

Redemption and Universal Justification According to II Corinthians 5:18–21

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The doctrine of universal, so-called objective justification sets forth that the Lord God by grace because of Christ's redemption actually forgave sins to all men, to the whole world, altogether apart from man's receiving or not receiving this justification in faith; that thus the forgiveness of our sins is not in the least dependent on anything in us, not on our attitude, not on our believing or not believing, not on our conversion; rather that faith, which God effects in men, apprehends an already complete gift, which is there for him personally and does not wait until he believes to become a reality.

Synergists without exception are bound to be offended at this doctrine. For it deprives man of even the least vestige of honor that he might yet tell himself the decision to be saved or not after all rests in his own hands. It makes it impossible to look upon faith as a condition of the justification of the sinner. It shatters every possibility of ascribing to man any activity toward good at his conversion and of making his election unto salvation dependent on his foreseen faith. For this reason it was bound to happen in the election controversy that our opponents attacked this jewel of biblical doctrine and sought with all artistry to eradicate it from the teachings of the church.

For us it is unquestionably certain that universal, objective justification is a doctrine of Scripture. However, our opponents through their bold opposition compel us also here to return to the Scriptures and from them to become reassured that we really possess this doctrine. We might do this by studying all pertinent Bible passages in order and then summarizing the result. But it is also possible for a change so clearly to present this doctrine by means of one single passage, that it should suffice as far as certainty of faith is concerned.

The section 2 Corinthians 5:18–21 contains, besides other precious truths, also a clear proof of objective justification. Our discussion of these verses is not intended to be an exhaustive exegetical study. Our aim here is to learn what this section has to say about the inner connection between the doctrine of redemption and the doctrine of objective justification; this will self-evidently call for proof that according to the apostle's presentation the evangelical ministry basically has only one task, correctly to proclaim this doctrine, indeed, that without the doctrine of objective justification the gospel would cease to be gospel.

The apostle's line of thought quite naturally leads him to speak of these two related doctrines. He had in the immediately preceding context set forth that in his official contact with the Corinthians he was fully aware of the accounting which he would eventually have to give before the judgment seat of God. Unlike that of the false teachers, who were troubling the congregation at Corinth, his point of view was such, that he judged neither Christ Himself nor those who were His, according to a fleshly criterion; according to the flesh he knows no one, also not Christ, whom before his conversion he knew only in this way (vs 16). He judges and treats all Christians as such in whom with the new life in Christ a complete transformation has taken place (vs 17). Now he continues: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God, for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

We need to concern ourselves especially with the word "reconcile." It not only controls the entire section, but also is the indispensable basis for the understanding of the doctrine of objective justification.

Not in every instance in the NT where Luther's translation has the word "reconciliation" ("reconcile")¹ did the Holy Ghost use the same Greek word in the original text. While καταλλάσσειν (καταλλαγή) occurs in our passage, we find ἰλάσκεσθαι (ἰλασμός) elsewhere. Thus Hebrews 2:17: "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation (εἰς τὸ ἰλάσκεσθαι) for the sins of the people"; I John 2:2: "he (Christ) is the reconciliation (ἰλασμός) for our sins"; 4:10: "God...loved us and sent his Son to be the reconciliation (ἰλασμόν) for our sins."²

We immediately add the passages, in which Luther rendered the word καταλλάσσω and other derivatives of the verb ἀλλάσσειν reconcile. Matthew 5:24: "be reconciled (διαλλάγηθι) to thy brother"; Romans 5:10f: "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled (κατηλλάγημεν) to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled (καταλλαγέμεντες) we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation (καταλλαγήν)"; 11:15: "If the casting away of them (the Jews) be the reconciling (καταλλαγή) of the world"; I Corinthians 7:11: "Let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled (καταλλαγήτω) to her husband"; Colossians 1:20–22: "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, to reconcile (ἀποκαταλλάξαι) all things to himself; ...and you, that were sometime alienated and enemies..., yet now hath he reconciled (ἀποκατήλαξεν) in the body of his flesh through death"; Ephesians 2:16: "That he might reconcile (ἀποκαλλάξῃ) both unto God in one body by the cross." This exhausts the passages in the German New Testament in which the word reconciliation (reconcile) occurs; we also cited all passages besides our selection in which the word καταλλάσσειν (καταλλαγή) appears.

