

## **BELIEVE IT OR NOT: You Are Forgiven Through Christ!**

*(Universal, Objective Justification Is The Gospel Truth)*

Once again, there seems to be a controversy regarding the doctrine of justification. It is not a new controversy among Lutherans in America. It has waxed and waned for many years. There are some who deny the teaching called “*universal, objective justification*.” There are some who claim that “universal, objective justification” is really “universalism.” There are some who even claim that the WELS does not teach “justification by faith.” What is the truth?

### ***UNIVERSALISM IS A FALSE TEACHING***

Universalism is the false teaching that all people will arrive in heaven in the end. This prevalent opinion is a lie of the devil. It can be heard today when someone dies who did not seem to be a confessing Christian, and yet people say, “He went to a better place.” If he died without faith in Jesus (and we will let God be the judge of each heart), he did not go to a better place. He went to eternal punishment in hell. Our Lord Jesus said, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but **whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him**” (John 3:36).<sup>1</sup> Jesus said: “**whoever does not believe will be condemned**” (Mk 16:16). Unbelievers forfeit the forgiveness won for them by Christ (John 8:24).<sup>2</sup> Based on God’s holy Word, we plainly teach that “unbelievers will be condemned to an eternity in hell.”<sup>3</sup> We certainly do not teach universalism. There is no controversy in our synod about this dangerous false teaching. *This We Believe* states plainly: “**We reject universalism**... (John 3:36).”<sup>4</sup> No one goes to heaven without faith in Jesus! (John 3:18; 14:6).

### ***THE BIBLE TEACHES JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH***

There is no doubt that the Bible teaches justification by faith. God’s Word clearly states that, “a man is **justified by faith** without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28 KJV). The inspired apostle Paul wrote that “a man is not **justified** by observing the law, but **by faith in Jesus Christ**” (Gal 2:16). Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Jesus also said: “**Whoever believes** and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:16). The apostle Paul was inspired to write, “For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**— and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:8–9).

### ***WE TEACH JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH***

Most often the Bible, the Book of Concord, and Luther’s writings use the term “justification” for justification by faith. We call this “subjective (personal/individual) justification.”

***Augsburg Confession: IV. [Justification]***<sup>1</sup> It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that **we receive forgiveness of sin** and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith,<sup>2</sup> **when we believe** that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us.<sup>3</sup> For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21–26 and 4:5.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, most Bible quotations are from *NIV 1984*.

<sup>2</sup> *This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, IV, 2 (NPH, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> *This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, IX, 4 (NPH, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> *This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, IV, 11 (NPH, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, p. 30 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

Individuals only “receive” God’s forgiveness by faith. Only believers receive the benefits and blessings of God’s forgiveness.<sup>6</sup> Without faith, the forgiveness is rejected and the benefits are forfeited. *This We Believe* puts it this way: “We believe that **individuals receive** this free gift of forgiveness not on the basis of their own works, but **only through faith** (Ephesians 2:8,9).”<sup>7</sup> We teach this in Luther’s Catechism (question # 255): “It is important that the Holy Spirit work faith in me so that I do not trust in my own works but only in the righteousness God gives me by grace in Christ. (subjective justification).”<sup>8</sup> I know of no one in our fellowship who denies “justification by faith.” But there is a controversy about “universal, objective justification.” For that reason, most of this paper will focus on the universal or objective aspect of justification, because that has become the subject of controversy.

### ***OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION – MEANS OF GRACE - FAITH***

As confessional Lutherans, we need to teach both aspects of justification: objective and subjective justification. In doctrine class, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary students are taught this: “In justification God applies to the individual sinner (subjective justification) the universal or general (objective) justification granted to the whole world in Christ.”<sup>9</sup> People need to hear the gospel, namely that they are forgiven through Christ. The gospel message is not the “possibility of future forgiveness” if certain conditions are met. The gospel message is not that a person might be forgiven. The gospel message is what Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Take heart, son; **your sins are forgiven**” (Mt 9:2). The Holy Spirit works faith through that gospel message (Rom 10:17). The Holy Spirit works through the means of grace (the gospel in Word and sacraments). When the Holy Spirit works faith in an individual’s heart, that person is a believer who receives the forgiveness of sins and also receives the benefits and blessings Jesus won for all on the cross. Only believers receive eternal life.

All people have sinned and fall short of God’s approval (Isa 53:6; Rom 3:23). We all deserve the just punishment for our sins from God, both temporal and eternal punishment (Rom 6:23). If left to ourselves and our own best efforts, we could never obtain eternal life in heaven (Rom 3:10).

But, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to be our Savior (Jn 3:16). When the time had fully come, God sent his Son to be born of a woman, to be born under law, to redeem those under law (Gal 4:4). Jesus, true God and true man in one Person, obeyed the law perfectly as our Substitute (Heb 4:15; Rom 5:18; active obedience). The LORD laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all (Is 53:6). Jesus died for all, as the Substitute for all people, on the cross (2 Cor 5:15). He cried out “It is finished” (or “paid in full”) when he had fully paid for our sins and satisfied God’s justice (Jn 19:30). On the third day, God raised him from the dead because Jesus had justified and won forgiveness for us (Rom 4:25). Through that whole process of suffering and dying for the sins of the whole world, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19). Based on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ for the whole world, God declared all sinners to be “not guilty” (Rom 5:18-19; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Rom 4:25). Jesus commanded the apostles and the church to “preach the gospel” (the good news of forgiveness) to all the world (Mk 16:15). He foretold that “repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations” (Lk 24:47). One fulfillment was when Paul preached in Pisidian Antioch, “Through Jesus **the forgiveness of sins** is proclaimed to you” (Acts 13:38–39). And, by divine inspiration Paul wrote, “In him we have redemption through his blood, **the forgiveness of sins...**” (Eph 1:7).

The forgiveness of sins that Jesus won on the cross, and that God declared in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is distributed in the means of grace (the gospel in Word and sacraments). So, we direct sinners to

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<sup>6</sup> Dogmatically speaking, they only receive the benefits of Christ’s payment which has been credited to them when they appropriate it by faith. Faith is the “receiving organ” (ὄργανον ληπτικόν).

<sup>7</sup> *This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod*, IV, 2 (NPH, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> *Luther’s Catechism*, David Kuske, pp. 211-213 (Milwaukee: NPH, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary *Dogmatics Notes (II, 3)*, p. 359.

the word of the gospel (whether it is spoken or read in Scripture). We urge regular worship attendance (3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment), so that people hear the saving gospel from the absolution, from the sermon, from the words of the liturgy (e.g., “you take away the sin of the world,” etc.), and from the many doctrinal hymns that we sing. We direct sinners to Holy Baptism, which distributes the forgiveness of sins to people of all ages. We direct confirmed, communicant members to the Lord’s Supper, which distributes to each individual believer the forgiveness of sins Jesus won on the cross. Let’s be sure to focus on the means of grace. That is where faith is created and strengthened. Luther wrote this in the Smalcald Articles (part of the Book of Concord which we all confess): “Therefore, we must constantly maintain this point: God does not want to deal with us in any other way than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. Whatever is praised as from the Spirit—without the Word and Sacraments—is the devil himself.”<sup>10</sup>

### ***PROCLAIM THE PURE GOSPEL!***

My dear fellow pastors, let’s be sure that we are proclaiming the pure gospel of Jesus Christ in every sermon and devotion. There should be no reason why anyone should claim that this or that WELS pastor failed to preach the saving gospel in a sermon, let alone that he hardly mentioned Jesus in the past several weeks. Shame on us if we do not preach the saving gospel from the pulpit! Every time we preach, we should think, what if this is the only sermon someone ever hears? This is no light matter. Shame on us if we ever fail to preach the gospel! Shame on me if I fail to point sinners to Jesus! It would be malpractice to fail in the single most important task we have in the pulpit. Let us be sure that after showing people their sins, we proclaim to sinners the gospel of “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

I do not wish to make myself an example, but here’s a suggestion I’ve found helpful. In every sermon manuscript, I put the symbol of a cross somewhere. This is a reminder that here is the main place where I will preach the gospel. I will preach gospel truths elsewhere, but that is where I’ll place my main gospel presentation. I encourage members to mention it to any pastor who preaches, if they do not hear the gospel. There is simply no excuse for failing to preach the gospel from a WELS pulpit – none.

And if there is any doubt about this, I encourage everyone to please read and reread and study Dr. C. F. W. Walther’s classic book on “*The Proper Distinction Between the Law and the Gospel.*” Here are a few excerpts. “Write your sermons so that you can say: ‘If any one hears this sermon and is not converted, it is his own fault if he goes home from church unconverted and hardened.’”<sup>11</sup> “How foolish are ministers who, after preaching a long time without having any success, decide to preach nothing but the Law for a while in order to rouse their people from their spiritual sleep! By that method they will accomplish nothing.”<sup>12</sup> “The Word of God is not rightly divided when the Law is preached to those who are already in terror on account of their sins, or the Gospel to those who live securely in their sins.”<sup>13</sup> “The Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.”<sup>14</sup> “True, we have to preach the Law, only, however, as a preparation for the Gospel. The ultimate aim in our preaching of the Law must be to preach the Gospel. Whoever does not adopt this aim is not a true minister of the Gospel.”<sup>15</sup>

It is not enough to merely mention the word, “gospel,” in a sermon and claim that is preaching the gospel. To keep myself from doing this, I made up a memory tool I call the “*Five Points of the Gospel.*” I teach it to confirmation classes every year. Some attempts to be “too cute” with gospel preaching can sail over

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<sup>10</sup> SA, III, art. VIII, §10. *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Paul T. McCain, p. 281 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> C.F.W. Walther, (Tr., Dau), *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, p. 407 (CPH, 1928).

<sup>12</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 410.

<sup>13</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 4, 403.

<sup>15</sup> C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, p. 404.

the heads of most members. It's great to have freshness. But, I also believe that it is important to have some solid familiarity, so that our members can share this simple, yet powerful, gospel message with others. At the end of this paper, I'll return to this "*Five Points of the Gospel*" as a summary.

Dear teachers and laymen, please be sure that you are hearing the pure gospel. No one should hear from a WELS pastor the message that there is the possibility that if he believes he might be forgiven. He needs to hear that he has been forgiven because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit works faith through that gospel message. The forgiveness of sins is not offered as a possibility. The forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in the gospel as **a ready and complete blessing**, won by Christ Jesus. Yet, no one receives the benefits of this gospel message without faith. **By faith**, the **individual receives** the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Dr. Adolf Hoenecke, the first Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary doctrine professor, put it this way:

**Emphasizing objective justification is necessary in order to preserve the real content of the gospel.** Special proof is not needed that justification happens to the individual sinner. Referring to the tax collector is enough (Lk 18:9-14). Justification occurred to him who appealed to God's grace, not to the Pharisee. And after all, all of Scripture shows that always the one who believes is justified, thus always the individual, as soon as faith is kindled in him.<sup>16</sup>

May Christ bless us with a clear grasp of God's Word so that we all believe, teach and confess both universal/objective justification and individual/subjective justification!

#### ***WHY OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION IS IMPORTANT***

In 1888, the great Lutheran Bible interpreter, Georg Stoeckhardt, wrote a masterful article in the Missouri Synod theological journal on "General Justification."<sup>17</sup> In this article, Dr. Stoeckhardt explained the importance of objective justification for genuine Lutheran theology. He described false teachers who wish to be counted as Lutherans, and yet teach that Christ's work of reconciliation has only "opened the way for the possibility of the forgiveness of sins, of justification... And when a sinner is converted and believes on Jesus Christ, then that possibility becomes a reality; only then, as far as God is concerned, does it develop into justification, forgiveness of sins."<sup>18</sup> Stoeckhardt explained how these false teachers deny that faith takes hold of the justification which has already been accomplished and declared. They deny that faith receives the forgiveness of sins already declared in the gospel. Instead, for them, faith is "an action of man which effects something, which brings into being something that was not there before, namely, the forgiveness of sins."<sup>19</sup> He showed how this false teaching removes the comfort that should be declared in the gospel, and bases everything on sand (a person's faith). "For in Christ, in the Gospel of Christ he finds only the possibility of forgiveness of sins or of justification. Man must then look into his heart to see whether there he finds that behavior which translates possibility into reality. And if he is then anguished and tortured by his sins under a feeling of the wrath of God..., when that faith escapes from his feeling and his awareness, then woe, then the lifeline escapes and is torn from his hands, then he despairs and goes to ruin in spite of all possibilities of salvation."<sup>20</sup>

Many WELS pastors have fond memories of Dr. Siegbert Becker, who served as a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1969-1984). The last essay he delivered before our Savior called him home was a 1984 paper on "*Universal Justification*." His closing words explain why this doctrine is so important.

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<sup>16</sup> A. Hoenecke, (tr., James Langebartels), vol 3, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, p. 338 (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003). (Underlining and bold is mine.)

<sup>17</sup> "Die allgemeine Rechtfertigung," *Lehre und Wehre*, XXXIV, 6 (June, 1888).

<sup>18</sup> Stoeckhardt, (tr. O. Stahlke), *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, Vol 42, #2, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> Stoeckhardt, CTQ, 42:2, p. 140. (underlining is mine)

<sup>20</sup> Stoeckhardt, CTQ, 42:2, p. 140. (underlining is mine)

Many Lutherans still labor under the delusion that God does not forgive us unless we believe. Instead of seeing faith as nothing more than the spiritual hand with which we make the forgiveness of God our own, they see it as a reason why God forgives us. They believe that Christ has indeed provided forgiveness for all men, that God is willing to forgive, but before he really forgives he first of all demands that we should be sorry for our sins and that we should have faith. Just have faith, they say, and then God will forgive you. All the right words are there. The only thing wrong is that the words are in the wrong order. God does not forgive us *because* we have faith. He does not forgive us *if* we have faith. He has forgiven us long ago when he raised his Son from the dead. The risen Savior commanded his apostles to preach that good news of forgiveness to every creature, to all nations. And the apostles are still preaching it today through their writings and through those who by word of mouth pass the same message on, whether they are pastors or laymen... Faith is important. It is important just because forgiveness is encased in a message. Forgiveness comes to us through words. And when the words are heard, one of two things will always happen in the hearer. Either he will believe what he hears, or he will reject it in unbelief. If he believes it, all the blessings that the message offers to the human heart will be his. If he does not believe it, the message will bring him no peace, no comfort and no hope. But whether he believes it or not, the message will remain true. Paul spoke of the unbelief of the Jews and asked, "Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness?" and he answers, "Not at all!" (Ro 3:3, 4). At another time he wrote, "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tm 2:13). That is why the Apology of the Augsburg Confession says that refusing to believe that our sins are forgiven is the same as accusing God of being a liar (Apology XII, 62; *Triglotta*, p 269). Again Melancthon writes, "If anybody, therefore, is not sure that he is forgiven, he denies that God has sworn to the truth; a more horrible blasphemy than this can not be imagined" (Apology XII, 94; *Triglotta*, p 281). And Martin Luther once said that those who do not believe God's message of forgiveness will someday find out how surely their sins were forgiven even though they did not believe it (LW 40:366f).

If forgiveness were dependent on faith in the sense that God does not forgive until we believe, we would always have to be sure that we are believers before we could be sure that we are forgiven. We may not see how dangerous that is until one of those moments of temptation and doubt comes to us in which we no longer know that we are believers. In such a time we will have no place to go unless we can say, "God has told me that in Christ he has forgiven the sins of the world. My faith or my unbelief will neither make God's Word true or untrue. He does not lie. He justifies the ungodly (Ro 4:5). Even if I am the most ungodly, the most wicked man on earth, I know that he has justified and forgiven me. To that promise I will cling, even if my heart tells me that I am without faith, without love, without hope. I know that God is greater than my heart and knows all things (1 Jn 3:20)."

*I cling to what my Savior taught,*

*And trust it whether felt or not. (Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal, p 267)*

Only the doctrine of universal justification makes it possible for a believing child of God to have such a sure foundation for his faith. God grant that our church may never surrender that doctrine. Amen.<sup>21</sup>

***DEFINING TERMS: Justification = Acquittal = Forgiveness of Sins***

Justification is a declaration of God, in which he declares a sinner (or sinners) to be "just" or "not guilty." In the original text of the Bible, there are several words that describe justification as a judicial (or forensic) decree.<sup>22</sup> Picture in your mind a judge in a courtroom. At the end of a trial, he officially announces that the defendant is "not guilty." That is the background picture for God's decree of

<sup>21</sup> *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 83:1, pp. 18-20.

<sup>22</sup> N.T. Greek: δικαιοῦν, δικαίωμα, δικαίωσις, δικαιοσύνη; O.T. Hebrew: Hiphil of פָּטַח.

justification. God does not deny that we have sinned. All have sinned, to be sure. But after viewing the perfect payment provided by Jesus, our Savior and Substitute, God announces the verdict of “not guilty.”

Justification and forgiveness of sins are essentially synonyms in Acts 13:38–39: “Through Jesus the **forgiveness of sins** is proclaimed to you.<sup>39</sup> Through him everyone who believes is **justified** from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.” Justification is the forgiveness of sins, based on the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. Justification is not a medicinal act of God. He is not giving us medicine to make us better than we were. It is a declaration about the sinner(s). Justification is not an executive order from God, similar to a governor who pardons a criminal. A governor pardons a criminal without any payment or satisfaction. God does not forgive sinners by sweeping sins under the rug. Every sin must be punished. There must be some sacrifice to satisfy God’s just wrath against sin. If Jesus had not redeemed sinners, God would not have declared sinners forgiven. Keep in mind that picture of a judge who declares a verdict after examining all the facts. Thanks to the redeeming work of Jesus, God says, “not guilty.”

