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Title: "OIC Statement of Faith, Part 6: We believe that justification and salvation are a gift of God's grace received through faith."

Key verses:

Romans 3:24-26 (NASB) – "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in God's merciful restraint He let the sins previously committed go unpunished; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, that is, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) – "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

Christ is risen!

Although it has been two weeks since our Easter celebration, I am continuing to use this Easter greeting, "Christ is risen." Traditionally, Christians have celebrated the resurrection of Christ not only on Easter Sunday but also for several weeks afterward. We are currently in the Easter season, a period of time that is sometimes called "Eastertide." This period of time lasts 40 days, up until the celebration of the Ascension of Christ, although in some church traditions, it lasts 50 days until the Day of Pentecost. I prefer seeing it as a 40-day commemoration. Today, I would like to spend a little time finishing up the story of Easter and its aftermath as a way to transition into discussing the main topic of today's message.

For the past two Sundays, I have shared with you the wonderful story of the resurrection of Christ, of His victory over sin and death, and of the many witnesses to the risen Lord. The story continues. At the end of the Gospel of Luke and at the beginning of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the Ascension of Christ into heaven is mentioned. Both of these books were written by Luke, and this is what he says in the opening verses of his second book:

Acts 1:1-3 (NASB) – "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen. <sup>3</sup> To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of things regarding the kingdom of God."

Both of the books that Luke wrote are addressed to somebody named Theophilus. Look closely at this name: *Theo*, meaning "God," and *phil*, meaning "love." "Theophilus" means a "God-lover." This name might refer to an actual person named Theophilus, or it might be a reference to any Christian, any God-lover. These are books that are for any of us who love God and want to know Him.

Luke says that in his first book, the Gospel of Luke, he wrote about "all that Jesus began to do and teach, <sup>2</sup> until the day when He was taken up to heaven." As I said a moment ago, the Gospel

of Luke ends with the Ascension of Christ. In this second book, Luke tells us in Acts 1:3 that Jesus “presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs.” In my message last week, I outlined several of those convincing proofs, which turned these doubting, hesitant disciples into bold witnesses for Christ. Also, we read here in verse 3 that Jesus appeared to the apostles over a period of 40 days – that gives us the time frame up to His ascension into heaven.

Verse 2 says He gave the apostles some orders. Verse 3 says He spoke to them “of things regarding the kingdom of God.” During this period of time, among the things Jesus said to the apostles was to commission them to spread the gospel. Last week, I read for you Mark 16:15 (NASB) where He told them to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus gives them the Great Commission and they are told to “make disciples of all nations.” Matthew records for us the main activities of the evangelistic mission: going, making disciples, baptizing, teaching. At the end of the Gospel of Luke, Luke records for us the main content of the evangelical message.

Luke 24:45-48 (NASB) – “Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and He said to them, “So it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things’.”

Here is the fundamental content of the gospel message: that in fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead, and then the apostles are to proclaim, in Christ’s name, the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Repentance for the forgiveness of sins. This is the way of salvation.

Let’s return to the Book of Acts. Chapter 1, verses 4 and 5 say this: “Gathering them together, He [Jesus] commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’.”

They are to wait in Jerusalem until they are baptized with the Holy Spirit. That occurs on the Day of Pentecost, and we read about that in Acts chapter 2.

But here, in the opening verses of Acts 1, Jesus departs from the apostles in a dramatic fashion. Let’s read Acts 1:9 (NASB) – “And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were watching, and a cloud took Him up, out of their sight.” *And a cloud took Him up, out of their sight.* This is what we refer to as the Ascension of Christ.

So, I have a question. Where is Jesus right now? Let’s take a look at what the Nicene Creed says about Jesus Christ. Here are some lines from the middle of the creed:

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Christ is currently in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. There are a number of Bible passages which tell us this. Let's look at Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV) – “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

The end of verse 3 again: *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* After Jesus became the sacrifice for sins on the cross, He rose again from the dead and then ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 10:12 (ESV) – “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”

We see from these passages that Christ had a crucial task to undertake for the sake of mankind: to be the sacrifice for our sins. After that, He takes His seat in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. This is the seat of authority and power.

Pastor John Piper makes the following comment on these verses:

When it says, "When he had made purification of sins he sat down at the right hand of Majesty," it means that the sitting down in this place of preeminence and honor and authority and power was a declaration of how perfect was Christ's work of purification of sins. Christ was fitted for this place of honor by the fullness and perfection of his sin-bearing work for us.