Now while both ἰλάσκεσθαι and καταλλάσσειν are correctly rendered "reconcile" in the German, yet they etymologically present reconciliation from differing viewpoints. ἰλάσκεσθαι is derived from ἱλεως, gracious, and thus pictures reconciliation as an act by which the grace of God is gained. An entirely different picture is presented by the word καταλλάσσειν which by way of the verb ἀλλάσσειν can be traced to ἄλλος, another. In all the verbs derived from this word the idea of change is more or less emphasized. ἀλλάσσω means change (Ga 4:20), transform (1 Cor 15:51f); exchange (Ro 1:23); ἀνταλλάσσω, give in exchange, from which in the New Testament is derived ἀντάλλαγμα, the ransom, indemnity, (Mt 16:26); μεταλλάσσω, give in exchange, transform, change (Ro 1:25f). Up to this point it is quite apparent that the meaning of the root word rings through. Of the compounds, which gradually acquired a definitely different meaning, ἀπαλλάσσω reveals most clearly how in the transition the basic meaning was determinative. Hebrews 2:15 reads: "Christ redeemed (ἀπαλλάξῃ) those who through fear of death were their entire life in bondage." Since ἀλλάσσω means, make different, change, ἀπαλλάσσω because of the ἀπο— means: to change by taking away or by separation; Christ through taking away changed the relation to death of those who had been slaves of death, i.e., he freed them from the fear of death. We find this same verb in Luke 12:58: "Give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from thine adversary" (ἀπηλλάχθαι ἀπ' αὐτοῦ). Here the Lord surely did not mean a physical separation, but such a change in the relationship between accuser and accused, that the accuser puts aside, drops his accusation. This takes us back directly to the verbs which here are our particular interest; for the passage just cited is the

¹ To be used in this translation wherever Luther in the German has *Versöhnung* (*versoehnen*).

² Luke 18:13: "God be reconciled (ἰλάσθητι) to me," Luther translated beautifully "God, be gracious unto me!" The four passages cited are the only ones in the New Testament in which the word ἰλάσκεσθαι (ἰλασμός) occurs.

parallel of Matthew 5:24: “Go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother” (διαλλάγηθι). Comparing the two passages we learn how the word διαλλάσσειν came to mean reconcile; it has the connotation: see to it that his relationship to you is changed, namely, that he ceases to be your adversary. We take a look also at 1 Corinthians 7:11: “Let the wife be reconciled (καταλλάγητω) to her husband”; i.e., she is to see to it, that the husband change the relationship of discord, which she through her action conjured up, and receive her back.

Such a comparison suffices to demonstrate that the word reconcile (reconciliation) in our Corinthians passage is a concept of an entirely different color than the same word in a passage like 1 John 2:2. καταλλάσσειν does not as ἰλάσκεσθαι point to the way in which the reconciliation was brought about, also not really wherein the reconciliation actually consists. It says rather that the relationship between two parties has been *fundamentally changed*. God changes His relationship to the world. It is essentially this with respect to reconciliation that here comes into consideration. From other passages we know very well what the relationship between both was previously: as children of wrath (Eph 2:3) men were under the curse of the law (Ga 3:13); God, offended by sin, was incensed against them with a wrath that burned to the deepest hell. If a change in this relationship has set in, men have peace with God (Ro 5:1) and grace has taken the place of wrath.

Thus we have already answered the important question, who the reconciled party is, God or the world. In this question we stand in direct opposition to Ritschl and many older and more recent theologians, who fail to find anything about a reconciliation of God taught in the Bible, but instead see redemption defined thus, that men are induced by Christ’s bloody sacrifice to cease their natural enmity against God and on their part to make peace with God. This view, which as it is completely upsets the Christian concept of redemption, upon closer scrutiny loses every semblance of justification also in our passage. For 1) the ἦν (God *was* in Christ) designates this praiseworthy act of God as completed in the past. Also the modern theologians are not so stupid as to assume an actually accomplished change of mind on the part of the world in God’s favor; they hold that reconciliation goes on from time to time in those who convert themselves. However, then quite obviously Paul would have had to show, at least by means of a present tense, that the reconciling activity of God is continuing. He should then have said: God *is* reconciling in Christ, or better still: God *will be* reconciling in Christ. The present form of the participle καταλλάσσων does not alter the time element of the imperfect; rather does it take the place of an imperfect participle (cp. Mk 14:4 and other passages). 2) Verse 18 indeed reads: God has reconciled us to Himself, and the persons designated by “us” are in every instance converted Christians, who now on their part as new men stand in the right relationship to God, irrespective of whether one restricts the ἡμᾶς to the apostles or takes it as said of the congregation. But what Paul here says of the converted, verse 19 says of the world, the κόσμος, of whom it has never been true and never will be true, that it on its part is entirely reconciled with God. The world as such is according to Biblical usage, as far as redemption is concerned, the mass of unconverted sinners, inimical to God, so that Jesus (Jn 17:14,16) distinguishes it from the believers and in John 15:18 states that He chose His disciples out of the world. The world will remain the same to the last day; it will never change its character. The Judge of the world will at His reappearance catch by surprise the great mass of men in their enmity toward God. Thus the world on its part is factually not reconciled with God. 3) To this also the dative ἑαυτῷ points. It does not in the least weaken but rather strengthens our argumentation. In Luther’s translation: “who reconciled us to Himself, He reconciled the world with Himself” this is not clearly evident. Nor would we add to the clarity of the translation by substituting the words “for Himself”; to do full justice to the Greek words, we would in German need an expression with a meaning somewhere between the two translations cited. Since a change on the part of the world for a reconciliation with God is excluded, the dative ἑαυτῷ no doubt contains the thought that as far as God is concerned He has already made the reconciliation a reality; He has reconciled Himself with the world. It also 4) needs to be pointed out that in καταλλάσσων the subject is always the offended party. We must not forget that the concept of atonement (*Suehne*) really does not lie in the word itself, but that it designates a change in relationship through which what