**Justification = acquittal = forgiveness of sins**

Dr. Becker offered clear definitions of some terms related to our discussion of justification:

The term *universal or general justification* is self-explanatory. By this term we mean to say that **God has justified, declared righteous, or acquitted, the whole world of sinners, or, in other words, that God has in his heart forgiven the sins of all men.** An alternate term for *universal justification* in our circles has been, for many decades, *objective justification*. We have used the two terms almost interchangeably without sensing any distinction between them. We should, however, be aware that also a Calvinist, who would most assuredly reject the doctrine of universal justification, could perhaps feel perfectly at ease with the concept of objective justification. Strictly speaking, the term *objective justification means that a sinner is justified by God whether he believes it or not.* Many Calvinists believe that this is true of the elect. While they might therefore be willing to accept our terminology when we speak of *objective justification*, they would vehemently reject the concept of *universal justification* because that would conflict with their doctrine of limited atonement. If justification is universal, it must of necessity be objective. For if the sins of all men have been forgiven in the heart of God, then men are forgiven by God whether they believe it or not. On the other hand, however, at least hypothetically, justification could be objective without being universal.<sup>23</sup>

Professor Lyle Lange defined these terms in the doctrine textbook used at Martin Luther College:

Oftentimes, the terms *universal justification* and *objective justification* are used interchangeably. There is, however, a distinction that can be made between the two. When we speak of objective justification, we mean that justification is complete. It does not need to be completed by faith or any other work. It is finished, perfect. God has declared the world righteous for Jesus’ sake. This is an objective reality, whether anyone believes it or not... On the other hand, the term *universal justification* stresses that Christ’s work of redemption atoned for the sins of all people... God justified the world on the basis of Christ’s substitutionary life, death, and resurrection. Therefore, God tells us to announce to all people that their sins are forgiven.<sup>24</sup>

The word, “objective” means that something is true, whether it is known or believed or not.  $2 + 2 = 4$ . The sum of two and two is four, even if someone maintains that it should be 3 or 5. It is objectively true. It was true before we knew it was true. It is true no matter what someone’s opinion of it is. Those who

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<sup>23</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Universal Justification*,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 83:1, pp. 10-11 (Winter 1986). Bold is mine.

<sup>24</sup> Lyle W. Lange, “God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine,” p. 343 (NPH, 2005).

give the answer 2+2 = “3” should have it marked wrong. And so it is in the case of doctrine. This teaching that Jesus won forgiveness for the whole world is true, even if someone claims it isn’t. And it remains true, even if people don’t believe it. They just forfeit the benefits. They don’t receive eternal life! But Jesus did die for all, and win forgiveness for all. Unbelievers reject Jesus as Savior, and forfeit the benefits he did pay for them. 2 Peter 2:1 reveals this. It says that some false teachers even deny “the Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves.” He bought them. That is objectively true. Yet they will be destroyed because they deny him as Savior in unbelief.

The phrase “objective justification” is not found in our Bible. Neither is the term, “Trinity.” Yet, these terms serve as useful labels for Scriptural teachings. Now let’s study some of the main Bible passages where universal, objective justification is found.

## ***THE BIBLE TEACHES UNIVERSAL, OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION***

### ***Romans 3:23-24***

**“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”** (NIV<sup>84</sup>)

- How many people sinned? “**All**” people “have sinned.” (*Gk: Aorist emphasizes it happened.*)
- How many people fall short of the glory of God? All people fall short of God’s approval.
  - The original text emphasizes that all people continually “**fall short**” of God’s approval.<sup>25</sup>
  - Here “**glory**” may be “translated as ‘praise,’ in the sense of approval... ‘**All have sinned and lack God’s approval.**’”<sup>26</sup>
- How many people “**are justified**” (v. 24)? All people are justified.
  - The subject of “**are justified**” comes from what precedes in verse 23. Professor Panning wrote, “The grammar of the original Greek here makes it perfectly clear that the ones justified are the same ‘all’ who sinned. That’s why Paul can say that with God ‘there is no difference.’ All sinned; all are justified.”<sup>27</sup> Just as all people continually fall short of God’s approval, so also, at the very same time, they are continually justified.<sup>28</sup>
    - NIV 2011 inserts the implied word, “**all** are justified.” To be precise, the original text does not have the word “all” in verse 24. But it is the implied subject.
  - The Greek verb for “**justified**” means that a judge declares people “not guilty” of all charges. They are in a constant state of being declared not guilty, “freely by his grace.”
- Does this mean that “all” are going to heaven? Absolutely not! The only people who are going to heaven are believers (John 3:36). Professor Panning explained: “The counterpart to this teaching, namely, the need for repentance and faith on the part of the individual to receive God’s blessing, is also well documented, both in Paul’s Letters (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:15,16; Ephesians 2:8) and in the rest of Scripture (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Mark 1:15).”<sup>29</sup> But the Bible does teach the doctrine of “universal justification” here. Professor David Kuske wrote, “This verse teaches universal acquittal.”<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Becker gives helpful guidance as we begin our study of this doctrine:

Human reason will always have difficulty with the doctrine of universal justification. It is always inclined to say that if God has really forgiven the sins of all men, then it is impossible to

<sup>25</sup> Gk: present passive indicative

<sup>26</sup> Armin J. Panning, *Romans* (People’s Bible), p. 60 (NPH, 1999). Bold is mine.

<sup>27</sup> Armin J. Panning, *Romans* (People’s Bible), p. 60 (NPH, 1999). See his footnote for more information.

<sup>28</sup> Gk: present passive participle (“are continually justified”) happens at the same time as the main verb (“fall short” = present; by contrast “sinned” = aorist)

<sup>29</sup> Armin J. Panning, *Romans* (People’s Bible), p. 60 footnote (NPH, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> David P. Kuske, *A Commentary on Romans 1-8*, p. 176 (NPH, 2007)

see how he can still send unbelievers to eternal damnation in hell. Because of this, some Lutherans who want to be orthodox are afraid that universal justification will lead to universalism, the doctrine which says that all men will finally be eternally saved.

We will never see a way out of that difficulty until we have a **clear understanding of the distinction between law and gospel**. The statement that God has forgiven the sins of all men, outside the framework of law and gospel, would actually be an untruth and a false doctrine. When a well-known modern theologian, for example, says that God has resources of love that go beyond his justice, he implies rather clearly that in the end all men will be sharers in heavenly glory because God will finally stop punishing sin and just cancel out all past wrongdoing.

The biblical revelation makes it clear that no one has a right to believe that God has forgiven every sin without at the same time believing that God has punished every sin. To say the one without also saying the other would be a clear denial of the unmistakable teaching of the Holy Scriptures...

God forgives sins and God punishes sins. Both of these statements are eternally, universally and unchangeably true. Yet to the human mind they cannot be reconciled, for human reason says that if God punishes he does not forgive and if he forgives he does not punish.

If men therefore proclaim a universal forgiveness which in any way ignores universal punishment, they are not calling men to the God who has revealed himself to us in the Holy Scriptures. There is only one place in all the universe where men will find it possible to believe that every sin is punished and that every sin is forgiven. That place is the green hill far away outside the city wall, where the place of the skull and the open tomb in which the crucified One was buried lie close by each other. On the cross where the eternal Son of God was forsaken by his heavenly Father to suffer for the sins of the world which the Lord had laid on him, we see the sins of the whole world being punished. At the open tomb from which the lowly and meek Jesus of Nazareth rose in the glory of the Father we see that the sins of the whole world have been paid for in a way that satisfied the Father who raised him from the dead. They are truly paid for, cancelled, wiped out and forgiven. It deserves to be repeated that what was paid for there were the sins of the whole wide world.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Romans 4:5**

**“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked\*, his faith is credited as righteousness.”** (NIV84) [\* **“ungodly”** – *KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, GWN, HCSB*]

- When reading this whole passage in context, it mainly teaches subjective justification. The believer trusts the God who justifies. **“His faith is credited as righteousness.”** Only believers in Jesus go to heaven. Yet, carefully study whom God justifies.<sup>32</sup> The original Greek term for **“wicked / ungodly”** refers to wicked, ungodly unbelievers as it is used throughout the New Testament.<sup>33</sup> It’s a startling word to find here describing those whom God justifies! He “justifies” unworthy sinners. Professor David Kuske wrote in his commentary on Romans:
  - ...The article is generic, indicating that Paul is talking about anyone and everyone who fits this description. The word ἀσεβής means “destitute of reverential awe, despising God” (Thayer), “godless, wicked” (BAGD), “ungodly, living without regard for religious belief or practice” (Louw & Nida), “unholy, profane, sacrilegious” (Liddell & Scott). In Romans 1:18 Paul used this term to refer to the attitude of those who don’t believe that they owe any respect to God as their Creator. Peter (2 Pe 2:5,6) and Jude (v15) use this term to refer to the most terrible of sinners, such as those at the time of the flood and those in Sodom and Gomorrah. In using this expression here, Paul is teaching universal acquittal. He is saying that God is “The

<sup>31</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Universal Justification*,” *WLQ*, vol. 83:1, pp. 11-13 (Winter 1986). Bold is mine.

<sup>32</sup> NIV inserts the word “God,” but to be more precise, the original text has “him who justifies.”

<sup>33</sup> ἀσεβής - see how it is used in Rom 5:6; 1 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 4:18; 2 Pet 2:5,6; 3:7; Jude 4, 15.



Acquitter” of all people, even that class of people who openly despise him... The believer knows and believes that God is The Acquitter of everyone, and, therefore, he is absolutely sure of being acquitted too.<sup>34</sup>

- “We believe, teach, and confess that according to the usage of Scripture the word ‘justify’ means in this article ‘absolve,’ that is, pronounce free from sin.”<sup>35</sup>

#### **Romans 4:7-8**

**“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”** (NIV84)

- Here the Holy Spirit led the apostle Paul to quote Psalm 32:1-2. It is quoted in this paper to provide a working definition of forgiveness. What does it mean to “forgive”? It means to cover sin. It means to not count sin against someone. This definition will be important when we get to 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. Please keep it in mind.

#### **Romans 4:25**

**“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** (NIV84)

- By using the word “**for**” the NIV (1984, 2011) and other Bible versions are not as helpful as they could be. The original Greek text means “**because of**.”<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the causal idea of “for” is not at all clear in our common use of the English language. It would be unlikely that an English reader would understand that “for” really means “because of” in this verse. Would you say at the end of the day, “I am going home, for I am done”? We usually don’t talk that way anymore. So, English readers misunderstand and think that “for” here means something else. *Dictionary.com* lists “because” as the 34<sup>th</sup> meaning of “for.” The first meaning listed is for the “purpose of.” (As in, “I am going home for some rest.”) But the original language does not indicate “purpose.” It indicates “cause.” These three translations are more clear:

**“He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”** (NASB95)

**“Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”** (NKJV)

**“It was He who was handed over to death because of our failures and then was raised because of our justification [acquittal].”** (GWN)

This passage answers two questions.

- Q. Why did Jesus die?                      A. Jesus died “**because of our transgressions.**”
- Q. Why did Jesus rise?                      A. Jesus rose “**because of our justification.**”

Dr. Becker explains this further.

We could also translate, “He was delivered over to death because we had sinned and was raised to life because we had been justified.” Some Lutherans who deny universal justification insist that since the previous verse speaks of believers, therefore the truth expressed in this verse must be limited to believers, because only believers are justified. But surely there is no Lutheran who would hold that Christ was delivered over to death only for the sins of believers. He died for all. He paid the ransom price for all. He took away the sin of the world. He is the propitiation or the cover for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. His resurrection is the proof that the sins of the world are cancelled and forgiven.<sup>37</sup>

When Paul says that Christ was delivered because of our transgressions the “because of” [διὰ] is without doubt retrospective. He was put to death because our sins had been imputed to

<sup>34</sup> David P. Kuske, *A Commentary on Romans 1-8*, p. 202 (NPH, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Tappert, *The Book of Concord*, p. 473. **Epitome, III, 7.**

<sup>36</sup> Gk: διὰ + accusative = cause.

<sup>37</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Universal Justification*,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 83:1, pp. 16 (Winter 1986).

him. And while it is true that “our” in this context refers to believers and only believers can say what Paul says here, yet it is crystal clear that what Paul asserts here of believers is true of all men... It is clear that “*was delivered over because of our transgressions*” [παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν] stands in exact parallelism to “*was raised because of our justification*” [ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν]. If “*because of*” [the διὰ] is retrospective in the first member of the parallelism it is very natural that we should understand the second “*because of*” [διὰ] as retrospective also.<sup>38</sup>

How many sins were laid on Jesus when he died? Isaiah 53:6 says, “**the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**” How many people did Jesus die for? 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says, “**One died for all, and therefore all died.**”<sup>15</sup> **And he died for all...**” Jesus died, because the LORD laid on him the sins of all of us (all people). Then on the third day, God the Father raised Jesus to life as a public verdict of justification for all of us (all people).

In his classic commentary on Romans, Dr. Georg Stoeckhardt explained Romans 4:25:

Since God raised Jesus from the dead, he has in fact declared that the death of Jesus has fulfilled its goal, that sin has been atoned for, that he has accepted the atonement, and thus the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—this glorious victory over death and sin—is also at the same time the actual, solemn, formal absolution which God has pronounced on sinful people. Just as the atonement for sin is, so this verdict of justification is universal and applies to the whole world of sinners.<sup>39</sup>

In the *People’s Bible Commentary*, Professor Panning explained Romans 4:25 this way:

Christ “was delivered over to death for our sins.” Because we had sinned, we deserved to die. Instead of requiring our death, however, God sent his Son to earth to live the perfect life we could not live and die the death we should have died. By his life he earned righteousness for us, and by his death he paid for our sins. In Christ, God now views us as righteous; in him we have been justified. The sinner’s justification is an accomplished fact, punctuated by Christ’s cry on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). And to show that he had accepted his Son’s sacrificial death for the justification of all sinners, God raised his Son from death on Easter morning. In doing so God made a statement to all the world... We might paraphrase that in this way: Christ had to die because we had sinned, but he could be raised to life because we had been justified by his death.<sup>40</sup>

In his Romans commentary, Professor D. Kuske carefully explained:

“Paul is not saying Jesus’ resurrection was the cause of our acquittal. Just the opposite, our acquittal was the cause of Jesus’ resurrection. Our acquittal was established by Jesus’ paying the ransom price for us on the cross (3:24). Because this was an established fact, God brought Jesus back to life. Or to put it another way, by raising Jesus, God was assuring us that Jesus had indeed accomplished our salvation.”<sup>41</sup>

Our pastors are all familiar with Franz Pieper’s excellent set of doctrine books, *Christian Dogmatics*. These books were written long ago, when we were in fellowship with the Missouri Synod. Franz Pieper mentioned C.F.W. Walther, the first president of the Missouri Synod, and other Lutheran theologians, while explaining Romans 4:25.

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<sup>38</sup> Siegbert Becker, “Objective Justification,” p. 10 (WLS Essay File). Translations were inserted for this audience.

<sup>39</sup> Translated especially for this paper by James L. Langebartels, from: Georg Stoeckhardt, *Römerbrief: Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer*, p. 214 (CPH, 1907).

<sup>40</sup> Armin Panning, *Romans*, p. 78 (NPH, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> David P. Kuske, “*A Commentary on Romans 1-8*,” p. 237 (NPH, 2007).

Now, then, if the Father raised Christ from the dead, He, by this glorious resurrection act, declared that the sins of the whole world are fully expiated, or atoned for, and that all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal. This gracious reconciliation and justification is clearly taught in Rom. 4:25: “Who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification.” The term δικαίωσις [*justification*] here means the act of divine justification executed through God’s act of raising Christ from the dead, and it is for this reason called the *objective justification* of all mankind. This truth Dr. Walther stressed anew in America. He taught that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the *actual absolution pronounced upon all sinners*. To refer the words: “Who was raised again for our justification,” to the so-called subjective justification, which takes place by faith, not only weakens the force of the words, but also violates the context. Calov, following Gerhard, rightly points out the relation of Christ’s resurrection to our justification as follows: “Christ’s resurrection took place as an actual absolution from sin... As God punished our sins in Christ, upon whom He laid them and to whom He imputed them, as our Bondsman, so He also, by the very act of raising Him from the dead, absolved Him from our sins imputed to Him, and so He absolved also us in Him.”<sup>42</sup>

Who is included in the word “**our**” in Romans 4:25? It certainly includes Paul and those who first read these words (the Roman Christians). But is that all? Can “our” be limited to the Roman Christians, or perhaps even limited only to believers? Genuine Lutherans have always rejected limited atonement (the false teaching that Jesus only died for some people, rather than all people). Holy Scripture plainly teaches that Jesus “**died for all**” (2 Cor 5:15). Some point to the immediate context and claim that “our” must be limited to believers. But only a simplistic reading of the context would overlook what is revealed in Romans 5:6, 8-11. This provides the explanation for who is referred to with “our” in Romans 4:25. Jesus did not merely die for believers, as we see next...

*Romans 5:6, 8–11 (references to objective justification are underlined)*

**“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”** (NIV84)      -- *Let’s study these words carefully...*

<sup>6</sup>**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly...**

- Jesus died at exactly the right time, on God’s own timetable. God had planned this way of salvation from eternity (see 2 Tim 1:9-10).
- The word translated “ungodly” is the same word that was used in Romans 4:5 (above). Once again it includes Paul and the Roman Christians, but not them alone. It includes all people. Jesus died for all, including the “ungodly... sinners... God’s enemies.” The Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to weave objective and subjective justification into a masterpiece of the pure gospel, the true doctrine of justification, which includes both aspects (objective/subjective). We were all included in that number of people, all people, who were classified by God in the category of “sinners, ungodly, enemies.” We did not make a good beginning. We did not meet God half-way. He did it all.

<sup>8</sup>**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

- Note the objective nature of the sentence underlined. God showed his love by sending his Son for the whole world (Jn 3:16, etc.). Jesus did not say, “God so loved some people that he gave...” in

<sup>42</sup> F. Pieper, vol. 2, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 321 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953).

John 3:16. He said, “God so loved **the world** that he gave...” Christ died for all of us while we were all still in that category of unworthy “sinners.” He died “**for**” us (“instead of” us, in our place) as our Substitute.

- While believers are certainly in mind, no one is excluded here. Jesus died “for” all (“instead of” all; in place of all, 2 Cor 5:14-15). Once again, there is “no difference” between people since **all** have sinned (Rom 3:22-24). This is an objective truth: “**While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” It is true whether people know it or not, believe it or not. Christ died for us.

<sup>9</sup> **Since we have now been justified by his blood,**

- This is objective justification right here. It is a fact (Gk: aorist) that we have “**been justified**” or acquitted or declared “not guilty: since Jesus has died, shedding his holy blood.
- Focus on the word “**now**.” We in the New Testament have been justified by Jesus’ blood “**now**” that Jesus died and rose again. It is a fact. It happened. It’s already done now.
- Some might expect “justified by faith,” but it plainly says “justified **by his blood**.” This is an important point not to be missed. Objective justification happened **by means of Jesus’ blood** shed on the cross on Good Friday, when “he died for all” (2 Cor 5:15). Jesus’ blood refers to his death on the cross. “Life... is in the blood” (Lev 17:11,14). Jesus’ life-blood was shed on the cross when he died. He died for all people and paid the “wages” for every sin on the cross. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). Only Jesus, true God and true man in one person, could make this payment. “The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7 ESV).
- Jesus’ atoning death on the cross was the means by which we were **justified** by God. Or, in other words, based on the sacrificial death of Jesus (“his blood”), God justified us.