During the three Sundays in April that I have spoken here, I have told you of Christ's work on the cross to purchase our redemption, of His death and resurrection, His triumph over sin and death, the witnesses to that resurrection, and the 40 days during which He appeared to the apostles on several occasions before His ascension into heaven. This concludes my telling of the Easter story, and it serves as a transition to the main topic of my sermon today.

Today, I am continuing my series on the Statement of Faith of Osaka International Church. Last month, I spoke on Paragraph 5 of the Statement of Faith. Let's read that paragraph one more time:

We believe that man was created in the image of God but fell into sin and is therefore lost, and only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit can salvation and spiritual life be obtained. Romans 5:15-19, Romans 8:15-17.

The focus of today's message is Paragraph 6. Let's read it:

We believe that the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe, and that only such as receive Jesus Christ by faith are born of the Holy Spirit, and thus become the children of God. Romans 3:25-26, Ephesians 2:8-9.

In my Easter message, I told you the story of mankind's fall into sin. I quoted for you some verses concerning our separation from God.

Isaiah 59:2 (NASB) says, "But your iniquities have caused a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear."

Romans 3:23 (NASB) – "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

In order to remedy this condition of separation from God, there must be a sacrifice for sins.

Let's read the latter half of Hebrews 9:22 (ESV) – "...and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Sin is a serious matter. And the only way it can be remedied is for blood to be shed – it means that a death must take place. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they immediately felt shame at being naked and they sought to cover themselves. They sewed fig leaves together to make themselves coverings (that's Genesis 3:7). They also sought to hide from God. But He discovered them and then banished them from the Garden. As He did so, he gave the man and woman new coverings. We see here that God is always reaching out to save man.

Genesis 3:21 (NASB) – "And the LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them." God made garments of skin – animal skin – for the man and woman. What had to happen for animal skins to be made available? An animal had to die. This is the first indication that in order to cover the sins of mankind, an animal had to die. A death had to occur.

This shedding of blood to cover man's sin is a part of what is called the Doctrine of the Atonement. The atonement. The idea behind this word is that there are two people who have become estranged from each other and there needs to be a process to bring them back together. Look at this English word *atonement*: "at one" ... the two estranged parties (God and man) are now made "at one," the relationship restored.

The Hebrew word for "atone" is *kāpar*. It is a very important concept in the Old Testament. A related word is *kappōret*, meaning "mercy seat," the lid which covers the tabernacle and which plays an important role during ceremonies on the Day of Atonement.

I would like to share some quotes from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*:

The term atonement expresses the notion of divine forgiveness as the removal or covering over of human guilt and the turning away of God's wrath.

The OT describes atonement primarily as a ritual activity... More specifically, the notion of atonement assumes that the relationship between human beings and God is fractured, but can be temporarily restored by religious rituals. The verb כָּפַר (*kāpar*) literally means "to cover"; atonement is envisioned as covering over sin and thus cleaning it up. The atonement rituals focus chiefly on animal sacrifices that are mediated by priests and take place in the

tabernacle or temple. The main outcomes of the ritual of atonement include expiation and purification; these suggest that the rupture in relationship between God and human beings is caused by human iniquity or sin, which contaminates life and causes a negative divine reaction (God's wrath). Thus, atonement or removal of iniquity produces purification on the human side and appeasement or propitiation on the divine side.

(Adriani Milli Rodrigues, "Atonement," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).)

Note some key words here: the notion of divine forgiveness, removal or covering over of human guilt, and the turning away of God's wrath, which is termed "propitiation." This word *propitiation* is another important word – the shedding of blood during the sacrifice appeases God's anger, His wrath against our sins.

Let me quote some more from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*:

The NT concept of atonement assumes the OT notion of this concept, but the NT explicitly elaborates it from a Christological perspective. Christ is the priest who makes atonement (vb. ἱλάσκομαι, *hilaskomai*; Heb 2:17), the means or place of atonement (ἱλαστήριον, *hilastērion*; Rom 3:25), and the sacrifice of atonement (ἱλασμός, *hilasmos*; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). In the NT, expiation or divine forgiveness of sins is provided by Christ.