we call reconciliation comes about. It is not within the capability of the world to alter the relationship existing between it and God, anymore than this is the case with a person who has offended another. The world cannot even supply the atonement that would move God to change His attitude toward it and even if it could, it would under no circumstances be the party which initiates the reconciliation. We need to take note that Matthew 5:24 really says: Be reconciled with thy brother, and I Corinthians 7:11: Let the wife be reconciled to her husband. In no case can the offending party itself make the reconciliation a reality; this belongs to the offended one. He is therefore also in every case the reconciled one, the one in whom the reconciliation must become a reality. So then also here not the world, but God is the reconciled party.³

How this reconciliation of God came about Paul does not here expressly teach. Even in verse 21 he only intimates this without however becoming explicit. He can presuppose that the Corinthians will immediately be reminded of the wonderful expiatory sacrifice for the sins of the world which God, who was in Christ, offered to Himself. Jesus' vicarious redemptive activity in His life, His suffering and death we may and should think about in the sentence: God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Through what Christ did in man's stead God is now so reconciled that factually there is peace on earth, the peace of God, that God's wrath toward men is stilled when He sees them in Christ.

We now turn to the other two participial clauses in verse 19: Not imputing their trespasses unto them and giving to us the word of reconciliation. Without a doubt, the sequence of the participial clauses in this verse is to present the actual, at least logical sequence of the actions of God: first reconciliation, then non-imputation, then transmission of the word of reconciliation. Every other view leads to conclusions that are contrary to Scripture and entirely absurd. We already established that God was not only the one who did the reconciling, but also that in the judicial transaction He was the party to be reconciled. If we now were to assume that *μὴ λογιζόμενος* is to present the way and manner in which God made Himself the reconciled one, the resultant thought would be: He changed His mind in that He overlooked the sins of the world. This, however, contradicts not only all clear conceptions of a reconciliation, in which the non-imputation of the guilt is conceivable only after the appeasement of the offended, but it at the same time poses the possibility that God has suppressed His holiness with its principled opposition against sin and His righteousness with its irrevocable demands for punishment, set them aside, rendered them inoperative, in short that in this matter and in this transaction He has denied or relinquished a part of His unchangeable essence. All of the numerous Bible passages, in which God's hatred of sin is either directly or indirectly set forth, would through such a view be completely emptied of their content. To be sure, violence of this type has often enough been applied by theologians of former and more recent times. Whoever permits a Socinian leaning to insinuate itself into his theology, must in some way get rid of the troublesome passages. Especially since Schleiermacher the love of God has been emphasized at the expense of His holiness and so the image of God has been distorted which Scripture presents in that it teaches that He is as much all holiness and all righteousness as He is all love.

If, however, *μὴ λογιζόμενος* denotes an action which is not identical with reconciliation nor is presupposed by it, then Luther is correctly interpreting when he inserts an "and," which Paul did not have. *And* did not impute their trespasses unto them. This sequence of thought Paul now indicates by means of *καί* before *θέμενος*; for also with respect to this second participle it is obvious that therewith not a presupposition but a consequence of reconciliation is to be expressed. It should not require a lengthy discussion to show that *ἡμῖν* here can only refer to the apostles, since Paul practically in the same breath with "we" proceeds to speak of the apostles' activity as ambassadors for Christ. Besides the *ὡς ὅτι* (Luther 'for') at the beginning of verse 19