**how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!**

- The future tense points us to the final judgment, when we will be finally saved through Jesus. Stoeckhardt wrote: “Through Christ’s death and blood we have become righteous. Christ died for all godless men and justified them all through His death. But it is the believing Christians, who have made this blessing of Christ their own. Only they make continual use of and take profit from it. They draw the conclusion, saying and confessing with the apostle: We are now justified; therefore, we will be saved from God’s wrath.”<sup>43</sup>
- This is subjective justification that is based on objective justification. Since we have been justified by the blood of Christ, we believers will be saved from eternal condemnation.

<sup>10</sup> **For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son,**

- “**We were God’s enemies**” when reconciliation happened. Reconciliation happened before we were believers. We were reconciled to God while we were still “God’s enemies.”
- “**We were reconciled**” (the Greek aorist tense indicates that it is an objective fact).
- The Greek word translated “reconciled” refers to a complete change in status before God.
- We were reconciled “to him,” that is, God. We were reconciled to God while we were still enemies. This cannot be talking about being brought to faith (subjective justification). This is objective reconciliation. How were we reconciled while we were still enemies?...
- We were reconciled “**through the death of his Son**”... The death of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, brought about reconciliation between holy God and sinful mankind. Remember what happened when Jesus died! The temple curtain was miraculously torn in two when Jesus died! (See below: “*Reconciliation: The Temple Curtain Torn Apart.*”)
- “Reconciliation and justification here mean one and the same thing to Paul. Thus, if the entire world of sinners has been reconciled to God through Christ’s death and blood, then we may also

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<sup>43</sup> George Stoeckhardt, (tr., E. Koehlinger) *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 65 (Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1980).

say that the sinful world has been justified through Christ's death and blood. Justification is nothing other than the forgiveness of sins." – Georg Stoeckhardt<sup>44</sup>

- "Objective justification is identical with objective reconciliation."<sup>45</sup>

#### **how much more, having been reconciled,**

- Once again, reconciliation is a past, objective fact (Gk: Aorist passive participle). It happened. It's finished. It's done. It's true.
- "Justified" describes a legal relationship to God of being declared, "not guilty." "**Reconciled**" describes a complete change in status before God. We were God's enemies at the time, as verse 10 reveals, but we are not God's enemies any longer. We were reconciled by the "death of his Son." Jesus's atoning death removed the barrier of sin that separated sinners from holy God.

#### **shall we be saved through his life!**

- Since we have been reconciled, we believers will finally be saved by means of our risen and ever living Savior. We believers in Jesus will be saved in the final judgment and go to heaven.

#### **<sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

- We deserve to be considered "enemies" by God, but based on "the death of his Son," we were reconciled. And already now in this lifetime, we have received the gracious gift of reconciliation. Here the verb "received" reveals that this is talking about believers who receive the blessings and benefits of this reconciliation that Jesus won for all. Believers can "rejoice" and enjoy the blessings of reconciliation from Jesus.
- A careful study of Scripture reveals that both objective and subjective reconciliation are beautifully taught together, often in the very same passage. Believers are not pointed to their faith, but to the objective work of Christ, who shed his blood for all, who died for all, who reconciled the world. Despite the fact that we were deserving God's wrath as "enemies," Jesus reconciled us by his atoning death. We believe that Jesus reconciled us all. That Jesus reconciled us all is an objective fact of Scripture. This is the comfort of the gospel.
- "When frightened consciences are consoled by faith and believe that **our sins are blotted out by Christ's death** and that **God has been reconciled to us because of Christ's suffering**, then indeed Christ's suffering benefits us."<sup>46</sup> – (*Apology IV*, 382).

#### ***Reconciliation: The Temple Curtain Torn Apart***

Matthew 27:51 "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

Mark 15:38 "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

Luke 23:45 "And the curtain of the temple was torn in two."

In detail, Werner Franzmann explained this miraculous tearing of the Temple curtain at Jesus' death.

Let us begin by recalling what the purpose of the curtain was. It shut off all access to the Most Holy Place except for one day in the year. That was the day on which the festival called the Day of Atonement (Hebrew: Yom Kippur) was celebrated. On that day only the high priest had the right and the duty to pass through the curtain in order to enter the Most Holy Place. This means, then, that all the other worshipers, *the people, were denied all access* to the Holy of Holies. They were dependent on the services of the high priest. He was their intermediary. He alone could go before God, who was present in the glory-cloud over the Ark of the Covenant, in the center of the Holy of Holies, and there act in behalf of the worshipping people. Since he, too, was a sinful

<sup>44</sup> Stoeckhardt, CTQ, 42:2, p. 142.

<sup>45</sup> Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary *Dogmatics Notes*, II, 3, p. 360 (June, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Tappert, p. 165.

human being, he first had to sacrifice a bullock, take its blood, and sprinkle its blood on the cover or mercy-seat of the ark, and before it, in order to atone for his sins and those of his high-priestly family. After he had been thus cleansed of his sin-- and only then—could he sacrifice a goat, as prescribed by God, carry some of its blood into the inner sanctuary, and sprinkle its blood as he had the blood of the bullock, in order to offer atonement for the sin of the people... Against this background consider the rending of the curtain in the temple. Can you imagine the consternation of the priests officiating at the evening sacrifice (about 3:00 P.M., the time of Jesus' death) as they saw the Most Holy Place exposed suddenly to their view? This was a part of the temple that by God's own strict ordinance was reserved for the footsteps and eyes of the high priest alone—and that on only one day of the year, the Day of Atonement... We have no trouble in reading the meaning that God wanted sinners to take out of his mighty sign. With the voice of thunder – delightful thunder! – he was declaring that sinners no longer needed the services of a high priest to take up their cause with a holy God... For Jesus Christ, the promised divine High Priest, had come. He had brought the sacrifice of his holy blood, valuable beyond all price because it was the blood of the Son of God... To the Father he presented his all-sufficient, all-atoning sacrifice, and the Father accepted it as the sacrifice that wins eternal redemption for all the sinful sons and daughters of men. (Hebrews 9:3-15; 6:19,20; 9:12; 10:19)... Now God proclaimed at the moment of Jesus' death: "All that blocked the way to me for you sinners has been removed! Didn't you hear my Son cry out: 'It is finished!?' Your sin no longer stands between me and you. Therefore the way to me has been laid open by the redeeming sacrifice of my Son... You have a Father reconciled to you by the death of his Son."<sup>47</sup>

It would be helpful to study through Hebrews chapters 6-10, to better understand the points made above. For now, let us just consider the following two passages.

\* **Hebrews 6:19-20** -- **"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek."** (NIV84)

\* **Hebrews 10:18-20** -- **"Where these [sins] have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body."** (NIV84)

- Jesus **"has entered"** behind the curtain. (*Gk: aorist*)
- NIV's **"these [sins] have been forgiven"** is more literally, **"there is forgiveness."**
- Jesus shed his **"blood"** when he died on the cross. By Jesus' blood, a new and living way was opened for us (*Gk: aorist*). This is another way of saying he reconciled us to God.
- **"By the blood of Jesus, ... There is no other way. His blood in payment for our sins has opened a freeway to heaven..."**<sup>48</sup> Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14:6).
- These are objective truths. Keep in mind that Jesus "died for all," not just some people. And yet, only believers receive the benefits of Christ's redeeming work.

### **Romans 5:18-19**

**"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life<sup>49</sup> for all men.<sup>19</sup> For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."** (NIV84)

<sup>47</sup> Werner Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary*, N.T., vol. 2, p. 933-935 (NPH, 1989).

<sup>48</sup> Richard Lauersdorf, *Hebrews* (People's Bible), p. 116 (NPH, 1986).

<sup>49</sup> Literally: **"justification of life."** NIV2011 "justification and life" is incorrect (also, ESV, AAT'76). God did/does not give eternal "life" to all people, but only to believers.

**“So therefore, as through one failure, condemnation came to all people, so also through one righteous act, justification [acquittal] which brings life came to all people.<sup>19</sup> For in the same way, as through the disobedience of one man, multitudes were proclaimed to be sinful, so also through the obedience of the One Man, multitudes will be proclaimed righteous.”** (GWN)

- *Note:* The term “act” may not be the best. It must either refer to God proclaiming justification or Christ’s saving work viewed as one “act” together. It would be clearer to insert “decree” or “verdict” instead of “act.”<sup>50</sup> Dr. Becker preferred the translation, “a verdict of acquittal” or “a decree of righteousness.”<sup>51</sup> Let’s take a closer look using the *God’s Word to the Nations* version.

**“So therefore, as through one failure, condemnation came to all people ...”** (GWN)

- One sin in the Garden of Eden resulted in God’s condemnation hanging over all people. This is what we might call universal condemnation. God’s Word does not say, “the possibility of condemnation” here. It says, “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all.” This was an objective, universal verdict of God. It was true whether people believed it or not.
- Romans 5:12 is in the background: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...” (NIV84) Note that this is universal (“all”). All were declared to be sinners (objective/universal fact).

**“so also through one righteous act, justification [acquittal] which brings life came to all people.”** (GWN)

- The “**righteous act**” or “**decree of righteousness**” (verdict of acquittal) was just as universal as the condemnation through Adam’s sin. The “justification which brings life” is declared for all people. This is universal justification. All were declared to be justified (objective/universal fact).
  - “**Righteous act**” views the redeeming work of Jesus Christ as one whole act.
  - If translated “**decree of righteousness**,” it would refer to Romans 4:25, which reveals that Jesus was raised because he had justified us. Based on the all-atoning death of Jesus, God declared forgiveness by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.
- “Justification which brings life” is literally translated, “justification of life.” Prof. Panning explained, “What Christ did for sinners truly brings life, but it is a blessing that needs to be accepted by faith. Life and salvation are there for all, but unbelief rejects what is there and thus loses the benefits a gracious God has provided.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>19</sup> **“For in the same way, as through the disobedience of one man, multitudes were proclaimed<sup>53</sup> to be sinful”** (GWN)

- Verse 18 reveals how many (“multitudes”) were declared to be sinners when it says, “all people.” All people is a lot of people! To emphasize this, it says, “**multitudes**” in v. 19.

**“so also through the obedience of the One Man, multitudes will be proclaimed righteous.”** (GWN)

- Once again, “**multitudes**” means “**all people**” (v.18). Notice the parallel structure. Through Adam’s sin, all people were proclaimed sinners and inherited condemnation. Through Jesus’ redeeming work, through the active and passive “**obedience of the One Man**,” all people “will be proclaimed righteous.”
- The word translated “**will be proclaimed**” comes from a Greek verb that can mean to set or appoint or establish in a legal or forensic context.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> BDAG: “to clear someone of a violation.” (NIV translates this same term: “justification” in Romans 5:16). “It normally refers to a pronouncement of some kind, not an action” (Leon Morris, *Romans*, p. 239). “Usually the decision, decree... by which a thing is declared” (Sanday-Headlam p. 141).

<sup>51</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Universal Justification*,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 83:1, pp. 15-16 (Winter 1986).

<sup>52</sup> Armin Panning, *Romans*, p. 91 (NPH, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> Aorist passive indicative

- **How should we understand the future tense of this verb? Here are a few options...**
- In his commentary on Romans, Dr. Stoeckhardt explained:
  - In this place we take the future with Hofmann and others as the **logical future**,<sup>55</sup> or as people have also called it, the future of logical certainty, which here states what of itself results from what has previously been said about Adam and his disobedience. If through the disobedience of the one the many have the status of sinners before God, then that will definitely be the case on the other side, then through the obedience of the One the many will have the status of righteous before God. As far as time is concerned, this happened in the past.<sup>56</sup>
- In his paper on Objective Justification, Dr. Becker wrote:
  - We may view the future here as a **gnomic future**,<sup>57</sup> denoting something that happens in every case. If all are condemned because of the sin of one man (18a), and all are justified because of the right action of one man (18b), and if all are *set down* as sinners through one man's disobedience (19a), then we can certainly expect that all men *will be set down* as righteous through one man's obedience (19b). If the action (described in 19b) is something that takes place when a man comes to faith, then these words are not true because all do not come to faith, and while many (πολλοί) are called, few (ὀλίγοι) are chosen. To say that "all" here means "all who come to faith" is to commit the same sin that is committed by Calvinists when they say that the "all" for whom Christ died are "all who are elect." The "all" of 18b are the "all" of 18a and of verse 12. There is in reality no warrant for denying that universal justification is taught in Romans 5:18,19. These verses are in perfect harmony with 2 Corinthians 5:18 and 19.<sup>58</sup>
- In his 1985 essay on Justification, Professor Leroy Dobberstein sounds like Stoeckhardt.
  - There is... nothing that demands that this future must be taken temporally. Why not a **logical future**? If it is true that by one man's disobedience—Adam's—many were made sinners, then it follows that by one man's obedience—Christ's—many are made righteous. In addition, it has been demonstrated that this verb, *kathisteemi*, is often used in a forensic context such as we have in these verses. Note the words condemnation and act of righteousness in the previous verse.<sup>59</sup>
- And in his commentary on Romans, Professor David Kuske offers another explanation:
  - "Instead of referring to heaven, the future here is a **durative future** (Robertson, p 871). The durative future speaks of something that is true both now and on into the future."<sup>60</sup>

## 2 Corinthians 5:15 "He died for all."

- Jesus did not merely die for believers! He died as the Substitute for all people. He died "**for**" (instead of, in the place of) all, as the Substitute for all.
- Universal atonement is the doctrine that Jesus died to atone for every sinner.
- This comforts a person who is struggling with doubt that Jesus also died for him. Jesus died for all, and that includes me too—no matter who I am, no matter what I have done. Jesus also was paying for my sins on the cross.

<sup>54</sup> κατασταθήσονται – Future passive indicative of καθίστημι – cf. LSJ, TDNT, etc.

<sup>55</sup> Lagrange, Zahn, and Fitzmyer also see *logical future* here, as does Prof. Dobberstein.

<sup>56</sup> Stoeckhardt, *Römerbrief*, p. 261 (CPH, 1907) -- Translated by James L. Langebartels.

<sup>57</sup> Though Dr. Becker does not give the reference, Moulton's *Grammar* vol. III, p. 86 provides Rom. 5:7 and 7:3 as examples of the gnomic future. Also see Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, §1914.

<sup>58</sup> Siegbert Becker, "*Objective Justification*," p. 9 (WLS Essay File).

<sup>59</sup> WLQ, vol. 84, p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> D. Kuske, *Romans 1-8*, p. 285-286 (NPH, 2007).



- If this passage used my name, it would not be as comforting. If it said, “Jesus died for Brian Keller,” I would wonder if it means me. There are quite a number of individuals who have that name. In my own county, there is someone with my name. When his name appears in the court records reported in the paper, some ask if it is me. But this passage says, “all.” I know that means me. It means you too! No matter who you are, no matter what you’ve done, Jesus died for you. Jesus died in your place, as your Substitute, paying the penalty for your sins.
- This is objective gospel, because it is true whether it is known or believed or not. Jesus died for all, whether people know it or believe it or not. It happened. It’s a fact. Of course, mission work involves telling people what Jesus did to take away their sins.

## 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

**“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (NIV84)

- Dr. Becker explained a weakness in the NIV (v19 “men’s sins”<sup>NIV84</sup> / “people’s sins”<sup>NIV2011</sup>). This NIV translation obscures the teaching of Paul to a certain extent. Paul’s actual words say that God was reconciling the world to himself not counting *their* sins against them. The only possible antecedent of “*their*” in that sentence is “*the world*,” and the world certainly includes all men. What Paul actually says, therefore, is that God does not count the sins of all men against them. In his letter to the Romans the apostle indicates beyond question that not to count a man’s sins against him means to forgive his sin. Paul writes, “Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him” (Ro 4:7, 8). We are therefore justified in saying that Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19 teaches that **in Christ God has indeed forgiven the sins of the whole world. God reconciled the world to himself by forgiving the sins of all men.**<sup>61</sup>
- The following properly use “**the world... their sins**” – KJV, NKJV, NASB, ESV, HCSB, GWN. Let’s study these words more closely, using the NASB95...

**“Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ...”**<sup>NASB</sup>

- “**All these things**” refers to the truths found in verses 14-17 (justification + sanctification).
- God is the only source of the blessings of justification and sanctification.
- God is the one acted, “**who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.**”
- The Greek word translated “**reconciled**” refers to a complete change in status before God. The Greek verb is in the aorist tense which means that it happened (in the past). When was it that God “**reconciled us to Himself through Christ**”? Recall the curtain of the temple being torn in two. God reconciled us to Himself on Good Friday. Based on the redeeming work of Jesus, who died on the cross, God tore the curtain in two.
- **Reconcile/reconciliation:** “does not denote a change in the nature of the sinner, in the attitude of his heart. That change will take place when he is led by the Spirit to accept in faith the offered καταλλαγή [*“reconciliation”*]. The change occurred in the standing of the sinner before his Judge... The *nature* of the sinner has not been changed. *God* did not undergo a change... The *status* of the sinner was changed.”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Universal Justification*,” *WLQ*, vol. 83:1, pp. 14 (Winter 1986). Bold is mine.

<sup>62</sup> Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, p. 106-107 (NPH, 1963). Italics are Meyer’s.

- This reconciliation only came about **“through Christ.”** He is the way to the Father. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). In his justice, God would not simply brush our sins under the rug. Jesus needed to serve as our Substitute, living a perfect life under the law and dying on the cross as the sacrifice for all sin.
- Who is meant by **“us”** here? Reading through the whole epistle, we see many examples in which the context clearly indicates that **“we”** or **“us”** refers to “Paul... and Timothy” or “Paul, Silas, and Timothy” (2 Cor 1:1, 19), while **“you”** refers to the first recipients of this inspired epistle, the Christians “in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia” (1:1; read 1:6-14; then see 5:11-13; 6:1,11, etc.). Also, the **“we”** in 5:16 refers to Paul, Timothy, and Silas. It would be consistent to see this **“us”** in v. 18 as first of all referring to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. And yet, the word that is parallel to this **“us”** in verse 19 is **“world.”** So, we should keep that in mind, and not limit those reconciled to just Paul, Timothy, and Silas. More about that below.

