemption in Jesus Christ".

Christianity is founded on the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and through him our sins are forgiven. The bible states that sin is only thing that separates man from God. Justification reveals how God deals with us when we sin, accepts us as righteous and makes us subjects of His favor rather than His wrath. When used in the bible, the meaning of " justify" is to declare a sinner " just" or right before God. The word does not mean to make just but to declare just. In Romans 8: 33 Paul stated, " Who will accuse God's chosen people? God declares them not guilty". The apostle Paul went further in verse 34 and stated " who further will condemn them (Christians)? Not Christ Jesus who died, or rather, who was raised to life and is at the right hand of God pleading with Him for us!" In verse 38, Paul stamps authority over justification by stating, " I am certain that nothing can separate us from His love; neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly powers or rulers.. there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord!"

The biblical context of justification shows that there were three major challenges that faced God in justifying mankind. The first is the sinful character of mankind. In Romans 3: 23 apostle Paul wrote that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Seemingly, it is challenging for

God to justify an unrighteous person. The second challenge lies in the non-relaxable character of the moral law. The Old Testament bears the 10 commandments which God gave to the Israelites and they were to merit God's judgement if they disobeyed those laws. James 2: 10 states that if someone breaks any one point of the law he is guilty of breaking all and stands to incur God's judgement. Third is the just and holy character of God Himself. In case God lowered His standard in order to justify mankind, He would cease to be Holy. In the face of these three challenges, it seemed impossible for God to justify mankind but He did. Probably these three reasons are among those responsible for causing divisions in the early Christianity in matters pertaining justification.

Conclusion

The Joint Declaration on the doctrine of justification rests on the conviction that when Christian churches overcame earlier doctrinal condemnations and controversial questions, the churches neither disavow their own past nor take condemnations lightly. Among all Christians, it is universally accepted that all people are sinners, they fall short of the glory of God and none stands to be condemned but all shall be declared righteous by the Grace of God. The doctrine of justification acknowledges that the Source of our justification is by His Grace, the Ground of our justification is by His Blood, the Means of our justification is by our Faith in Him and the Evidence of our justification is by our Works. The developments that have taken place have not only required churches to examine the divisions among them but also made them to the ultimate goal of Christianity-repentance and unification of God with mankind.

References

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