³ Cf. Zahn, *Komm. z. Roemerbr.*, p 258, note 23: Object of *καταλλάσσειν* and its derivatives or subject of its passives is never the one who suffers the hatred or enmity, but the one who caused the break of peace, mankind which rebelled against God, which in the warfare between God and sin on the side of the latter wars against God (Ro 6:13) as *θεομάχοι*, in other words the entire rebellious world of men, 2 Cor 5:18–20; Col 1:20–22. So the wife who offended her husband by more or less willful desertion, 1 Cor 7:11; so also the man against whom his brother believes he has cause for complaint, through whom the brother feels himself wronged, Mt 5:24.

clearly shows that the words, “He has placed in us the word of reconciliation,” indicate how the establishment of the ministry of reconciliation came about, also how the first part of verse 19 is an amplification of the reconciliation spoken of in verse 18. In other words: The word of reconciliation is the gift of God which made possible the activity in the ministry of reconciliation. Even the boldest phantasy does not here find grounds for the assumption that the inspiration of the Word by God was to designate an action through which the apostles now were to effect the alleged change of the world in favor of God. Rather is the inspiration which the apostle claims for himself and his co-apostles here implicitly expressed. But obviously the word of reconciliation could not logically exist before the reconciliation was an established fact in the heart of God. Thus the giving or establishing of this Word is a consequence of the reconciliation and therefore at the same time includes the knowledge of the justification of the sinner, which indeed is involved in the reconciliation, but is not identical with it.

Accordingly having reconciled the world for Himself, having made the reconciliation with the world a reality, God did not impute their sins to them. Very briefly let us point out that the same persons whom God reconciled to Himself are the *objectum personale* of the non-imputation: the world, the totality of sinful, inimical mankind, the lost, accursed sinners, irrespective of whether they will be converted or not. Whoever at this point injects the qualifying thought: “provided they repent,” not only commits flagrant violence contrary to all sound principles of Scripture interpretation, but also contradicts here, as we above showed in another context, the clear Scriptural doctrine concerning the unchangeable character of the world as such. Whoever has been converted, as a result of his conversion no longer belongs to the world in this sense. Only then do we remain true to the apostle’s clear declaration if we firmly hold that God actually did not impute their sins to the ungodly, lost world of men. Let us get this straight: God not only *made possible* the non-imputation of sins; that is not what Paul is saying. He says apodictically: God did not impute sins to the world as such. Nor is it useless to note that for the noun world, which is in the singular, he subsequently simply uses the plural of the personal pronoun: not imputing their trespasses unto them. The grammarian considers this transition from the singular to the plural a *constructio ad sensum* fully justified. Yet the sense is still not only this that in the concept world individual people are to be thought of as a totality, but that what is said of the concept (world) applies in like manner to every individual thing that makes up that concept. When I read: “The herd rushed past; *they* were felled by the bullets of the hunter,” I certainly do not understand this as though the hunters had killed the concept herd; not even an ex-president, who is an expert marksman, can get at a concept with powder and lead. But this I will accept, that the individual gazelles or hartebeests fell prey to the hunters, in that every individual animal was hit. Let us apply this to our passage. Paul is not saying that God did not impute sin to the concept world, but rather shows with the plural of the pronoun that in this act God had in mind and thought of the *individual* people, all without exception.

But what does it mean not to impute sin? This is a negative assertion. Is its content merely a negation of the designated action? Is God’s dealing with the sins of the world such that He simply left them unimputed, as perhaps a merchant by oversight or intentionally fails to enter a debt into his books which he rightly claims against someone? Such a removal of the debt of sin is unheard of in the Scriptures, would also be entirely incompatible with the holiness and righteousness of God. Such a position on God’s part is not taught, for example, in Acts 17:30; for it does not say that God winked at the sin but at the time of ignorance. This by no means was to say that He does not consider the ignorance deserving of punishment, but only that He does not let the former ignorance prevent Him from proclaiming the gospel to men now. Much less dare one appeal to Romans 3:25, where it is said of certain sins that they hitherto remained during the patience of God; for the apostle is only speaking of a passing over of the sins, thus of suspension of punishment, in which the sins remained in God’s eyes what they were, damnable transgressions which were altogether charged to men.