**“and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,”** NASB

- The **“and”** ties this phrase to the preceding one. God had to give the ministry of reconciliation, because without it, no one could believe (Rom 10:17), and without faith, no one benefits from the reconciliation Jesus earned for all people.
- To whom did God give the ministry of reconciliation? Who is included in **“us”** here? In the context, it seems that **“us”** first refers to Paul, Silas, and Timothy (5:11-13,16; 6:1,11). Then, by application, it refers to the church of all true believers. **“The ministry of reconciliation”** describes the work of proclaiming that God **“reconciled us to Himself through Christ”** (v. 18 above). Paul, Silas, and Timothy were certainly called to do this work. But, Jesus plainly commanded that the gospel should and would be proclaimed to all the world until he returns (Mt 24:14; 28:19; Mk 16:15-16). Jesus gave this ministry of proclaiming the reconciliation to the church, **“to the believers individually and collectively.”**<sup>63</sup> And in a special way, he calls public ministers of the gospel to proclaim the reconciliation (Acts 13:1-3; Eph 4:11).

<sup>19</sup> **“namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,”** NASB

- Note once again that God is the one who is doing the work. **“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...”** While the incarnation of Christ is in mind, the main thought is the work of reconciling. **“When Christ won the new status for the world, God was in Him doing it.”**<sup>64</sup>
- Professor Meyer explained: **“God was in Christ refers, of course, to the historical appearance of Christ in the flesh. The whole life of Christ on earth was occupied in working out our καταλλαγή [“reconciliation”], His entire state of exinanition [humiliation] being devoted to the task... The present participle, though denoting duration, does not predicate a continuation of the work beyond the earthly career of our Savior.”**<sup>65</sup>
- Professor D. Kuske explained that the Greek for **“was reconciling”** is a periphrastic imperfect: The periphrastic tense does not have to mean... that the meaning of reconcile in this verse would be changed **“to signify something like bringing to faith”** (i.e., **“God is in the course of history reconciling one individual after the other in unbroken succession”**). ... This would require a present periphrastic. The **imperfect periphrastic merely refers to a continued action in the past.** God’s reconciling of the world to himself did not take place in a single act (i.e., Jesus’ death) but by Jesus’ active and passive obedience. **The whole life of Christ on earth was occupied in working out our reconciliation.** Thus the imperfect is used in this verse to relate **this continued action in the past.**<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS* (1997), p. 48; Mt 16:19; 10:32; 18:18; 1 Pe 2:9.

<sup>64</sup> Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, p. 110 (NPH, 1963)

<sup>65</sup> Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, p. 111 (NPH, 1963). Translations, bold, underline is mine.

<sup>66</sup> See D. Kuske, WLQ, vol. 77:1, p. 13. Pastors may see the Greek grammar explained there. Bold/underline is mine.

- Dr. Becker also wrote that this periphrastic imperfect, “denotes **continued action in the past**. The reconciling was going on throughout the ministry of Jesus, beginning at his birth and reaching its climax in the resurrection.”<sup>67</sup>
- *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states: “**Christ suffered and died to reconcile the Father to us.**”<sup>68</sup> The extended period of time in the past when “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” was during our Savior’s life, suffering and death. The periphrastic imperfect certainly does not mean bringing people to faith one by one in the future. Daniel Wallace writes in his Greek Grammar: “In general, the imperfect may be diagrammed as follows:”<sup>69</sup>

Past	Present	Future
-----continued action-----		

- Part of the periphrastic imperfect is a present participle.<sup>70</sup> Dr. Becker wrote:  
It has been said that if the reconciliation spoken of in verse 19 were something that happened when Christ rose from the dead, **the present participle** is out of place. If Paul had wanted to speak of a past reconciliation, it is argued, he would have used an aorist participle. That argument is absolutely untenable. No one, for example, would argue that the sentence, “**I was sitting**” cannot refer to something that happened sixteen years ago because “sitting” is a present participle and if you want to speak of things that happened in the past you must use a past participle. As is the case in English, so it is also in Greek. As a general rule we can say that the Greek participles are timeless (except for the future participle) and they take their temporal significance from the main verb in the sentence. If the aorist participle were used here it would normally denote an action that took place **before** “God was in Christ.” The English translation of such a Greek construction would be, “God was in Christ, having reconciled the world unto himself” (**even before** he was in Christ).<sup>71</sup>

**“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them,”**

- “God was in Christ reconciling **the world**.” Jesus did not merely do this work for some people (limited atonement/reconciliation). Jesus was doing this work for all people (universal/world reconciliation). Everyone is included. Jesus was doing that work of reconciliation for all people of all times, whether they would be brought to faith or not, whether they would end up in heaven or not. Jesus died for all and was reconciling all people in his state of humiliation (perfect life, suffering and death).
- The phrase: “**not counting their** [the world’s] **trespasses against them**” expresses universal justification. The pronoun “**their**” has to refer to “**the world**.” God is the subject who was “**not counting**” the world’s trespasses against them.
- Remember what we learned from Romans 4:7-8, “Blessed are they whose transgressions are **forgiven**, whose sins are **covered**. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will **never count against** him.” Remember how “not counting sins against” someone is the same as “forgiving sins.” In Christ, God was reconciling the world, by forgiving their sins.
- Grammatically, “**not counting**” is in apposition to “**reconciling**.” In other words, when placed side by side this way, “**not counting**” explains “**reconciling**.” It explains what is meant by “**reconciling**.” What kind of reconciling was God in Christ doing? He was forgiving sins. God’s “**reconciling**” meant “**not counting**” sins against the world, and that means forgiving them. This is universal, objective justification. Again, reconciliation means essentially the same

<sup>67</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Objective Justification*,” p. 6. Bold/underline is mine. (cf. Robertson *Grammar*, pp. 1111f. on ptp.)

<sup>68</sup> Tappert, p. 107. (Apol. III, 1). Bold/underline is mine.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 541 (Zondervan, 1996).

<sup>70</sup> Imperfect indicative (ἦν) + present participle (καταλλάσσων) = periphrastic imperfect

<sup>71</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Objective Justification*,” p. 5. Bold/underline is mine.

as the forgiveness of sins. *The Formula of Concord* uses these terms synonymously when it says: “reconciliation or the forgiveness of sins” (FC, III, 30).

- “As Paul shows in 2 Corinthians 5:19, God’s reconciling the world to himself is his ‘not counting men’s sins against them.’ Because of Christ’s atonement God now looks on the world as forgiven and righteous.”<sup>72</sup> -- *WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR 1983)*
- Dr. Becker put it this way: “We are therefore justified in saying that Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19 teaches that in Christ God has indeed forgiven the sins of the whole world. God reconciled the world to Himself by forgiving the sins of all men.”<sup>73</sup>

**“and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”** NASB

- **“He has committed”** is “an aorist periphrastic... while God’s reconciling of the world was an ongoing action in the past during the entire life of Christ, God’s establishing of the ministry of reconciliation was a simple action, in this case a command (the Great Commission).”<sup>74</sup>
- God **“has committed to us”** the responsibility of proclaiming **“the word of reconciliation,”** the pure gospel of forgiveness through Christ.
- Reconciliation is an objective fact, a ready blessing, won by Christ for all people. Christ did not command us to preach the possibility of forgiveness. He committed to us the word of reconciliation, the clear message of forgiveness through his atoning death. When preaching the Gospel, we do well to say: “You are forgiven through Christ!”
- **“The word of reconciliation”** refers to the objective reconciliation, the objective justification, that we have been talking about all through this paper. The gospel we have to proclaim is not, “You could be forgiven if...” It is, “You are forgiven through Christ!”
- Of course, we must rightly divide the word of truth, and know when and to whom to preach the Law, and when and to whom to preach this saving Gospel. But, rightly placed within the context of the proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel, this **“word of reconciliation”** is pure gospel.
- To the sinner who feels guilt and is contrite, we declare, “You are forgiven through Christ!”
- To the member of our congregation who is troubled because he is not sure if he believes strongly enough, we may declare, “You are forgiven through Christ!” And God the Holy Spirit works through that gospel message, just as he works through the Lord’s Supper, to strengthen weak faith.
- To the member of our congregation who is dying and keeps thinking, “I wasn’t the father I should have been. I feel so much guilt.” We can clearly declare, “You are forgiven through Christ!” It is as sure as the fact that Jesus died for all and rose again.
- Pastors do well to say these words to communicants at the Lord’s table as part of the dismissal, “Take heart! Your sins are forgiven. ☩ Depart in peace.”
- What a great Savior we have! He gives us such comfort. We do well to proclaim the full forgiveness of the gospel.

<sup>20</sup> **Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.** NASB

- God sends his **“ambassadors”** to preach **“the word of reconciliation.”** Here, in verse 20, **“be reconciled”** means to believe the good news that you are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Faith comes from hearing the message: You are forgiven through Christ! (Rom 10:17). Faith receives the benefits and blessings of the reconciliation Jesus won. Receive this gift!

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<sup>72</sup> WLQ, vol. 81, p. 50.

<sup>73</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Universal Justification*,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 83:1, p. 14 (Winter 1986).

<sup>74</sup> D. Kuske, WLQ, vol. 77:1, p. 17.

Professor Valleskey explained this verse in his People's Bible commentary:

At first hearing, these words might appear to be contradicting what Paul has just said, that God has already reconciled us and the whole world to himself. Now he talks about the need for us to be reconciled to God. This is not conflicting testimony at all, however. Rather Paul is guarding against what today is called "universalism," the teaching that one day everyone is going to go to heaven. This idea could well arise if one looked only at the objective side of reconciliation. One might conclude: If God no longer counts the world's sins against the world, then that means everyone in the world will be saved. That such will not be the case is amply testified to throughout the Scriptures. Mark 16:16, for example, records the words of Jesus: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Paul is saying the same thing here with the appeal, *Be reconciled to God*. It is by faith that the individual receives the benefits of the reconciliation God has already accomplished. If one rejects this finished work, one's sins remain on oneself...<sup>75</sup>

Professor John Schaller explained what faithful preaching of the reconciliation includes:

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? ... 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.<sup>76</sup>

So, faithful preaching of the reconciliation communicates that Jesus, our God-man Substitute and Savior, lived a perfect life and died on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn 2:2). Faithful preaching of the gospel announces that Jesus was delivered over to death because of our sins and was raised to life because of our justification (Rom 4:25). Faithful preaching of the gospel insists that Jesus has really risen from death, for "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith," and "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:14,17). Faithful preaching of the gospel proclaims that the free gift of reconciliation is received by faith and rejected by unbelief, so "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16).

It would be good for a pastor to be known for repeatedly teaching what Jesus did to reconcile the world. Can we ever hear these gospel truths too often or know them too well? Can we ever assume that everyone who is listening knows these saving truths clearly? Professor Schaller more than hinted that the mere passing statement that "God is reconciled" in a sermon would not suffice as preaching the gospel. It is not enough to say, "we all know that God is reconciled," without some instruction about what Jesus did to redeem the world. It is important to make it clear that this reconciliation is received by Spirit-worked faith and rejected by unbelief, and that believers will go to heaven and unbelievers will go to hell.

We certainly reject universalism. But, careless or imprecise preaching can give a false impression. To simply assert that "all are forgiven" and let that hang in the air without clear connection to the redeeming work of Christ (without clearly expressing that not everyone is going to heaven), could easily confuse people and lead some to wonder if it is really universalism. All of this is a plea to preach carefully. Faithful preaching is not easy, but is very important.

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<sup>75</sup> David J. Valleskey, *2 Corinthians*, p. 95-96 (NPH, 1992).

<sup>76</sup> John Schaller, (tr., G. Hoenecke) WLQ, vol. 72, pp. 322-23.

<sup>21</sup> **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** (NIV84)

- Though Jesus was tempted by the devil, he committed no sin. “Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners...” (Heb 7:26)
- God placed all sin on Jesus (the holy God-man). “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isa 53:6)
- On the cross, it was as though Jesus had committed every sin. He became “sin,” or the one sinner, for us (as our Substitute). He suffered the just punishment for the sins of the world, and was forsaken by God. He completed his task, paid the full price for sin, and said, “It is finished.”
- As a result of his perfect sacrifice, God credits Christ’s righteousness to us as a gift. He did this so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Whoever believes in Jesus receives the benefits and blessings of what Jesus won for all on the cross. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life. But, whoever does not believe rejects Christ’s sacrifice and will be condemned.
- We now know this verse as “*God’s Great Exchange*,” since it was popularized by Professor Valleskey in an evangelism / gospel presentation.<sup>77</sup>



### 1 Timothy 3:16

“He appeared in flesh, was **justified in spirit**, was seen by angels, was preached among nations, was **believed in the world**, was **taken up in glory**.” (GWN)

- Dr. Becker calls this a third sedes [seat] where objective justification is found. He wrote:  
There can be no doubt that these words refer to the Lord Jesus Christ. He appeared in a fleshly mode of existence and was justified in a spiritual mode of existence. According to 1 Peter 3:18, this spiritual mode of existence began when he was made alive. When the Savior came to be in this new mode of existence through his resurrection, he was justified, that is, he was declared free of the guilt of all the sins that were laid upon him. By the resurrection the sins for which he was “numbered with the transgressors” were formally declared by the Father to be completely paid for. Christ was no longer “guilty” but free from all liability to punishment. But the sins for which he had been condemned were the sins of the world, and because Christ is the substitute for all men we can say that if one was justified, the all whose substitute he was were also justified in his resurrection, just as Paul can say, “If one died for all, then were all dead” (2 Co 5:14).<sup>78</sup>

### 1 Timothy 4:10

“...we have put our hope in the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, and **especially of those who believe**.” (NIV84)

- “**Savior of all men**” refers to universal, objective justification. “**Especially of those who believe**” refers to individual, subjective justification. Ponder how both aspects are taught here.
- The term “**Savior**” (σωτήρ) is used 10 times in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tm 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Tt. 1:3, 4; 2:10, 13; 3:4,6; 2 Tm 1:10). All seem to use the usual “saving sense” of “Savior” (rather than Provider). Titus 3:4-7 is a very clear example of the saving (soteriological) sense that we see here in 1 Timothy 4:10. In each case, the context reveals the meaning of “Savior.”

<sup>77</sup> <https://connect.wels.net/AOM/ps/evangelism/Personal%20Evangelism%20Tools/How%20Do%20I%20Witness/Handy%20Witnessing.aspx>

<sup>78</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Objective Justification*,” pp. 9-10.

- “**All men**” may be translated “all people” or “everyone” since the Greek in this verse (πάντων ἀνθρώπων) does not stress maleness and the context does not demand it.<sup>79</sup> It refers to all people of all ages from all nations. “For there is one God and **one mediator between God and men**, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as **a ransom for all men**—the testimony given in its proper time” (1 Tim 2:5–6). Jesus paid the ransom for all people. He redeemed all people with his sacrificial death on the cross, when he “died for all.” (2 Cor 5:15). He is the only **Way** to heaven for all people (Jn 14:6). Jesus “**really is the Savior of the world**” (John 4:42).
- “**Savior of all men**” teaches that Jesus won salvation for all people. It does not mean that all people will be saved in the final judgment. Professor Armin Schuetze explained in his *People’s Bible* commentary: “Not all, however, enter into salvation. He is the Savior especially of those who believe, not because their faith makes them worthy of it, but because unbelief rejects God’s blessing.”<sup>80</sup> Yet, Jesus won that ready blessing of forgiveness for all, as “**the Savior of all.**”

### ***Redemption and Forgiveness***

Some have claimed that all people are “redeemed” but not all are “forgiven.” But, let us see if this claim holds up after we study a few more Bible passages.

### ***Ephesians 1:7***

“**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace...**” (NIV84)

- “**Redemption**” and “**forgiveness**” are in apposition here. Forgiveness explains what is meant by redemption through his blood. Redemption through Jesus’ blood means the forgiveness of sins.
- Professor Panning explained: “Paul uses two terms that differ as to the picture underlying them yet are **virtually interchangeable in meaning: ‘redemption’ and ‘forgiveness.’** *Redemption* implies that someone is a slave or captive and needs to be ransomed. *Forgiveness* implies that someone has acted improperly toward another and in so doing has incurred guilt that needs to be covered over or taken away.”<sup>81</sup>
- Dr. Stoeckhardt asserted: “We must therefore insist that **through and with the redemption the forgiveness of sin is obtained, has been gained, and is present as a complete gift.** If the sinners have actually been **redeemed** through the blood of Christ and are therefore before God **freed and released from their sins**, from their guilt, from their punishment, then these sins and transgressions **have been forgiven** them... And now we Christians are the very ones who, being in Christ, actually have and possess... the present **redemption and forgiveness** which has been purchased for all sinners.”<sup>82</sup>
- Even though the context is speaking of believers, the phrase “**through his blood**” reveals that this is an objective redemption that was won by Christ on the cross. The result of this redemption was the forgiveness of sins. Jesus died for all. Jesus won forgiveness of sins for all.

### ***Colossians 1:14***

“**...in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins...**” (NIV84)

- Once again “redemption” and “forgiveness” are in apposition. Once again, they are “virtually interchangeable.” Once again, forgiveness explains what is meant by redemption.
- In this case, the context is clearly that of believers, who receive the benefits of redemption/forgiveness and are “saints” in God’s sight. But notice what follows...

<sup>79</sup> Matthew 19:5 is one example of a case when context demands that ἄνθρωπος be translated “man.”

<sup>80</sup> Armin W. Schuetze, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 67-68 (NPH, 1991).

<sup>81</sup> Armin J. Panning, *Galatians/Ephesians*, p. 133 (NPH, 1997). Bold/underline is mine.

<sup>82</sup> George Stoeckhardt, (tr. M. Sommer) *Ephesians*, p. 54-55 (CPH, 1952). Bold/underline is mine.

### Colossians 1:19-22

God decided to have His whole Being live in Him,<sup>20</sup> and **by Him to reconcile to Himself everything, on earth and in heaven in a peace made by the blood of His cross.**<sup>21</sup> **Once you were strangers to God, and in your mind you were his enemies, doing wicked things.**<sup>22</sup> **But now He has reconciled you by dying in His human body in order to have you stand before Him without sin or fault or blame.** (GWN)

- Look carefully at v. 20 again. “To reconcile” translates a Greek aorist infinitive. God decided to (once for all) **“reconcile to Himself everything.”** A universal reconciliation is described.<sup>83</sup>
- Notice also that reconciliation and **“peace”** was **“made by the blood of His cross.”**
- The NIV (1984 & 2011), ESV, and HCSB are misleading when they translate the Greek participle in v. 20, “making peace.” That makes it seem like it is a present participle in Greek.
- Actually, the participle is an aorist referring to something that already happened, **“having made peace”** (KJV, NKJV, NASB) or **“peace made”** (GWN). Peace was “made” and “finished” at the cross, when Jesus shed his blood and died (Jn 19:30). The Greek main verb rendered **“He has reconciled”** is also an aorist in Greek. Jesus reconciled sinners on Good Friday, **“by dying in His human body.”** It happened then and there. It was no coincidence that God tore the Temple curtain in two that day. Jesus made peace with God for sinners. Jesus removed the barrier of sin that separated holy God from all sinners. So we preach: “Jesus has reconciled you by his death.”