What is being said here highlights three functions of Jesus Christ in His atoning work: He is the priest that makes atonement, He is the place of atonement or means of atonement, and He is the atoning sacrifice itself. Let's look at some Bible passages.

Hebrews 2:17 (ESV) – "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." Jesus Christ is a faithful high priest in the service of God. But note also that He "had to be made like His brothers" – I described for you in my Easter sermon how Jesus had to take on human flesh ("to be made like His brothers") in order to redeem our human flesh.

1st John 2:2 (NKJV) – "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." Christ is that sacrifice for sins that appeases the wrath of God. This message is for everyone in the world – salvation is made available to any who will place their faith in Christ.

My quote from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook* cites Roman 3:25, as does Paragraph 6 of the OIC Statement of Faith. So now let's look at Romans 3:24-26 (NASB) – "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in God's merciful restraint He let the sins previously committed go unpunished; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, that is, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Verse 24 – Justification is made available to us as a gift of God's grace. This is an important point. It is a free gift to us made available to us as a gift of His grace.

Verse 25 – Christ was publicly sacrificed on the cross. This was an act of propitiation, and we can appropriate the benefits of this sacrifice through faith in Him. In Old Testament times, God left most sins unpunished: the Old Testament sacrificial system was temporary, until the final and ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross could once and for all pay the penalty for our sin.

Verse 26 – God’s justice demanded a payment for sins, and by this action on the cross, it shows that He is a just God ... but at the same time, He provides the way of justification for any sinner who will put their faith in Jesus.

Let me quote from the *Lexham Survey of Theology*:

Justification is a Christian’s judicial acceptance by God as not guilty because his sins are not counted against him.

Paul proclaims that “all who believe” are justified by faith without works (Rom 3:24–25, 28). In other words, believers are reckoned as righteous by God not on the basis of their good works but because of what Christ has achieved for them, received by faith.

(Tony Lane, “Justification,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Mark Ward et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018).)

Justification is the Christian’s judicial acceptance by God as “Not guilty.” His sins are not counted against him because Christ paid the penalty for our sins on the cross – all our sins: past, present and future.

Paul declares in several places that all who believe in Christ are justified not by any works that we do, but simply through faith. Let’s look at the other Biblical citation that the OIC Statement of Faith makes:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) – “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

By God’s grace we are saved. Salvation is initiated by God, and we have done nothing to merit it. We have done nothing to earn salvation. Salvation does not happen as a result of works. It is by God’s grace that we are saved, and it is through faith that we receive this gift.

This was the wonderful news proclaimed by the Protestant Reformers in the 16th century. This notion was in stark contrast to the ideas of medieval Christianity and its elaborate system of religious activities that a person was expected to do in order to gain salvation. Such a system bred uncertainty in the hearts of Christians, who were never sure if they had done enough to obtain salvation.

When Martin Luther and other Christian clerics of that era discovered the Biblical teaching that salvation came as a gracious gift from God through faith alone, this started a movement we call the Protestant Reformation. They had been protesting not only against wrong theology, but also against certain abusive practices in the established church – thus they were called “**Protestant**.” They had wanted to reform the church, but became a movement that separated from that church.

Some of the hallmarks of the Protestant movement were a belief that the Bible should be our supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and practice, that salvation is a free gift of God's grace that cannot be merited by anything, and that this free gift is received by faith. Osaka International Church stands in the evangelical and Protestant tradition, as made clear in our Statement of Faith and constitution.

Once more, the first half of Ephesians 2:8 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith ...” Saved **by** God's grace ... **through** faith. We aren't saved by having faith. Faith is not the means of our salvation – rather, it is the means (the instrument) by which God has designed that we receive this free gift of His grace.

Let me read a few more verses ...

John 3:16 (NKJV) – “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

John 5:24 (NKJV) – “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”

John 1:12-13 (NKJV) – “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:<sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

God is the One who initiated the program of salvation, not us. God desires us to receive Christ and believe in Him. Verse 12 again: *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*

He offers this free gift to you and to me. If you have not yet received this gift, please talk to me or to any of the other workers here at OIC and we can show you the way to peace with God and eternal life.

I would like to close today's message by quoting Paragraph 6 of our Statement of Faith one more time:

We believe that the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe, and that only such as receive Jesus Christ by faith are born of the Holy Spirit, and thus become the children of God.