We turn to Romans 4 for the interpretation of the expression “nonimputation.” There Paul had clearly set forth the contrast between merit and grace and drawn the conclusion that faith is imputed for righteousness entirely without merit on the part of man. Following this he continues in verses 6 to 8 (NIV): “David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: Blessed are they whose offenses have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man

whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (οὐ οὐ μὴ λογίσηται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν). Paul here appropriates David’s terminology as altogether equivalent to his, since David expressed the same thought that he, Paul, had just carried out, namely, that God justifies a man by imputing Christ’s righteousness to him without works. Yet how does David express this thought? With three parallel statements: iniquity forgiven, sin covered, sin not imputed. This profusion of expressions obviously is to serve the purpose of describing the justifying act of God from various points of view: when God justifies, He is forgiving iniquity, He is covering sin, He is not imputing sin. These three expressions fuse for Paul into one concept, justification, so that he can in a given instance describe the entire act of justification by means of any one of these expressions. In each of these expressions the others are implied; one can substitute one for the other without altering the intended meaning. If then Paul in our Corinthians passage uses only the negative statement, he intends thus to present the forgiveness of sins or justification. God did not impute their sins to men; for Paul this means God forgave their sins.

Thus he is saying that the persons of whom he is speaking were justified by God, were declared righteous. These persons, however, are the world, the sinful, cursed, ungodly world, which to the last day will continue to be such and in all eternity will not change its character. So little does the apostle make the forgiveness of sins and the universal justification depend on a future attitude of individual persons that one could less easily conclude from the sentence alone that justification is granted to the believers, than that God in Christ also forgave the sins of the unbelievers who eventually are damned. To this conclusion the text compels one; the other can only be made with the help of other biblical statements. And so the results of our discussion thus far can be expressed as follows: God on His part made the reconciliation of the whole world a reality, is reconciled to the whole world, has made peace with it; as the reconciled One, because He was reconciled, He then of necessity forgave the sins to this same world, justified it. What is more, He did not justify the concept world, nor the world as a whole of which some small parts could possibly be missing, without invalidating the statement. On the contrary, He consciously declared righteous every individual who belonged to the world or will belong to the world to the end of days, every individual sinful person. But this is *universal justification*.

Following this the apostle proceeds to describe the task and authority of those in whom God placed the word of reconciliation. This part of the text is of less importance for our study; only this one thing might also be emphasized here, that (in spite of all objections) Luther’s translation “in Christ’s stead” must stand. The ambassadors do not come in their own name and, despite the honor that is due them by virtue of their office, do not appear before men as persons who speak on their own authority. When they speak, Christ is speaking. This understanding of the preposition ὑπέρ, the addition ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντες δι’ ἡμῶν establishes as correct so that Luther in rendering ὡς with “for” undoubtedly hit the right idea. God speaks through the preachers; thus they actually stand in the place of God and Christ and do not merely speak *on behalf of Christ*, as the American Revised translation renders the preposition.

We are chiefly concerned about the content of the message to be preached. What the apostle intends to present as content cannot be determined off hand. Opinions on this will differ, depending on whether one places a period or a semicolon at the end of verse 20. With a period the words read: “He made Him who knew no sin, etc.” In this case verse 21 would not belong to the presentation of the content of the message, but would serve another purpose. Since generally verse 21, which is added without a connective, is looked upon as supporting argument and thus Luther’s “for” would be conceded as correct, the verse with this punctuation would have to be tied up with δεόμεθα: The reason why we at all beseech you, is this, that God made Him, who knew no sin, etc. This view of the context, however, does not strike me as suggested, because in the case of an asyndetic addition a more precise connection with that to which the addition refers might be called for than is the case here. The nearest reference is always to that which immediately precedes and thus here to the *content* of the plea. Besides it is not easy to comprehend why Paul would consider such a reason for the appeal necessary; for surely the act of appealing as such was sufficiently motivated by the announcement: We are ambassadors, and did not require a subsequent reason. For this reason I consider the other punctuation correct: “We appeal: Be reconciled to God; He made Him who knew no sin, etc.” In that case verse 21 is attached directly to the appeal itself and contains an impressive argument why every person dare and ought to accept the reconciliation. This

also makes for a fitting line of thought from verse 18 to verse 21: First the fact of the reconciliation through which the universal justification and the word of reconciliation became possible, then the description of those to whom as ambassadors the word was committed and finally in briefest form the statement of the content of their message.

The message is introduced with the appeal: Be reconciled with God. To whom it is directed is perfectly clear from the appeal itself and also the context. The one who is urged to be reconciled with God obviously does not yet have the right relationship to God. That also for believers this word is precious gospel, which can only serve to make their own state of grace more certain the more they hear it, follows simply from the fact that we Christians continually need the gospel for our edification and preservation in faith, and so this word is meant also for the children of God. In the first place, however, this appeal is addressed to such who are still far removed from God. As God reconciled the *world* and forgave the *world* its sins, so he has His messengers cry out to the *world*: Be reconciled! Whether Paul was preaching in Derbe or on the Areopagus in Athens before a highly cultured public, whether he had Jews, Greeks, or barbarians before him, his appeal always rang as he here states it; nor could it be different. It is the appeal of the preaching ministry to *all* its hearers and to each individual also in the largest and most heterogeneous group that might be assembled anywhere.

