

The article by which the church stands or falls

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Martin Luther said about the doctrine of justification: «Because if this article stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses». Later on, this became a sort of proverb, in Lutheran and also in Reformed theology: «justificatio est articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae», «Justification is the article by which the church stands or falls». In this article I analyse and evaluate this saying. First, I discuss its context. Then I mention some other articles that were important in the history of Christian doctrine. In the third place I highlight the danger of oneness. Lastly, I discuss the historicity of doctrine. Luther's focus on the doctrine of justification had its context in the specific circumstances and problems of his time. In other times the church stood or fell by other articles. The focus on one article has the danger of one-sidedness: we must be aware of other aspects of the gospel, that always has more treasure than we can comprehend. It is our task to proclaim the gospel as an answer for the questions and problems of our time.



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