### 1 John 2:2

**He is the atoning sacrifice\*** [the covering] **for our sins, and not only ours but also for [the sins of] the whole world.** (GWN) [*\*or: “propitiation” – ESV, HCSB, NASB, NKJV*]

- This passage clearly teaches “universal atonement.” Jesus did not only die to pay for the sins of believers, but **“for [the sins of] the whole world.”** (Calvinists teach a limited atonement.)
- The Greek word translated **“atoning sacrifice”** or “propitiation” is used only here and in 1 John 4:10. “Propitiation” is a good word, but we need to explain it. A propitiation is a sacrifice that turns away God’s wrath. Of course, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the sacrifice that turns away God’s wrath.
- *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession* explains that a “propitiatory sacrifice... is a work of satisfaction for guilt and punishment that reconciles God or placates his wrath or merits the forgiveness of sins for others”<sup>84</sup> (XXIV, 19).
- In 1972, Prof. Armin Panning evaluated the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and described how some Bible translations undercut the meaning of God’s Word:  
But there are subtler ways in which the atonement of Christ is undercut in the translations. There is, e.g., the liberty that is taken with the Greek word that means “propitiation.” Properly, “propitiation” means turning away wrath with an offering. Scripture speaks at length of God’s wrath against sin and the need to propitiate Him... The NEB translates: “He himself is the remedy for the defilement of our sins,” while the TEV speaks of Him as the “means by which sins are forgiven.” In this passage, and in all others where the various forms of *hilasmos* occur, the NASB retains the accurate translation “propitiation.”<sup>85</sup>
- Dr. Becker taught that this Greek noun is related to a verb<sup>86</sup> that means “to appease anger.” Then, he wrote: “Christ is thus the sacrifice for the sins of the world that appeases the anger of God. Since it is sin that arouses the anger of God, **only the removal or forgiveness of sin can appease** and take away the wrath of the Almighty. In fact, **the removal of God’s anger and the**

<sup>83</sup> The aorist indicates it happened. It’s completed and done. There is much more depth than can be presented here. For help on how the reconciliation of Christ affects all of creation, including “all things,” study Romans 8:19ff.

<sup>84</sup> Tappert, p. 252.

<sup>85</sup> WLQ, vol. 70, p. 24.

<sup>86</sup> The Greek noun ἱλασμός is related to the verb ἰλάσκομαι.



**forgiveness of sins are treated as synonymous expressions** in the Old Testament.”<sup>87</sup> Then he cited Psalm 85:2-3 as an example: “*You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger.*” He also asserted that “to **cover** sins is to **forgive** sins. That those two phrases are **totally synonymous**, and that **both terms are synonymous with justification** is made as clear as anything can be when Paul says, that David speaks of the man to whom God imputes righteousness (whom God justifies) when he writes, (Ro 4:7,8)”... “Blessed are they whose transgressions are **forgiven**, whose sins are **covered**. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will **never count against** him.”

- In 1983, the WELS CICR wrote: “To speak of Christ as propitiating, that is, appeasing, the wrath of God is, of course, an anthropopathism” [*i.e., ascribing human feelings/affections to God*]. They mentioned as references: Psalm 85:3 (quoted above) and Isaiah 12:1, “Although you were angry with me, your anger has turned away and you have comforted me” (cf. also Is 54:7–10).<sup>88</sup>
- Note the present tense of “**is**.” Dr. Stoekhardt explained, “Christ is the offering. He has offered up Himself, shed His blood, given Himself into death to procure forgiveness. Thereby He has rendered satisfaction to God and appeased His wrath. But we should note that John asserts that Christ not only once was, but that He is, the propitiation, the means of appeasing for our sins. The atonement which Christ once brought about has infinite power and validity. Jesus Christ has rendered satisfaction to God once and for all times.”<sup>89</sup>
- Stoekhardt noticed something else in the original Greek text: “It is not literally correct to supply ‘sins’ before world. It is quite self-evident that the world here appears as the whole body of sinful mankind. Christ reconciled the whole world to God. The sins of the whole world have been taken away by Christ. Here is clear testimony for the universality of Christ’s atonement.”<sup>90</sup>
- Notice the brackets on **[the sins of]** in *GWN*. The *NKJV* is particularly careful and precise: “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also **for the whole world**.”
- R. C. H. Lenski’s commentary is helpful here, though he was not known as a proponent of objective justification: “John says that it is effective, ‘not regarding our sins only, but also regarding the whole world.’ John does not say ‘regarding *the sins* of the whole world’ ... John advances the thought from sins to the whole world of sinners... ‘The whole world’ includes all men who ever lived or will live.”<sup>91</sup>
- Stoekhardt’s comment is appropriate for our situation today:

Strange as it may seem, that is a peculiarity of **false teachers** that they **attempt to pervert the clearest teaching of Scripture**. John Calvin remarks with regard to this statement of John that Christ is the propitiation for the whole world, “*he does not include the reprobate/rejected in the ‘all.’*”<sup>92</sup> (i.e., when the Apostle says “all,” “the whole world,” he does not mean all, but only some, namely, only all the elect.) But when the Apostle asserts that Christ is the propitiation not only for our sins, but also for the whole world, it becomes clear without doubt that here a universal redemption is taught, that **there is forgiveness for every sinner**, and that **in Christ already the whole world is absolved**. Moreover, this article of universal redemption benefits and brings comfort to believing Christians only. Unbelievers despise and reject this truth and so exclude themselves from God’s universal salvation. But to Christians it is a special comfort to know that not only they, but the whole world as well, have been redeemed. For a Christian could easily begin to doubt that he is a believer and so lose the assurance that

<sup>87</sup> Siegbert Becker, “*Objective Justification*,” p. 11. Bold, underline is mine.

<sup>88</sup> WLQ, vol. 81, p. 49.

<sup>89</sup> G. Stoekhardt, (tr. H. W. Degner) *Lectures On The Three Letters of John*, p. 14 (Concordia Theological Seminary, 1980).

<sup>90</sup> G. Stoekhardt, (tr. H. Degner) *Lectures On The Three Letters of John*, p. 14

<sup>91</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*, p. 400 (Augsburg, 1966).

<sup>92</sup> Calvin: “In omnibus non comprehendit reprobos.”

Christ's atonement is wrought for him. Our many daily sins give rise to such doubts, so that a conscientious Christian could begin to question whether he is a Christian at all. But now all should know the whole world is redeemed, and no one can doubt that he is a part of the world and hence has part in Christ's redemption.<sup>93</sup>

### ***1 John 1:7 and 2:12***

1 John 1:7 **The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.** (NIV84)

1 John 2:12 **I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.** (NIV84)

- Both of these passages were written to believers. But notice how the gospel is proclaimed, not as a possibility, but as a comforting truth. "Your sins have been forgiven" because of Jesus' name.
- The Holy Spirit did not inspire John to write that the blood of Jesus makes Christians "washable," but that it "purifies us from all sin." The Greek present active indicative reveals that Jesus' blood cleanses us from all sin, now and always. It is constantly true.
- Luther wrote: "In this consists the piety and holiness of Christians that God ever and again forgives them what they do wrong against their God. His daily forgiveness continually takes away the smirches and stains which tarnish the brilliancy of their light and which displease their holy Lord."<sup>94</sup> This forgiveness is based on what Jesus did on the cross.
- The Holy Spirit did not inspire John to write that because of Jesus' name, you are "forgivable," or have the possibility of someday being forgiven, but that "**your sins have been forgiven.**" The Greek perfect passive indicative means that your sins have been forgiven and remain forgiven.
- Luther put it this way: "When I feel sin, why should I despair, and why should I not believe that it **has been forgiven**? For the blood of Christ washes sins away."<sup>95</sup>

### ***Acts 13:37-39***

**But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.**<sup>38</sup> **"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.**<sup>39</sup> **Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.** (NIV84)

- Right after teaching that God raised Jesus from the dead, the apostle Paul proclaimed "**the forgiveness of sins.**" It was not described as a possibility for the future, but a ready blessing. It is already won. It is already there. It is offered and proclaimed: "**the forgiveness of sins.**" In actual practice that means saying, "You are forgiven through Christ." The forgiveness of sins has already been won at Christ's cross, and declared in Christ's resurrection. It is an objective fact. Jesus died in the place of all sinners. He paid the full price for all sins. He rose from death because he had won forgiveness of sins for all. The apostles were to proclaim "repentance and forgiveness of sins" (Lk 24:47). Paul proclaimed, "**the forgiveness of sins.**" That is what objective justification is. It's like saying, "2+2=4" but it is infinitely more important. It is true. It is certain. The Holy Spirit works through that gospel message (Rom 10:17).
- Then, the apostle taught subjective justification, "Through him **everyone who believes is justified.**" That is absolutely true. Believers are justified by faith (Rom 3:28). By faith, they receive the forgiveness and the benefits Jesus won (eternal life and salvation).
- We would do well to proclaim both objective and subjective justification as Paul did.

<sup>93</sup> G. Stoeckhardt, (tr. H. Degner) *Lectures On The Three Letters of John*, p. 14. Bold is mine.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in: G. Stoeckhardt, (tr. H. Degner) *Lectures On The Three Letters of John*, p. 8

<sup>95</sup> *Luther's Works*, Vol. 30, p. 228 (CPH, 1967). Bold is mine.

### **John 1:29**

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (NIV84)

- **Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration XI, 28:** “We must always firmly and rigidly insist that, like the proclamation of repentance, so the promise of the gospel is *universalis* [universal], that is, it pertains **to all people** (Luke 24[:47]). Therefore, Christ commanded preaching “repentance and **the forgiveness of sins** in his name to all nations.” “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” for it (John 3[:16]). **Christ has taken away the sins of the world**<sup>96</sup> (John 1[:29]);... his blood is the atoning sacrifice for... the whole world” (1 John 1[7; 2:2])... Therefore, Christ commanded that the promise of the gospel must be proclaimed to all those to whom repentance is preached (Luke 24[:47]; Mark 16[:15]).<sup>97</sup>
- John the Baptist spoke the words of John 1:29 from his perspective in time. Jesus was still in the process of taking away the sin of the world by living a perfect life, and in the future Jesus would die on the cross. The Formula of Concord looked at John 1:29 from their perspective in time. We can speak the same truth. “**Christ has taken away the sins of the world.**” That is universal, objective justification. It is a truth taught by the Lutheran Confessions, so genuine Confessional Lutherans will teach it too.

***The study of Bible passages (above) reveals that the Bible teaches universal, objective justification.***

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### ***AN ILLUSTRATION FROM LUTHER: teaching Objective Justification***

Luther certainly taught “objective justification” even though he didn’t call it that.<sup>98</sup> He wrote:

“Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly **his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it**... Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king’s fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it.”<sup>99</sup>

Let’s consider Luther’s illustration. Let me run with the illustration a little freely to make a point.

A king goes to war and wins a great battle. He captures a castle. He can do whatever he wants with it, but for some reason known only to him, he issues a royal decree that he has generously given the castle to: \_\_\_\_\_ . [insert your name.]

You are not aware of this yet. It is not based on anything you have done. As a matter of fact, you are not even a citizen in his kingdom yet. Nevertheless, he has issued the decree.

A messenger comes to your home and reads the royal decree to you, handing you the deed to the castle, signed over by the king himself. You haven’t seen the king. You haven’t seen the castle. You didn’t fight in the war. And yet, there’s the king’s messenger reading you the decree and trying to hand you the deed. If you would reject this gift, you would not experience the benefits of owning this castle. If you accept this gift, you did not earn it, since you didn’t do anything for it.

That’s how it is with objective justification. When Jesus died and rose again, God essentially said, “You are forgiven through Christ.” He didn’t say, “You will be forgiven if you believe first.”

At what point, though, did the King decree that the castle was yours? When did the King give the castle? It was certainly before the messenger ever arrived at your door. At what point did God declare forgiveness? It was when Jesus rose from the dead (Romans 4:25).

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<sup>96</sup> German: “Christus hat der Welt Sünde getragen” and Latin: “*Christus peccata mundi sustulit.*” [Perfect tense]

<sup>97</sup> Kolb/Wengert, “*The Book of Concord*,” p. 645 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000). Bold/underline is mine.

<sup>98</sup> Also see the Luther quotations in **Appendix A: The Catalog of Testimonies** below.

<sup>99</sup> *Luther's Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*, pp. 366-67 (Fortress, 1958). Bold print mine.

Even if you would reject this generous gift, it remains true that the king gave it. I feel sorry for those who deny objective justification, because they miss the comfort that is taught in God's Word. They fail to give or receive the comfort God offers through words, "You are forgiven through Christ." Ultimately, rejecting objective justification means believing in your faith and the possibility of future forgiveness. That is thin ice to stake your life on. Believing in your faith is misplaced trust. Believing in Jesus, who lived a perfect life, died on the cross for all people, and rose from death is saving faith. In the Apostles' Creed, we don't say, "I believe in the possibility of forgiveness." We say, "I believe... in the forgiveness of sins."

What did our Savior send his apostles and believers out to proclaim? He said, "**preach the gospel,**" not the "possibility" of forgiveness (Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:47; Ac 5:31; 13:38, etc.). The Bible never says, "Pastors, don't preach the gospel in your sermons, because they know all that." Jesus plainly said, "**Preach the gospel**" (Mk 16:15).<sup>100</sup> What a privilege it is to be able to announce the good news of Jesus Christ, "You are forgiven through Christ!"

### ***DISTINGUISH WHERE FORGIVENESS WAS WON AND IS DISTRIBUTED: Luther***

*True Confessional Lutherans should remember what Dr. Martin Luther wrote:*

The Word, the Word, the Word... The Word avails. Even if Christ were given for us and crucified a thousand times, it would all be in vain if the Word of God were absent and were not distributed and given to me with the bidding, this is for you, take what is yours.... **We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true.** But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. **He has won it once for all on the cross.** But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world.... **If now I seek the forgiveness of sins, I do not run to the cross, for I will not find it given there.... But I will find in the sacrament or gospel the word which distributes, presents, offers, and gives to me that forgiveness which was won on the cross....** Whoever has a bad conscience from his sins should go to the sacrament and obtain comfort, not because of the bread and wine, not because of the body and blood of Christ, but **because of the word** which in the sacrament offers, presents, and gives the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for me.<sup>101</sup>

Let's study this doctrine of justification carefully! Let's be sure to properly distinguish between the Law and the Gospel. Let's remember thesis 25 of Dr. Walther's "*Law & Gospel*": "***the Word of God is not rightly divided when the person teaching it does not allow the Gospel to have a general predominance in his teaching.***"<sup>102</sup> In other words, let the Gospel predominate! Go heavy on the Gospel! Walther explained, "Law and Gospel are confounded and perverted for the hearers of the Word, not only when the Law predominates in the preaching, but also when Law and Gospel, as a rule, are equally balanced and the Gospel is not predominant in the preaching." He said, "True, we have to preach the Law, only, however, as a preparation for the Gospel. The ultimate aim in our preaching of the Law must be to preach the Gospel. Whoever does not adopt this aim is not a true minister of the Gospel." Let's be sure to let the Gospel predominate! Let's be sure to preach and teach and speak the comforting gospel of forgiveness through Jesus! Walther continued to emphasize his point:

In accordance with God's will it should be the preacher's aim to proclaim the Gospel to his hearers till their hearts are melted... It is not sufficient for you to be conscious of your orthodoxy and your ability to present the pure doctrine correctly. These are, indeed, important matters; however, no one will be benefited by them if you confound Law and Gospel. The very finest

<sup>100</sup> The original Greek words were painted on the wall in the WLS chapel: κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.

<sup>101</sup> *Luther's Works, Vol. 40:* p. 214. Bold, underline is mine.

<sup>102</sup> C.F.W. Walther, Tr. W. Dau, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, p. 403 (CPH, 1986).

form of confounding both occurs when **the Gospel** is preached *along with* the Law, but is not the **predominating** element in the sermon. The preacher may think that he has proclaimed the evangelical truth quite often. His hearers, however, remember only that on some occasions he preached quite comfortingly and told them to believe in Jesus Christ.<sup>103</sup>

Then, Walther laid it on the line. “Now, [I say to] the preacher who steps out of his pulpit without having preached enough Gospel – so that some poor sinner who may have come to church for the first and the last time is not saved – woe to him! [That sinner’s] blood will be required of [that preacher]!”<sup>104</sup>

**SUMMARY: “FIVE POINTS OF THE GOSPEL”** - ✠ (mentioned above).

1. Jesus lived a perfect life for us, and all people.
2. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins, and the sins of the whole world.
3. Jesus rose from death, and that means...
4. God has forgiven all sins through Jesus. “You are forgiven through Christ!”
5. Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life.

I usually begin by quoting John 3:16 as the background. I often quote Mark 16:16 with point 5 to explain that believers will be saved and unbelievers will be condemned. There are variations of how these five may be worded. The underlined words are always included. They can be explained further. I teach these five points to every student in every confirmation class. They learn them over and over again so that they can say them at any time. It’s a memory tool. I hope and pray that it helps people to remember the gospel of Jesus Christ. It helps me remember to proclaim the gospel in each sermon in a way that won’t quickly sail over people’s heads. It reminds me to include the perfect life, atoning death, and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as both aspects of the doctrine of justification. May God bless you so that you can know and believe the saving gospel, and are able to clearly declare it to others.

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### ***CONFESSIONAL LUTHERANS TEACH UNIVERSAL, OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION***

*The Lutheran Confessors and early Lutheran theologians were often able to teach both aspects of the doctrine of justification at once. They often join the truth of universal/objective justification with the truth of personal/subjective justification in one masterful sentence. See this in the quotations that follow. (Bold, underline emphasis is mine.)*

### ***The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church***

#### ***Apology IV, 40-41***

<sup>40</sup> Therefore men cannot keep the law by their own strength, and they are all under sin and subject to eternal wrath and death. On this account the law cannot free us from sin or justify us, but **the promise of the forgiveness of sins and justification** was given **because of Christ**. He was given for us to make satisfaction for the sins of the world and has been appointed as the mediator and the propitiator.

<sup>41</sup> This promise is not conditional upon our merits but **offers the forgiveness of sins and justification freely**. As Paul says (Rom. 11:6), “If it is by works, it is no longer on the basis of grace.” Elsewhere he says, “Now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law” (Rom. 3:21), that is, **the forgiveness of sins** is offered freely. Reconciliation does not depend upon our merits.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> C.F.W. Walther, Tr. W. Dau, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, p. 406 (CPH, 1986).