On the meaning of this appeal we recently commented in passing without giving a penetrating presentation.⁴ By way of expansion we here present the following. The view, that in the opinion of the apostle an inner change was to take place in those addressed, so that they on their part were to be reconciled with God and to desist from all animosity toward God, is Scripturally entirely admissible. For this we do not appeal to Romans 5:10, because there, in spite of attempts to interpret otherwise, men are called enemies of God since God is hostile to them because of their sin (Luther's "still" is not in the Greek text!). One needs, however, to read Romans 8:7: "to be carnally minded is enmity against God"; Colossians 1:2: "And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works..."; James 4:4: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God"; John 7:7: "The world cannot hate you; but *me it hateth*." (Cf. NIV on these!) Thus there is no doubt, that according to the Scriptures it is as impossible for the unconverted man to be indifferent over against God as to be friendly disposed toward Him, but that bitter enmity against God rules in every unregenerate person. It is especially over against the gospel that natural man customarily gives vent to his enmity in that he either ridicules it as foolishness or blasphemes it as offensive. We would therefore remain entirely within the framework of scriptural assertions, if we understood the appeal of Christ's ambassadors as expressing a strong urging to desist from the inherited enmity against God, and calling for a desirable subjective, i.e., conscious turning to God. Factually a change in attitude as just described takes place in the conversion of a person. Nor would it be an argument against accepting such a view that synergistic theology might find in it proof for the cooperation of man in his conversion;⁵ for many other clear passages of Scripture are subjected to the same kind of abuse.

We need, however, bear in mind that the hostile attitude of men toward God is entirely unjustified and unfounded. Never did God inflict anything on mankind as a whole or on any individual which might give them even the appearance of right to assume a position of enmity against God. He never offended men, so that He now on His part was obligated to set things right. Thus man's enmity against God is shown to be sin, and this God certainly could not acknowledge as justified that through His representatives He should appeal: Won't you desist from your enmity! I remind you that everywhere in the New Testament where the passive of *καταλλάσσειν* is found, as here, the offender, the causer of the break, is the subject. Such a person, however, at the most has the obligation to render satisfaction for his transgression, but not the right to demand satisfaction of any kind. Consequently the view is surely to be preferred that Paul means to say: Won't you accept the proffered reconciliation! Had he not in the preceding verses established that on the part of the offended God the reconciliation and forgiveness of sin is a finished matter? Thus the ministry of reconciliation can have no other

⁴ *Quartalschrift (Wis. Luth. Quarterly)*, vol. 1, p 14f.

⁵ Heinrici, e.g., writes in Meyer's Commentary by way of paraphrase of our passage: "Do not, by refusing faith, frustrate the work of reconciliation in your case, but through your faith bring it about that the objectively accomplished reconciliation be accomplished subjectively in you."

purpose than to offer this ready gift to men. What on the part of men corresponds to such an offer is not so much desisting from the unjustifiable hostility as rather acceptance, which is done by faith. “Be reconciled to God” accordingly means nothing else than “Believe in the gospel” or “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” Compared to such acceptance, desisting from one’s personal enmity recedes so far into the background that one really can not even say the desisting from enmity must precede the acceptance. In conversion the emphasis always is on believing acceptance, which self-evidently implies also the cessation of the hostility.

Thus the connection with verse 21 is also definitely settled. The asyndeton causes no trouble whatever, but rather appears entirely in keeping with the apostle’s lively style of presentation. We do the same thing in our own sermons, as when we say: “Take! Everything is ready!” As we in a less lively presentation instinctively bridge an asyndeton with “for,” this is also done in our Corinthians passage; and so Luther inserted the little word. Paul would say: Thus we preach to the world: Accept the reconciliation, there is nothing more for you to do, it is at hand and ready in every respect. With these words Paul is therefore giving the quintessence of the gospel; they are a brief summary of the content of all evangelical sermons which were ever delivered on earth.

The messengers of Christ speak of the reconciliation in that they show how it came about. In order that peace with God might be established, God Himself imputed the sins of all men to man’s Substitute, who did not know sin from personal experience nor from the witness of a bad conscience.⁶ Paul does not deem it necessary fully to carry out this thought in this brief summary. Since God made the innocent One to be sin and thereby purposed to redeem the world, it is self-evident that He also accomplished His purpose. God in fact reconciled the world to Himself by giving His Son into death for it. As Paul in the above cited passages designated the forgiveness of sins as the direct result of the accomplished reconciliation, so also here: “that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,” the righteousness which avails before God or which God bestows.

At this point we need to come to grips with the objection that the apostle is here not speaking of the objective, universal justification of all men, but of the subjective, personal justification, which is accomplished in the believers. It is admitted that this objection can not claim support in the subjunctive *γενώμεθα*, “that we might be”; for this mood is called for by the conjunction *ἵνα* in all purpose clauses. Also for our German linguistic sense the subjunctive by no means indicates that the expressed purpose has not yet been accomplished, or that its realization is dependent on the fulfillment of certain conditions. It is thought, however, that better continuity results if one assumes that Paul concludes his discussion of reconciliation and universal justification with a reference to subjective justification. This of course presupposes that verse 21 is not part of the content of the apostolic message with which Paul concludes; therefore I feel the reasons given above militate against the punctuation which would then be required. Moreover it seems to me that here an *argumentum e silentio* is not only permissible, but also effective. If Paul in verse 21 wanted to speak of subjective justification and distinguish this from universal justification, he, the apostle of faith, would without a doubt have indicated this with the addition *διὰ πίστεως*: “That we *through faith* might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” The words “in Him” do not take the place of this addition, for they can just as well point to the manner of the universal justification. In this context, in which beginning with verse 14 the universality of the redemption is so strongly emphasized, a clear reference to this progression of thought would have been indispensable, even in this compendious presentation of the apostle, if his intention was here to speak about the appropriation of salvation by the individual.

If, however, we hold to the understanding of the context as presented above, the addition, verse 21, will readily be understood. Not only in a general way is a reconciliation to be proclaimed to the world; it is not enough only to say: God is reconciled, and then to leave it to the world to imagine the manner and result of the reconciliation. How could the secret hidden wisdom of God be uncovered by the world? We certainly would then again allow its philosophers to meander about in their phantasy and promote the most contradictory and of course false theories! As it is they do this more than enough in Christendom, where they have no excuse for it; but what a confusion would result, if Christ had not given His representatives a further assignment! But He did

⁶ *WLQ*, 1910, No. 1, p 15f.

this very thing. The gospel is the proclamation of the great acts of God for the salvation of mankind. The appeal to accept the reconciliation of God must be preceded by or certainly be followed by a presentation of what God did in order to reconcile the world to Himself and to justify it before His eyes. Therefore also he adds to verse 21a that pursuant to the sinbearing of Jesus the imputation of the righteousness of God to the world followed. Thus the second part of verse 21 becomes a repetition of the previous statement that God did not impute its sin to the world, only this time in a positive statement, the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Thus it has at the same time become clear that the two parts of the sentence denote two distinct acts, which can only be ascribed to God. Of the imputation of sin this is expressly said. *God* made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. Who else would have the right to do this? The devil? Men? One need only pose these questions to demonstrate the absurdity of the thought that someone besides God might have had the authority to visit strange sins on an innocent person. Here God is acting as the one Judge who is competent for this kind of judicial procedure; consequently this action of God bears the character of an *actus forensis*, a judicial action. The very same thing, however, then also applies to the second action referred to here. God makes the sinners to be the righteousness of God in that He imputed Christ's divinely complete merit to them. Who else than God alone would have the right to declare sinners righteous? Whom besides God could it behoove to make use of ransom money which has been paid into His hand? Here again He is the one Judge who has this authority. What He determines goes without confirmation of a higher judicial court. He looks upon what Christ accomplished as a complete satisfaction and this satisfaction He ascribes to the world of men whose place Christ took. Thus we note also here a procedure which with the dogmaticians we properly designate as an *actus forensis*.

The parallelism of the two parts of the verse also makes it obvious that the pronoun "us" (we) both times refers to the same persons. The passage states so well what is in our heart as Christians that we without hesitation claim it as an expression of our own experience of faith. But even if Paul so meant it, this would not exclude applying it to the whole world. God most certainly made His Son to be sin for the whole world; and we condemn Calvinism, which restricts redemption and reconciliation to the elect. So then He also in Christ really made all men to be the righteousness of God, declared them all righteous, otherwise the parallelism of thought would not hold. But we have taken cognizance that verse 21 gives the content of the message which is addressed to the whole world. As Paul here, so every evangelical preacher addresses *all* his hearers, regardless of where he finds them or who they might be.