<sup>104</sup> Walther, *Law and Gospel*, Tr. C. Tiews, p. 462 (CPH, 2010).

<sup>105</sup> *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, p. 112-13 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959).

### ***Apology IV, 103***

The law would seem to be harmful since it has made all men sinners, but **when the Lord Jesus came he forgave all men** the sin that none could escape and **by shedding his blood canceled the bond\*** that stood against us (Col. 2:14).<sup>106</sup> [*\*Or: "blotted out the bill of indictment" – Kolb/Wengert*]

### ***Apology IV, 149 [III, 28]***

<sup>149</sup> If somebody doubts that his **sins are forgiven**, he insults Christ because he thinks that his sin is greater and stronger than the death and promise of Christ<sup>107</sup>

### ***Apology IV, 382***

When frightened consciences are consoled by faith and believe that **our sins are blotted out by Christ's death and that God has been reconciled to us because of Christ's suffering**, then indeed Christ's suffering benefits us.<sup>108</sup> [*Note how objective and subjective justification are **both** presented.*]

### ***Apology XII, 88***

Finally, when will conscience be quieted if we receive forgiveness of sins on the ground that we love, or that we do the works of the Law? The Law will always accuse us, because we never satisfy God's Law. Just as Paul says, "The law brings wrath" (Romans 4:15). Chrysostom asks about repentance, "Where are we made sure that our sins are forgiven?" The adversaries also, in their *Sentences*, ask about the same subject. This cannot be explained; consciences cannot be made at peace unless they know it is God's command and the very **Gospel** that they should be firmly confident that **sins are forgiven freely for Christ's sake**, and that they should not doubt this. If anyone doubts, he charges the divine promise with falsehood, as 1 John 5:10 says. We teach that the Gospel requires this certainty of faith. The adversaries leave consciences uncertain and wavering.<sup>109</sup>

### ***Apology XII, 94***

As God swears that He does not want the death of a sinner, He shows that faith is required, in order that we may believe the one swearing and be firmly confident that He forgives us. In our estimation, the authority of the divine promises should be great by itself. But this promise has also been confirmed by an oath. Therefore, if anyone is not **confident that he is forgiven**, he denies that God has sworn what is true. A more horrible blasphemy cannot be imagined.<sup>110</sup>

### ***Large Catechism, III, 88***

<sup>88</sup> Here again there is great need to call upon God and pray, "Dear Father, forgive us our debts." Not that he does not forgive sin even without and **before** our prayer; and he gave us **the Gospel, in which there is nothing but forgiveness, before we prayed or even thought of it**. But the point here is for us to recognize and accept **this forgiveness**.<sup>111</sup> [*Note: Forgiveness exists before faith and is received by faith.*]

### ***Large Catechism, Third Article, 38***

<sup>38</sup> Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit. **The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection**, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and

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<sup>106</sup> Tappert, pp. 121-22. *In each quotation, underline/bold is mine.*

<sup>107</sup> Tappert, pp. 127.

<sup>108</sup> Tappert, p. 165.

<sup>109</sup> *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Paul T. McCain, 170 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005).

<sup>110</sup> *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, pp. 170-71.

<sup>111</sup> Tappert, p. 432.

enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation.<sup>112</sup> [*Again, objective and subjective justification, both.*]

**Smalcald Articles II, I, 1-3** (*Objective/General/Universal Justification*)

<sup>1</sup> The first and chief article is this, that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, “was put to death for [“because of”]<sup>113</sup> our trespasses and raised again for [“because of”]<sup>4</sup> our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

<sup>2</sup> He alone is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “God has laid upon him the iniquities of us all” (Isa. 53:6).<sup>114</sup>

<sup>3</sup> **All** have sinned and **are justified freely**, without their own works or merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23–25).<sup>115</sup>

- [*Above is the doctrine of “Universal Justification.” Yet, that does not mean that all sinners go to heaven. Far from it! What follows is justification by faith (subjective justification).*]

**Smalcald Articles II, I, 4** (*Subjective Justification*)

<sup>4</sup> Inasmuch as this must be believed and cannot be obtained or apprehended by any work, law, or merit, it is clear and certain that such faith alone justifies us, as St. Paul says in Romans 3, “For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom. 3:28), and again, “that he [God] himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26).<sup>116</sup>

**Formula of Concord Epitome III, 7**

We believe, teach, and confess that according to the usage of Scripture the word “**justify**” means in this article “absolve,” that is, pronounce free from sin.<sup>117</sup>

**Formula of Concord Epitome V, 5**

<sup>5</sup> **4.** But **the Gospel**, strictly speaking, is the kind of doctrine that teaches what a man who has not kept the law and is condemned by it should believe, namely, **that Christ has satisfied and paid for all guilt and without man’s merit has obtained and won for him forgiveness of sins**, the “righteousness that avails before God,” and eternal life.<sup>118</sup> [*Note: Christ won forgiveness of sins before faith; believe it!*]

**Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration II, 54 -- (Martin Chemnitz 1522-1585)**

<sup>54</sup> Through this means (namely, the preaching and the hearing of his Word) God is active, breaks our hearts, and draws man, so that through the preaching of the law man learns to know his sins and the wrath of God and experiences genuine terror, contrition, and sorrow in his heart, and through the preaching of and meditation upon the holy **Gospel of the gracious forgiveness of sins in Christ** there is kindled in him a spark of faith which accepts **the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake** and comforts itself with the promise of **the Gospel**. And in this way the Holy Spirit, who works all of this, is introduced into the heart.<sup>119</sup> [*Note: faith “accepts the forgiveness of sins” Jesus won before faith; it is received by faith.*]

**Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration III, 30** [*Both objective & subjective justification intertwined*]

<sup>30</sup> In order to afford saddened consciences dependable and reliable comfort and to give due honor to the merit of Christ and the grace of God, Scripture teaches that the righteousness of faith before God consists

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<sup>112</sup> Tappert, p. 415.

<sup>113</sup> Latin: “propter”; [Greek: διὰ + acc.] - underlined words inserted by this author. German: “um.”

<sup>114</sup> Tappert, p. 292.

<sup>115</sup> *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, p. 263.

<sup>116</sup> Tappert, p. 292.

<sup>117</sup> Tappert, p. 473.

<sup>118</sup> Tappert, p. 478.

<sup>119</sup> Tappert, p. 531.

solely in **a gracious reconciliation or the forgiveness of sins, which is bestowed upon us by pure grace because of the unique merit of Christ, the mediator**, and which we receive only by faith in the promise of **the Gospel**. Accordingly in justification before God faith trusts neither in contrition nor in love nor in other virtues, but **solely in Christ and (in him) in his perfect obedience** with which he fulfilled the law of God in our stead and which is reckoned to the believers as righteousness.<sup>120</sup>

*Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration III, 57 [Both universal and individual justification]*

<sup>57</sup> Since... it is the obedience of the entire person, therefore it is **a perfect satisfaction and reconciliation<sup>121</sup> of the human race**, since it satisfied the eternal and immutable righteousness of God revealed in the law.<sup>1</sup> This obedience is **our righteousness which avails before God and is revealed in the Gospel**, upon which faith depends before God and which God reckons to faith, as it is written, “For as by one man’s disobedience many will be made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19), and “the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7), and again, “The righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4).<sup>122</sup>

*Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration XI, 15*

<sup>15</sup> **1.** That **through Christ the human race has truly been redeemed and reconciled with God** and that **by his innocent obedience, suffering, and death Christ has earned for us “the righteousness which avails before God”** and eternal life.<sup>123</sup>

*Formula of Concord - Solid Declaration XI, 28*

“We must always firmly and rigidly insist that, like the proclamation of repentance, so **the promise of the gospel is universalis [universal], that is, it pertains to all people** (Luke 24[:47]). Therefore, Christ commanded preaching “repentance and **the forgiveness of sins** in his name to all nations.” “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” for it (John 3[:16]). **Christ has taken away the sins of the world<sup>124</sup>** (John 1[:29]);... his blood is the atoning sacrifice for... **the whole world**” (1 John 1[7; 2:2])... Therefore, Christ commanded that the promise of the gospel must be proclaimed to all those to whom repentance is preached (Luke 24[:47]; Mark 16[:15]).<sup>125</sup>

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## **APPENDIX A: A CATALOG OF TESTIMONIES**

*A selective collection of quotations on universal/objective justification*

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)– (see his Book of Concord quotations above)*

**Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it.** St. Paul says in Rom. 3[:3]: “[Does] their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God.” We are not talking here either about people’s belief or disbelief regarding the efficacy of the keys. We realize that few believe. We are speaking of what the keys accomplish and give. **He who does not accept what the keys give receives, of course, nothing.** But this is not the key’s fault. Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. **A king gives you a**

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<sup>120</sup> Tappert, p. 544.

<sup>121</sup> “so ist er eine vollkommene Genugtuung und Versöhnung des menschlichen Geschlechts;” “ideo ea est perfectissima pro humano genere satisfactio et expiatio”

<sup>122</sup> Tappert, p. 549-550.

<sup>123</sup> Tappert, p. 619.

<sup>124</sup> German: “Christus hat der Welt Sünde getragen” and Latin: “*Christus peccata mundi sustulit.*” [Perfect tense] The Formula of Concord apparently looked at Jn 1:29 from their/our perspective in time, but when John the Baptist spoke the words, from his perspective in time, it was still present and future.

<sup>125</sup> Robert Kolb & Timothy Wengert, “*The Book of Concord*,” p. 645 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).



**castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king's fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it.**<sup>126</sup>

We have discussed this matter among ourselves and do not see that the public, general absolution is to be censured or rejected, for the [following] reason[s]: The preaching of the holy gospel itself is principally and actually an absolution in which **forgiveness of sins is proclaimed** in general and in public to many persons, or publicly or privately to one person alone. Therefore absolution may be used in public and in general, and in special cases also in private, just as the sermon may take place publicly or privately, and as one might comfort many people in public or someone individually in private. Even if not all believe [the word of absolution], that is no reason to reject [public] absolution, for each absolution, whether administered publicly or privately, has to be understood as demanding faith and as being an aid to those who believe in it, just as **the gospel** itself also **proclaims forgiveness to all men in the whole world** and exempts no one from this universal context. Nevertheless the gospel certainly demands our faith and does not aid those who do not believe it; and yet the universal context of the gospel has to remain [valid]... This is the true office and task of the gospel: definitely to forgive sins by grace.<sup>127</sup>

*When He made purification for sins, [He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high].* With this brief word he makes useless absolutely all the righteousnesses and deeds of penitence of men. But he praises the exceedingly great mercy of God, namely, that “**He made purification for sins,**” not through us but through Himself, not for the sins of others but for our sins. Therefore we should despair of our penitence, of our purification from sins; for **before we repent, our sins have already been forgiven.** Indeed, first His very purification, on the contrary, also produces penitence in us, just as His righteousness produces our righteousness. This is what Is. 53:6 says: “All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”<sup>128</sup>

It is expressly stated here that **Christ came and removed the sin of the world so completely that it is entirely deleted, entirely forgiven.**<sup>129</sup>

Now when the Lord departs with the words “**It is accomplished,**” He means by this that all Scripture has now been fulfilled, as if to say, “The world and devil have done all that they could to Me, and so I have suffered all that was needful for the redemption of humanity, all that was prophesied and proclaimed in Scripture through the prophets. Thus everything is fulfilled and accomplished. We should note well that Christ's suffering is the fulfillment of Scripture and the accomplishment of the redemption of the human race. **It is accomplished: the Lamb of God is slain and offered for the sins of the world** [John 1:29; Rev. 13:8]. The true High Priest has completed His offering [Heb. 10:12ff.]; the Son of God has given and offered up His body and life as a payment for sin; **sin has been blotted out; God's wrath appeased**; death overcome; the kingdom of heaven won and heaven opened.<sup>130</sup>

This is the most joyous of all doctrines and the one that contains the most comfort. It teaches that we have the indescribable and inestimable mercy and love of God. When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we could not be liberated from it by anything, He sent His Son into the world, **heaped all the sins**

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<sup>126</sup> *Luther's Works, Vol. 40: Church and Ministry II*, pp. 366-67 (Fortress, 1958). Bold print mine.

<sup>127</sup> *LW, Vol. 50: Letters III*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>128</sup> *LW, Vol. 29: Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews*, pp. 112-113 (Heb 1:3; CPH, 1968).

<sup>129</sup> *LW, Vol. 22: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1-4*, p. 383 (Jn 3:16).

<sup>130</sup> *LW, Vol. 69: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 17-20*, pp. 264-265 (Jn 19:30).

**of all men upon Him**, and said to Him: “Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer, and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that You pay and make satisfaction for them.” Now the Law comes and says: “I find Him a sinner, who takes upon Himself the sins of all men. I do not see any other sins than those in Him. Therefore let Him die on the cross!” And so it attacks Him and kills Him. By this deed **the whole world is purged and expiated** [*gereinigt und gesühnt*] **from all sins**, and thus it is set free from death and from every evil. But when sin and death have been abolished by this one man, God does not want to see anything else in the whole world, especially if it were to believe, except sheer cleansing and righteousness... If **the sins of the entire world** are on that one man, Jesus Christ, then they are not on the world. But if they are not on Him, then they are still on the world. Again, if Christ Himself is made guilty of **all the sins that we have all committed**, then we are **absolved** [*or “acquitted” - freigesprochen*] **from all sins**, not through ourselves or through our own works or merits but **through Him**. But if He is innocent and does not carry our sins, then we carry them and shall die and be damned in them. “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ Amen.” (1 Cor. 15:57.)<sup>131</sup>

Yes, He assumes not only my sins but also those of the whole world, from Adam down to the very last mortal. These sins He takes upon Himself; for these He is willing to suffer and die that our sins may be expunged and we may attain eternal life and blessedness... Anyone who wishes to be saved must know that all his sins have been placed on the back of this Lamb! Therefore John points this Lamb out to his disciples, saying: “Do you want to know where the sins of the world are placed for forgiveness? Then don’t resort to the Law of Moses or betake yourselves to the devil; there, to be sure, you will find sins, but sins to terrify you and damn you. But if you really want to find a place **where the sins of the world are exterminated and deleted**, then cast your gaze upon the cross. The Lord placed all our sins on the back of this Lamb.”<sup>132</sup>

(*On Romans 4:25*) Through His death He has made satisfaction for sin, and through His resurrection He has brought us righteousness. And thus **His death** not only signifies but **actually effects the remission of sin** as a most sufficient satisfaction.<sup>133</sup>

We should **preach** also **forgiveness of sins** in his name... **The Gospel** should be preached, which **declares unto all the world that in Christ the sins of [“all”; aller Welt] the world are swallowed up, and that he suffered death to put away [“take away”; hinweg nehme] sin from us and [“therefore” darum] arose to devour it and blot it out.** All this he did that whoever believeth, should have the comfort and assurance, that it is reckoned unto him even as if he himself had done it; that his work is mine and thine and all men’s.<sup>134</sup>

Finally we should hold most firmly to this, that no one is or becomes righteous before God except **through the blood of Jesus Christ**... We gain salvation solely because of the righteousness of God, and it is because of this righteousness that we are saved.<sup>135</sup>

When the Divine Majesty thinks about me that **I am righteous**, that **my sins have been forgiven**, that **I am free from eternal death**, and when I gratefully grasp this thought of God about me in

<sup>131</sup> *LW, Vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535*, p. 280 (Ga 3:13; CPH, 1963).

<sup>132</sup> *LW, Vol. 22*: pp. 162-163 (Jn 1:29).

<sup>133</sup> *LW, Vol. 25*: p. 284.

<sup>134</sup> (St. L., XI, p. 693, § 36). *Sermons of Martin Luther: The Church Postils*, ed., J. Lenker, vol 2, p. 316 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>135</sup> *LW, Vol. 30*, p. 228.

faith, then I am truly righteous, not through my works but through faith, with which I grasp the divine thought. For God's thought is infallible truth. Therefore when I grasp it with a firm thought—not with an uncertain and wavering opinion—I am righteous. For faith is the firm and sure thought or trust that **through Christ God is propitious and that through Christ His thoughts concerning us are thoughts of peace**, not of affliction or wrath. God's thought or promise, and faith, by which I take hold of God's promise—these belong together.<sup>136</sup> \*

\* *Note: Stoeckhardt quoted this and explained: "According to Luther, it is **not** the case that man believes and God then thinks that he is righteous, but just the opposite, so that **the divine Majesty thinks that I am righteous, that my sins are forgiven**, and that I then lay hold of and grasp these thoughts of God with my thoughts in faith; if I do that, then I am truly righteous."*<sup>137</sup>

Here's J. P. Meyer's translation of the same Luther quote as above (**bold is Prof. Meyer's here**):  
**Since the divine Majesty does indeed judge concerning me that I am righteous**, that my sins have been forgiven me, that I am free from eternal death, and since I on my part in faith, with the giving of thanks, lay hold of this judgment of God concerning myself, I verily am righteous, not by my works, but by faith, **through which I lay hold of the divine judgment**.<sup>138</sup>

**Martin Chemnitz (1522-1585)** – (See his **Formula of Concord** quotations above)

And so the church sings: "When **Christ** our Passover was sacrificed, for He is the true Lamb, who **has taken away the sins of the world**, who in dying destroyed our death," etc.<sup>139</sup>

God, before the worlds were made and before the foundations of the earth were laid [1 Peter 1:20], when He foresaw the misery which would befall the human race, out of pure grace, mercy, and love made the decree concerning the sending of His Son as the Mediator, that He might be the Victim and the Propitiation, 2 Tim. 1:9 and Titus 1:2. And in Him He chose and predestined us, Eph. 1:4–5. He demonstrated His love toward us, whereby in the fulness of time He sent forth His only-begotten Son and delivered Him up for all, Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9. Luke 1:78 and 54: "through the bowels of His mercy ... in remembrance of His mercy." John 3:16: **God accepted the sacrifice of His Son as satisfaction and propitiation for the sins of the whole world**. 1 John 4:10 and 1 Cor. 1:30: He was made for us by God our redemption, righteousness, etc. 2 Cor. 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."<sup>140</sup>

*In a review of a translation of Chemnitz's writing on Justification, Prof. Wilbert Gawriscch wrote:*

At the time of Melancthon and Chemnitz, the terms *objective justification* and *subjective justification*, around which considerable controversy currently swirls, were not, of course, in use. Chemnitz nevertheless teaches what is now known as objective justification when he writes, "**God accepted the sacrifice of His Son as satisfaction and propitiation for the sins of the whole world**" (p 182). Subjective justification likewise is referred to by him without the use of the term when he speaks of "receiving or laying hold on these blessings, by which we apply to ourselves these good things offered in the Gospel, so that we are made participants or sharers in them.... Faith alone ... is the means for this application" (p 188).<sup>141</sup>

<sup>136</sup> LW, Vol. 3: p. 21-22.

<sup>137</sup> G. Stoeckhardt, *Römerbrief: Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer*, p. 278 (CPH, 1907). -- Translated by Pastor James L. Langebartels.

<sup>138</sup> Joh. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, p. 102-103 (NPH, 1963)

<sup>139</sup> Martin Chemnitz (tr., Fred Kramer), *Examination of the Council of Trent*, vol. 2, p. 470 (CPH, 1978). (*also see FC, SD XI, 28 above, TLH and CW below in this paper.*)

<sup>140</sup> Martin Chemnitz (tr., J.A.O. Preus), *Loci Theologici*, vol 2, pp. 548-49 (Concordia Publishing House, 1989). Bold, underlining is mine.

<sup>141</sup> WLQ, vol. 84, p. 240. (bold is mine; the book was: *Justification, The Chief Article of Christian Doctrine as Expounded in Loci Theologici*, by Martin Chemnitz, tr. J.A.O. Preus. St. Louis: Concordia, 1985.)

*Note: Chemnitz often writes of justification by faith, but while doing so, he weaves in the truths of objective justification without calling it that. The Bible passages he cites makes it plain that he is writing of the universality of Christ's objective work.*

With respect to us, this righteousness and salvation is and is called free grace, which comes to us without either our works or merits and without any payment or satisfaction from us.

But with respect to Christ the Redeemer it is and is called redemption, *lytron* [in Greek], or satisfaction, something bought or merited. Ro 3:24; 1 Co 6:20; 1 Ptr 1:18–19; 1 Ti 2:6; Acts 20:28.

**143** *And What Kind of Satisfaction Does the Law Require that Christ Had to Render for Us?*

I. The Law requires complete, holy, pure, and perfect obedience. This Christ rendered fully and perfectly for us. Ro 5:19; Heb 10:9–10, 14.

II. The Law requires satisfaction for sins, **that by passion and punishment divine wrath might be satisfied. And Christ accomplished this satisfaction for us by His passion and death.** 2 Co 5:14; Gl 3:13; Is 53:5–6.

And in this way Christ obtained this for us, that by His redemption we are **justified freely, or by grace, without our merit.** Ro 3:24.<sup>142</sup>

*Comment: “It is the bad habit of those who quote the fathers in defense of their wrong headed position that like so many they read history backwards. They start with the mistaken assumption that the confessors dealt with the problem they are dealing with and then read into them their own assumptions. The simple fact is that they saw no big distinction between objective and subjective justification; they treat as one doctrine viewed from two different perspectives, not as two entirely different objects of consideration. And that's why you're not going to find an abundance of citations that dwell on a distinction they never thought worth making in the way that some do now... The Confessions most often join the two doctrines, often beautifully in one sentence.” – Professor emeritus Daniel Deuschlander<sup>143</sup>*

### **Johann Gerhard (1582-1637)**

“By raising Christ from the dead the Father **absolved** him from our sins which had been imputed to him, and therefore he also absolved us in him, so that in this way **the resurrection of Christ** might be the cause and guarantee and completion of our justification.”<sup>144</sup>

In the fact that the Scriptures on frequent occasions ascribe the resurrection of Christ to the Father lies hidden a noteworthy comfort. **God had hurled all our sin upon His Son and poured out all His wrath all over Him—which wrath would otherwise have gone out over the entire world...** Now then, since this heavenly Father brings forth again His Son, who had paid for our sin, from the grave with such great glory, note that this is a most certain testimony and indication that **He has been thoroughly and completely pacified**, so that **no longer does iniquity endure**, and sin is sealed shut and **transgression is atoned for**, and eternal righteousness has been brought forth... **God is at peace** with our debt.<sup>145</sup>

“Accordingly this is to be understood concerning the power and the effect of the death of Christ, that namely **all men**, thus from the beginning of the world up to this hour **have been reconciled**

<sup>142</sup> Martin Chemnitz (L. Poellot tr.), *Ministry, Word, and Sacraments: An Enchiridion*, p. 72 (CPH, 1981).

<sup>143</sup> Correspondence 3/25/13.

<sup>144</sup> *Annotationes in Epist. ad Romanos*, p 156; quoted in WLS Dogmatics Notes

<sup>145</sup> Johann Gerhard, *Postilla*, (E. Hohle, tr.) p. 311 (Malone, TX: Center for the Study of Lutheran Orthodoxy, 2001).

**with God** and received in grace, [and] in the slaughter of this Lamb must seek and find the same.”<sup>146</sup>

“**In the resurrection of Christ we were absolved from our sins** so that they might no longer be able to condemn us before the judgment seat of God.”<sup>147</sup>

This power of the **resurrection of Christ** includes not only the application of the righteousness that avails before God, but also **the actual absolution from sins**, and even the blessed resurrection to life, since by virtue of the resurrection of Christ we are freed from the corporal and spiritual death of sins. Some bring in here the apostolic teaching in 1 Timothy 3:16, *God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit* (namely through the resurrection by God the Father) that is, **he was absolved of the sins of the whole world**, which he as Sponsor took upon himself, so that he might make perfect satisfaction for them to God the Father. Moreover in rising from the dead he showed by this very fact that satisfaction has been made by him for these sins, and all of the same have been expiated by the sacrifice of his death.<sup>148</sup>

#### **Abraham Calov (1612-1686)**

If Christ had remained in death, he would not have been the conqueror of death nor would he have been able to make our own the righteousness bought for us at such high cost... With respect to the **actual absolution from sin**: Just as God in Christ punished our sins, which were laid on him or imputed to him as our substitute, so also **by raising him from the dead he by that very fact absolved him from our sins which were imputed to him, and therefore he also absolved us in him.**<sup>149</sup>

**C.F. W. Walther (1811-1887)**: *Walther preached “universal, objective justification,” but he was careful to preach “individual, subjective justification” too. This is from one of Walther’s Easter sermons:*

**Christ’s resurrection**, therefore, was nothing else than the actual testimony which God the Father gave before heaven and earth, before angels and men, that all the demands of the eternal divine righteousness had now been fully met by Him. It means that the debt... had now actually been paid by Him to the last farthing, and that **the punishment... had now been thoroughly removed by Christ** to the very last stripe. It means that **Christ is now free and forever declared loosed from all the debt and punishment which He had assumed. In one word, it means that He is absolved. Since it was all mankind in whose place and for whom Christ suffered, died and made payment, who was it, then, that was absolved in and through Christ’s Person when the eternal Judge set Him at liberty? It was... all mankind... Christ’s acquittal [was] the acquittal of all men, Christ’s justification the justification of all men, Christ’s absolution the absolution of all men...** Many a one among us is perhaps thinking: Are you saying that God has already in Christ absolved all men...? – And yet it is so, dear friends... **God the Father, in raising Jesus Christ from the dead, has already absolved all men from all their sins...** Remove this comfort from the Scriptures, and all its other doctrines become empty husks that have no comfort... **God has already forgiven you your sins... when**

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<sup>146</sup> Translated by D. Deutschlander from: *Postille, erster Theil*, verfasset durch Johann Gerhard, herausgegeben und verlegt von Gustav Schlawitz, Berlin, 1870, S. [page] 368 [Ostertag V Predigt on 1 Cor. 5:7-8]. “*Darnach ist diess zu verstehen von der Kraft und Wirkung des Todes Christi, dass nehmlich alle Menschen, so von Anfang der Welt bis auf diese Stunde mit Gott versöhnet und zu Gnaden angenommen sind, in der Erwürgung dieses Lämmleins dasselbe suchen und finden müssen.*” Also in the English edition: Johann Gerhard, *Postilla*, p. 340.

<sup>147</sup> *Disputationes theologicae*, XX, p 1450; quoted in WLS Dogmatics Notes

<sup>148</sup> Translated by Jon D. Buchholz, “Jesus Canceled Your Debt!” p. 10. Johann Gerhard, *Disputationes Theologicae* (Jena, 1656) p. 1450. (Bold, underlining is mine on the phrase: “*absolutus a peccatis totius mundi.*”)

<sup>149</sup> *Biblia Illustrata*, on Ro 4:25; quoted in WLS Dogmatics Notes

**He in Christ absolved all men by raising Him after He first had gone into bitter death for them...** Every man who wants to be saved must accept by faith the general absolution... Please understand that likewise the poor world has **no benefit** from the fact that God through Christ's resurrection has already absolved the world entirely from all its sins **as long as it continues in its unbelief...** Every one of us must learn to say from the heart: I, too, am absolved. The forgiveness of sins is mine. God has declared also me free from all my guilt... Praise God! There is forgiveness also for me! And, dear friends, let me add this: **The general absolution which God has already pronounced upon all men must not only be accepted in faith by every individual person if he would be saved, but this can take place in no other way than by faith alone.**<sup>150</sup>

On what doctrinal basis does the Lutheran practice of **absolution** rest? On the following facts:—

1. Christ, the Son of God, took upon Himself by imputation all sins of every sinner, counting them as His own. Accordingly, John the Baptist, pointing to Christ, says: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” John 1:29.

2. By His life in abject poverty, by His suffering, crucifixion, and death, **Christ has wiped out the record of the world's sin and procured remission of all sins.** No man living, from Adam to the last human being that will be born, is excepted from this plan. For St. Paul writes, 2 Cor. 5:21: “God hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Even Isaiah, chap. 53:5: “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.” And even in an Old Testament prophecy still earlier than that of Isaiah we hear the Messiah wail: “I restored that which I took not away.” Ps. 69:4.

3. By raising His Son Jesus Christ from the dead, God the Father confirmed, and put the stamp of approval on, the work of reconciliation and redemption which Christ finished on the cross. For by the resurrection of Christ He has, in the presence of heaven and earth, angels and men, declared: “As My Son has cried on the cross, ‘It is finished,’ so do I announce, It is finished indeed! Ye sinners are redeemed. **Forgiveness of sins is prepared for everybody; it is ready;** it must not first be acquired by you.”

4. By His command to **preach the Gospel** to every creature, Christ commanded at the same time **to preach forgiveness of sins to all men,** hence to bring to them the glad tidings: “All that is necessary for your salvation **has been accomplished.** When asking, What must we do to be saved? do but remember that **all has been done.** There is nothing more to do. You are only to believe all that has been done for you, and you will be relieved.”<sup>151</sup>

If Christ were not risen, we could not administer absolution; for on what would we base it? Not until **God the Father had acknowledged the work of Christ's reconciliation and redemption,** not until **He had absolved Christ, and in Him all men, by raising Christ from the dead,** have we mortals become justified in saying to a fellow-man: “Be of good cheer, **all thy sins are forgiven** and their record is wiped out. Only believe!” This declaration is based on the fact that God the Father has glorified Christ, our Proxy, and therewith has proclaimed in the presence of heaven and earth that **all men are redeemed and reconciled and their sins forgiven...** The removal of sins is not based on a mysterious power of the pastor, but on the fact that **Christ has taken away the sins of the world long ago** and that everybody is to tell this fact to his fellow-men.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> C. F. W. Walther, “*The Word of His Grace*,” ELS tr., p. 229ff. (ELS Bd for Publications, 1978). Easter sermon.

<sup>151</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, p. 169 (Dau tr., CPH, 1929/1986).

<sup>152</sup> C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, p. 186-187 (Dau tr., CPH, 1929/1986).

**Georg Stoeckhardt, (1842–1913) *General Justification (1888) and Commentary on Romans (1907)***

Genuine Lutheran theology counts the doctrine of **general justification** among the statements and treasures of its faith. Lutherans teach and confess that through Christ's death **the entire world of sinners was justified** and through Christ's resurrection the justification of the sinful world was festively proclaimed. This doctrine of general justification is the guarantee and warranty that the central article of justification by faith is being kept pure. Whoever holds firmly that **God was reconciled to the world in Christ**, and that to sinners in general **their sin was forgiven**, to him the justification which comes from faith remains a pure act of the grace of God. **Whoever denies general justification is justly under suspicion that he is mixing his own work and merit into the grace of God.**<sup>153</sup> [Note the danger in denying objective justification!]

*Note: I highly recommend Stoeckhardt's article, "General Justification," to better understand that today's controversy is not really new.*

*Special thanks to Pastor James L. Langebartels for translating key portions of Stoeckhardt's classic commentary on Romans for use in this paper.*

[*Commentary on Romans 4:25*] The righteousness which avails before God was established and prepared already through the death, the bloody atonement of Christ, as we have demonstrated above in detail. If people's sin has really been atoned for, made amends for in God's sight, and annulled, then people are by that justified before God. Both the atonement and the justification, which materially coincide, are then confirmed and sealed through the resurrection of Christ. Since God raised Jesus from the dead, he has in fact declared that the death of Jesus has fulfilled its goal, that sin has been atoned for, that he has accepted the atonement, and thus the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—this glorious victory over death and sin—is also at the same time the actual, solemn, formal absolution which God has pronounced on sinful people. Just as the atonement for sin is, so this verdict of justification is universal and applies to the whole world of sinners.<sup>154</sup>

**STOECKHARDT'S COMMENTARY ON ROMANS 5:18-19: *Universal Justification.***<sup>155</sup>

- "This passage, Romans 5:18,19, is the *locus classicus* [classic place/passage] for the doctrine of universal or the so-called objective justification. The apostle teaches and testifies in clear words that this has resulted in the justification of life for all people, that the many—that is, all people—are put down as righteous before God... All people have been justified and absolved from all their transgressions."<sup>156</sup> (p. 262)
- "Faith is not mentioned with one syllable." (p. 262)
- "Christ's righteousness and obedience has resulted in a verdict of justification for all people." (p. 263)
- "We explained above that for him justification is identical to the forgiveness of sins... Thus God has in Christ already forgiven the whole world all their sins. The whole Pauline doctrine of justification and especially all comfort from justification stands and falls with this special article of universal justification. Thus it is altogether clear and obvious that justification is completely independent of people's conduct. That is the only way in which an individual can become certain

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<sup>153</sup> Concordia Theological Quarterly, Vol 42, #2, pp. 139ff; Lehre und Wehre XXXIV, 6 (June, 1888), "Die allgemeine Rechtfertigung." <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/stoeckhardtgeneraljustification.pdf>

<sup>154</sup> Translated for this paper by James L. Langebartels, from: Georg Stoeckhardt, *Römerbrief: Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer*, p. 214 (CPH, 1907).

<sup>155</sup> Each of the following quotations come from: Stoeckhardt, *Römerbrief*, (CPH, 1907) – Special thanks to Pastor James L. Langebartels, who translated a portion of this commentary for this paper. Latin/Greek expressions were explained for this audience by this author. Page numbers following each of the quotations are from the German text.

<sup>156</sup> Stoeckhardt, *Römerbrief*, (CPH, 1907) – (Ad hoc translation by James L. Langebartels).

of his justification. This is the convincing conclusion: If God has in Christ already justified all people and forgiven their sins, then I also have in Christ a gracious God and the forgiveness of all my sins. Furthermore, the apostle's whole doctrinal statement on the '*righteousness of God*' [δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ], which was established through Christ and is offered to people in the Gospel as a finished gift, implicitly includes in itself just this that the verdict of God labeled '*righteousness of God*' [δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ] applies to all people in common." (p. 264)

- **“Just as Adam’s sin resulted in the condemnation of death for all people, so Christ’s righteousness has resulted in the justification of life for all people.** This sentence is the brief summary of the second half of the chapter.” (p. 270)
- “Paul used '*reconciled*' [καταλλαγέντες] and '*justified*' [δικαιωθέντες] as synonymous expressions (Ro 5:9,10). However, the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the solemn, public declaration of righteousness and absolution which God pronounced on the sinful world and through which he sealed the effect of Christ's death (Ro 4:24,25). Yes, Christ's *righteousness* [δικαίωμα], has already resulted in the justification of life for all people (Ro 5:18).” (p. 273)

Stoeckhardt also taught subjective justification or justification by faith.

- “verse 17... the believers... will in the future, in fact, '*reign in life,*' so that all those who accept the gift of righteousness in faith and so personally share in it, or what is the same, all those who appropriate to themselves and make use of the verdict of justification pronounced in Christ over the whole world of sinners and proclaimed in the gospel will finally in fact be saved.” (p. 263)
- “The justifying power of faith lies only and alone in its object... Faith must have something to which it holds, on which it relies... Faith lays hold of Christ and His merit.” (p. 272-273)
- “Through faith we appropriate to our own persons the verdict of justification which God has pronounced on the ungodly in general (Ro 4:5,24,25).” (p. 274)

Stoeckhardt pointed out a false teaching that still is lurking around today.