Therefore Paul with the pronoun here means himself not only with the elect, with the believing children of God, as a special group among men, but speaks as a redeemed person to the redeemed, as a man to men, who on the one hand are in the same degree of condemnation, on the other are like him the object of the reconciliation and justification which Christ gained for the world. One need not even do violence to the words to come up with the thought that in both instances God in His omniscience was conscious of every individual person and made him the object of His activity. Paul, of course, could instead of the pronoun just as well have repeated the word "world" and then left it to each one to conclude that he himself was included. Instead he restricts the circle to the number who every time hears the message, in order to remove all doubt, that God did not reconcile and justify mankind as a whole, in an *a parte potiori* sense, but in all certainty every individual.

In both instances therefore the imputation has also been completely carried out without any subtraction whatsoever. Among other things the abstract terms "sin" and "righteousness" point this out. Every last sin of every individual person God laid on sinless Jesus; only so could He make Him to be *sin*, which certainly was not merely something imaginary. Particularly when He entered into judgment with Christ on the cross, He saw no other sin in all the world; the entire load rested by imputation on the innocent One. Consequently the people, whose place Christ was taking, became in Him without any exception whatever the righteousness of God. Both times God saw the human race in and through Christ, first in order to impute their sin on the innocent One, and then to impute to all men the righteousness He had gained. Both times Christ completely embraces all mankind.

We need also take notice that in this summation of the evangelical message the reconciliation is not directly mentioned. It is indeed clearly enough implied in the words. When God imputes all sins to the innocent One to effect reconciliation, this is by no means an experiment the outcome of which might be uncertain. God's doings never admit the possibility of being unsuccessful. Thus the result, reconciliation, is included in the

message that our sins were charged to Christ. It is, however, also presupposed in the justification of the world; this is taught in verse 18. Only the reconciled God could make us to be the righteousness of God by declaring us righteous. This is so self-evident for Paul that he did not deem it necessary here specifically to mention reconciliation. This also coincides completely with the custom of true Christians, when they speak of these great acts of God; redemption, reconciliation, justification are for us such a great, closely knit whole, that we, when we choose not to speak precisely, simply substitute one term for the other and so to speak treat them as synonyms.

If we were further to expand thoughts expressed in verse 21, Romans 4:25 would likely give the briefest commentary: Christ was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. 1 Corinthians 15:17–20a would serve a similar purpose: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also who are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. *But now is Christ risen from the dead.* This last sentence not only brings out the one point which Paul in keeping with his purpose in this passage was emphasizing, namely that Christ is “the firstfruits of them that slept,” but self-evidently also this that our faith in Him as Son of God and Savior of the world has a firm foundation, that since His resurrection we no longer are in our sins, that also the fathers of the Old Testament had a complete part in the redemption.

Our treatise yields several highly important corollaries, the discussion of which, however, we must dispense with at this time. Only one inference I would not like to leave unstated, that the doctrine of justification really belongs to the Second Article. Through our Catechism expositions we have been spoiled, to the point that we do not really find this doctrine expressed until the Third Article as a work of the Holy Ghost, and thus consider it as belonging not so much to Soteriology, as rather to Pneumatology. According to our passage, to which for the sake of brevity we are here confining ourselves, this is a mistake in understanding and arranging the thoughts expressed in the gospel. Justification and forgiveness of sins were not only made possible after the reconciliation of God through Christ’s vicarious atonement had been accomplished, but actually became a reality in Christ whose resurrection as far as we are concerned was equally as substitutionary as His passion. The forgiveness of sins as such does not depend on the subsequent activity of the Holy Spirit; the appropriation of the accomplished salvation on the part of the individual is rather ascribed to Him.

From this standpoint alone Luther’s explanation of the two Articles becomes perspicuous and is safeguarded against the charge of repetition. He has the Christian confess in the Second Article: Christ is my Lord, ...from all sins...When? When I came to faith? None of this, but as lost and condemned sinner He redeemed me from my sins. Luther obviously wants to say that faith in Christ embraces the existing, finished forgiveness of sins intended for the individual and thus acknowledges Christ as his Lord. In the Third Article he again comes to speak of the forgiveness of sins. Here, however, he does not, as in the Second Article, emphasize the purchasing and winning but the imparting: In this Christian Church (note with emphasis: and nowhere else) the Holy Ghost forgives (through the gospel, thus through the ministry of reconciliation!) me and all believers daily and richly all sins. Here then the believer is to confess that through the power of the Holy Spirit in the gospel justification is merely made his own certain, conscious possession. Whoever teaches otherwise immediately comes close to the synergistic doctrinal presentation that our faith is the condition of our personal justification. On this, God willing, more later.