- “The moderns vaporize and depreciate the concepts of redemption and reconciliation, since they present the matter as if with redemption only the possibility of justification and the forgiveness of sins has been provided, a possibility which then becomes reality only first later when faith begins. No, we are redeemed through Christ's death and blood, which means that we have really been set free from sin, guilt, and the punishment for sin. Sin is atoned for through Christ's blood, Christ is the atonement cover by virtue of his blood, which means that sin is concealed from God's eyes, so that God no longer sees it, no longer looks at it, nor ascribes it to man. We are reconciled to God through the death of his Son, so that God now has nothing more against us... With his death and blood Christ has not only earned, but also brought about and set up the righteousness which avails before God and the forgiveness of sins.” (p. 273)
- “Later Lutheran dogmaticians and similarly most modern Lutherans distinguish, as far as the object of faith is concerned, between the... merit of Christ and the justification... They teach that only the first and not the second is offered in the Word and grasped by faith. Justification, then, only happens when the person has accepted Christ's merit in faith. In this way, the real, decisive verdict of God is separated from the Word, made uncertain, and the idea stirred up that the act of man in laying hold of Christ causes God's act of justification.” (p. 275)
- “On the other hand, the genuine Lutheran doctrine, which we find in Luther and the Lutheran theologians of the sixteenth century, especially in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church, is in all points the faithful reproduction of the Pauline doctrine of justification. *The Apology Article IV* and *the Formula of Concord Article III* throughout coordinate the grace of God, the merit of Christ, reconciliation with God, the forgiveness of sins, and the righteousness which avails before God; they have these benefits grasped together in the Word and by faith.” (p. 275)



- Stoeckhardt quoted the Formula of Concord: “*The Holy Spirit offers these treasures to us in the promise of the Gospel, and faith is the only means whereby we can apprehend, accept, apply them to ourselves, and make them our own.*”<sup>157</sup> Then Stoeckhardt wrote: “So, the previously mentioned benefits—Christ’s merit and obedience, justification, absolution...—are presented to us in the Gospel and appropriated to us by faith.” (p. 276)

**Adolf Hoenecke, (1835–1908) “Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics” (1912):**

Justification is an action of God that occurs in time and especially to each individual sinner. But **there is also an objective justification, which happened to all people in time, specifically in Christ’s suffering and resurrection** (Ro 5:18; 2 Co 5:19; Ro 4:25). Our dogmaticians do not treat objective justification especially but only incidentally. Gerhard writes... “When he brought him (Christ) out of death, he acquitted him of our sins imputed to him, and consequently also absolved us in him, so that Christ’s resurrection is the cause and proof and completion of our justification. Because in Christ’s resurrection we are acquitted of our sins, so that they can no longer condemn us before the judgment of God.” ... **Emphasizing objective justification is necessary in order to preserve the real content of the gospel.**<sup>158</sup>

**J. Ylvisaker, (1845–1917) “The Gospels,” (1905 Norwegian / 1932 English)**

Rom. 4:25... The resurrection is the Father’s Amen to the words of the Son on the cross: “It is finished.” The blood of the sacrificial Lamb was accepted by the Father as an efficacious atonement. But it was for us Christ had paid on the cross. Therefore, **His resurrection is the judgment of acquittal for the world** (Rom. 5:16ff), and Christ has become the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Cor. 15:20).<sup>159</sup>

**A. L. Graebner, (1849–1904) “Outlines of Doctrinal Theology” (CPH, 1910) – [Born in Frankentrost, MI; NWC Professor, Watertown, WI, 1875; WLS Prof. Milwaukee, 1878]**

§ 148. The chief benefit of Christ’s vicarious obedience is the perfect righteousness obtained by Christ for all mankind, the acquisition of which God accepted as a reconciliation of the world to Himself, imputing to mankind the merit of the Mediator – general or objective justification --; and inasmuch as faith is the actual acceptance of this imputation announced in the Gospel, or of the righteousness imputed and offered in the Gospel, it is justifying faith, and God in His judgment graciously and for Christ’s sake holds and pronounces the believer actually and by personal application fully absolved from all guilt and punishment while in the state of faith – individual or subjective justification. (p. 189-190)

**John Schaller, (1859–1920) “Redemption and Universal Justification According to Second Corinthians 5:18–21” (WLQ German, 1910; WLQ English translation by Gerald Hoenecke, 1975).**

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... For us it is unquestionably certain that **universal, objective justification is a doctrine of Scripture**. However, our opponents through their bold

<sup>157</sup> Solid Declaration, III, 10 -- quoted here from Tappert, p. 541.

<sup>158</sup> A. Hoenecke, (translated by James Langebartels), vol 3, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, pp. 337-338 (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2003). German: *Ev.-Luth. Dogmatik*, Band III, pp. 354-355 (NPH, 1912). “allgemeine Rechtfertigung... über alle Menschen.” [allgemeine could be rendered “general” or “universal”]

<sup>159</sup> p. 764, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1932; reprinted by NPH, 1977)

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.**<sup>160</sup>

*A Short Exposition of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (CPH, 1912; Synodical Conference):

196. How does God forgive sins? He does not impute their sins to sinners, or, in other words, He declares sinners righteous. (Justification). 2 Cor 5:21; Rom 8:33

197. Who receives this forgiveness? **Although it has been procured for all men, and is offered by the Gospel to all that hear it,** yet only those who believe the Gospel and thus accept the forgiveness of sins actually become partakers of such forgiveness. 2 Cor 5:19; Gen 15:6; Rom 4:5

*Franz Pieper (1852-1931), "Christian Dogmatics" (1917):*

But this "wondrous" justice of justification by faith is based on that "wondrous" fact that God has reconciled the world unto Himself by Christ's vicarious satisfaction, that in His heart He has forgiven their sins and offers this forgiveness, this righteousness, in the Gospel. **One cannot present the doctrine of justification by faith without constant reference to the universal, objective justification.**<sup>161</sup>

Now, then, if **the Father raised Christ from the dead,** He, by this glorious resurrection act, **declared that the sins of the whole world are fully expiated, or atoned for, and that all mankind is now regarded as righteous** before His divine tribunal. This gracious reconciliation and justification is clearly taught in Rom. 4:25: "Who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." The term δικαίωσις here means the act of divine justification executed through God's act of raising Christ from the dead, and it is for this reason called the **objective justification of all mankind.** This truth Dr. Walther stressed anew in America. He taught that **the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the actual absolution pronounced upon all sinners.** To refer the words: "Who was raised again for our justification," to the so-called subjective justification, which takes place by faith, not only weakens the force of the words, but also violates the context. Calov, following Gerhard, rightly points out the relation of Christ's resurrection to our justification as follows: "Christ's resurrection took place as an actual absolution from sin (*respectu actualis a peccato absolutionis*). As God punished our sins in Christ, upon whom He laid them and to whom He imputed them, as our Bondsman, so He also, by the very act of raising Him from the dead, absolved Him from our sins imputed to Him, and so He absolved also us in Him."<sup>162</sup>

An essential prerequisite of justification by faith, or of subjective justification, is **the objective justification (the reconciliation) of all mankind. If God had not in His heart justified the whole world because of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, and if this justification were not offered in the Gospel, there could not be a justification by faith.** All those who deny the

<sup>160</sup> WLQ, vol. 72, p. 309-310.

<sup>161</sup> F. Pieper, vol. 2, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 505 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953).

<sup>162</sup> F. Pieper, vol. 2, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 321 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953).

objective justification (the objective reconciliation) will, if they would be consistent, also deny that subjective justification is brought about by faith; they will have to regard faith as a complement of Christ's merit—a human achievement. But **objective reconciliation** is the clear teaching of Scripture. Also our Lutheran Confessions base justification by faith on the fact that **God is reconciled with the world and offers the forgiveness of sins as a gift (*res promissa*) in the Gospel**. Apology: “When we believe that **God, for Christ's sake, is reconciled to us**, we are justified freely by faith.” “Remission of sins is something promised for Christ's sake. Therefore it cannot be received except by faith alone. For a promise cannot be received except by faith alone.”<sup>163</sup>

**Carl Gausewitz, (1861–1928) “Luther's Catechism” (1917, 1956) –**

Q. 206 Of what does the resurrection of Christ assure you?

A. That Christ is the Son of God;

**B. That He did redeem and justify me before God;**

- John 20:19-28. The risen Christ bestows peace and proclaims remission of sin.
- Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:17.

C. That He will also raise me up from death.

*Note: A few deny that Gausewitz teaches Objective Justification. With the past tense in letter “B” and the explanation on John 20, combined with the Roman 4:25 reference, he seems to teach similar to Gerhard and Calov. He was a student of A. L. Graebner and A. Hoenecke, and served side-by-side with J. Schaller. It seems inconceivable that they would have disagreed on justification. In fact, J. Schaller's WLQ review of Gausewitz's Catechism commended it for the way that the Gospel predominated. Rather, it seems that Gausewitz is intent on making the one doctrine of Justification (objective + subjective), very personal for students. See what Martin Franzmann wrote about this idea in 1950, below.*

A. 254. “The most precious gift is **the forgiveness of sins or the righteousness of Christ**, by which we are **justified before God. (Justification.)**”

*Note: “Again it is not explicit, but I think the notion of some that writers like Gausewitz ever talked about subjective justification without thinking about objective justification, or about objective justification without thinking about subjective justification, would strike him as very strange. They never disassociate one from the other. Gausewitz, far from denying objective justification, seems everywhere in the Catechism to assume it. He did not need to rebut deniers of objective justification because he assumed people in the Synodical Conference accepted it. I learned and taught objective justification from this catechism.” -- Professor John F. Brug<sup>164</sup>*

**Paul Kretzmann, (1883–1965) “Popular Commentary” (1921-1924): on Romans 5:18**

Paul now takes up the thread of the argument which he introduced in v.12. He introduces the inference from the whole discussion with “wherefore.” As by the trespass of one the result for all men was condemnation, so through the righteousness of One the result for all men is justification of life. When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, it was a single act of disobedience; but as the consequence of that one trespass the sentence of condemnation has been passed upon all men. On the other hand, the righteousness of Christ, His fulfilling all the demands of the righteousness of the Law, has resulted in the fact that **all men are declared to be righteous**... For just as through the disobedience of the one man many, all men, were presented before God as sinners, so also through the obedience of One all men are presented as just and righteous. First the disobedience of Adam was imputed to all men: God looked upon them as disobedient on account of the sin of

<sup>163</sup> F. Pieper, vol. 2, *Christian Dogmatics*, p. 508; (*Trigl.* 147, Art. IV [II], 87; 145, *ibid.*, 84).

<sup>164</sup> Correspondence 3/25/13

Adam; but then came Christ with His perfect obedience for all men, with His complete fulfillment of the Law, and through this vicarious obedience the many, all men, are placed in the rank, in the category of just and righteous people. In this way **Christ earned righteousness for all men; the objective justification concerns the whole world**: every person without exception belongs to the number of those for whom the benefit of Christ's work has been obtained. Of the fact that this **objective justification actually becomes the property of the individual person by faith**, Paul speaks elsewhere: but here we have the full comfort of the assurance that the righteousness of Christ was sufficient to place all men in the class of those for whom the obstacles of their salvation have been removed and full righteousness obtained.<sup>165</sup>

**Paul Kretzmann, (1883–1965) “Popular Commentary” (1921-1924): on 2 Corinthians 5:18-21**

**He reconciled all mankind to Himself through Christ.** It was God Himself that planned the salvation, the atonement of mankind through the sacrifice of Christ. All men were, by their own fault, His enemies and wanted nothing of Him. But since His righteousness and holiness would therefore have been obliged to condemn them to everlasting punishment, He found this way by which the enmity might be removed and the friendly relations intended by Him in the beginning be established. **This reconciliation was brought about by Christ for all men, by His vicarious work; it is a historical fact.** And now the second act of God's mercy comes into consideration, namely, that he has given to the apostle and his fellow-workers, to the ministers of the Gospel at all times, **the ministry of the reconciliation**, He has entrusted to them the office of **proclaiming the fact of the reconciliation of all men, the fact that God is actually reconciled to all men through Christ**. The business of the Gospel-ministry, then, is only one, namely, to make known the existing reconciliation and thus to urge men to believe in Christ.<sup>166</sup>

**Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod (CPH, 1932).**

Scripture teaches that **God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ**, Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Rom. 4:25; that therefore not for the sake of their good works, but without the works of the Law, by grace, for Christ's sake, He justifies, accounts as righteous, all those who believe in Christ, that is, believe, accept, and rely on, the fact that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven. (Rom. 3:23, 24, 28).

**E. W. A. Koehler, (1875–1951) “A Summary of Christian Doctrine” (1939):**

The fruit of Christ's redemption is not that He merely opened for man the way to reconciliation with God, and that God is now ready and willing to forgive sins, pending certain conditions man must first fulfill. The fruit of Christ's redemption is that Christ actually did effect a reconciliation, that God does no longer impute sins, but **has in His heart forgiven all sins to all men**. On the part of God **reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins is not a mere possibility, but an accomplished fact, an objective reality**, which is not affected by the personal attitude of man (Rom. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:13). **By His vicarious active and passive obedience Christ paid for the sins of all men, and God, accepting this payment, has in His heart forgiven all sins of all men**. There is not a soul in all the world which God has not already absolved from all sin. This is called **objective or universal justification**. “Objective justification may be defined as God's declaration of amnesty to the world of sinners on the basis of the vicarious obedience of Christ, by which He secured a perfect righteousness for all mankind, which God accepted as a reconciliation of the world to Himself, imputing to mankind the merits of the Redeemer” (Dr. C. H. Little in *Disputed Doctrines*, p. 60).<sup>167</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, NT, II, p. 29 (CPH, no date given; 1921-24). Available online at: <http://www.kretzmannproject.org/home.htm>

<sup>166</sup> Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, NT, II, p. 192.

<sup>167</sup> Edward Wilhelm August Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 146-47 (CPH, 1939/1952).

*The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH, 1941) – Proper preface for Easter -- “But chiefly are we bound to praise Thee for the glorious resurrection of Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Lord; for He is the very Paschal Lamb which was offered for us and **hath taken away the sins of the world...**” (p. 25; see FC, SD, XI, 28, quoted above)

*Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism* (Syn. Conf., CPH, 1943): “Forgiveness of sins has been obtained for all, because Christ has fully atoned for the sins of all mankind” (1 John 2:2; 2 Cor 5:19).

*Oswald Riess, “What Does the Bible Say?”* (Lesson 16, p. 60) – “God charged the sins of the whole world to Christ, our Substitute. When Christ died He rendered full satisfaction to God for all sins, and God declared the whole world to be righteous. (General justification.)”

*Abiding Word* (1947)

“The sins are paid for; God speaks the great word: The human race now is justified, it possesses righteousness, the sins of all men are forgiven... He reconciled the world to Himself... Sin has been forgiven—the human race is acquitted... God justifies the whole world... He declares the whole world righteous... The sins of the whole world were canceled. What we have just now considered is called **objective justification**... Another term used for this great act of God is **universal justification**, a justification that extends to everybody.”<sup>168</sup>

*Martin Franzmann, (1907–1976) “Reconciliation and Justification” (1950)*

It is not our intention, in speaking of objective justification, to make the concept “static,” to relegate justification to some cool region beyond the humanity that is to hear and receive it. We are thinking and speaking no more “statically” than Luther speaks when he says: “**The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us**” (Large Catechism, III Art., 38). Our concern in speaking of objective justification is rather to keep justification altogether personal. Teachers like Stoeckhardt, Engelder, and Schaller emphasize the comforting character of **objective justification**: the sinner is to know of a surety that God had him, just him, in mind and in heart when He delivered up His Son for the sins of the world and pronounced His judgment on the sins of the world; universal grace, universal salvation, objective justification are not to be so thought of or so preached that the individual appropriation of that salvation be left out of sight; Christ, they insist, has not died for the world *in abstracto*, but for each individual in the world. Though we distinguish between objective and subjective justification, it does not occur to us to separate them... We do not speak of two justifications; objective and subjective justification refer to the same act of God.”<sup>169</sup>

*E. Reim, (WLS 1940-1957) “A History of the Term “Objective Justification” (WLQ, 1955)*

“In Jesus Christ God has already declared the entire world righteous, entirely apart from the faith of man.”

*J. P. Meyer, (1873–1964)*

- Essay: “Objective Justification” in *Our Great Heritage*, III, pp. 35ff.
- Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary *Dogmatics Notes*
- *Ministers of Christ (NPH, 1963)* - commentary on 2 Corinthians (excursus on “Objective and Subjective Justification,” esp. pp. 98ff.)

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<sup>168</sup> Wm. Arndt, “The Doctrine of Justification” in *The Abiding Word*, ed., Theodore Laetsch, pp. 243-245 (CPH, 1947).

<sup>169</sup> CTM, Vol. 21, 1950, pp. 81-93.

*NPH booklet: "Justification" (1966), pp. 11ff. "Not Just a Possibility"*

"It is a blasphemous twisting of the plain and simple truth to say that Christ's sacrifice has made our freedom a possibility, so that if we now fulfill certain conditions we may procure that freedom. The plain and simple truth is rather that **Christ took away the sins of the whole world** (2 Cor 5:19)... No amount of trickery, unbelief, scoffing can change these simple words into meaning something other than that Christ took on Himself all the world's sin and all the consequences of sin. **When God raised Christ from the dead, He proclaimed to all the world that payment in full had been made, that redemption was complete, that guilt had been wiped out, and in Isaiah's words, that the iniquity of God's people had been pardoned...**

God's declaration that all of the world's sin had been laid upon His only Son and that all men are therefore free, stands as **true, regardless of how that declaration is received by those for whom it is meant.** Men may and do doubt that God means what He says...

Faith does not make the Lord's Supper effective. That was made effective when Christ instituted it... Faith simply takes what is freely offered... So it is too with faith and justification."

*This We Believe (1967/1999) See Appendix B at the end of this paper.*

*Armin Schuetze, "Basic Doctrines of the Bible" (1969/1986)*

"Jesus Christ died for all; in Christ God has justified all sinners... Romans 5:18 can be paraphrased and expanded as follows: On the basis of the complete holiness and righteousness of the one man, Jesus Christ, substituting for all of mankind, God has as a gift of his grace, justified all men, that is, he has declared them righteous and just... Since this is something that has taken place through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and is an objective reality, it may be spoken of as objective justification."<sup>170</sup>

*Daniel Deutschlander, "On the Distinction between Objective and Subjective Justification"<sup>171</sup> (1977). Prof. Deutschlander's insightful comment is proving true again in our generation.*

Given the history of the controversy and its tendency to emerge anew in one generation after another, given the perversity of our own sinful nature *and will*, and the tenacity of the Old Evil Foe, we do well to give our energy and attention to a re-thinking and a restatement of the truth of God's Word on these central truths of His revelation and work for us and for our salvation.

By objective (or universal) justification we mean simply this: God, on account of His own free and unmerited grace, has forgiven the sins of the whole world;<sup>1</sup> this "not guilty" verdict God has declared over the whole world<sup>2</sup> without injury to His divine justice;<sup>3</sup> for the sacrifice of His Son in the place of all mankind<sup>4</sup> serves as the all-sufficient satisfaction for the offence done to God by the individual and collective sin of our fallen race,<sup>5</sup> and that sacrifice provides each and every sinner with the only possible, perfect, and complete covering for his guilt.<sup>6</sup>

1) Romans 5:18-19

2) 2 Corinthians 5:19

3) 2 Corinthians 5:21

4) John 1:29; Galatians 3:13; Isaiah 53:11

5) John 1:29; Galatians 3:13; Isaiah 53:11

6) 1 John 2:2

*Note: Prof. Deutschlander has written a new doctrine book for laity to be published by NPH. Rest assured, it will include instruction on this doctrine.*

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<sup>170</sup> pp. 41-42 (NPH, 1986, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).

<sup>171</sup> Available in WLS Essay file.

**Siegbert Becker, (1914-1984) “Objective Justification” (1982) and “Universal Justification” (1984)**

See the many quotations above. In his lectures on Romans (4:25), Dr. Becker made this comment:

Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Because he paid for the sins of the whole world, the whole world is declared to be just. Thus Jesus doesn’t have to stay dead anymore. (Q.) When are we declared not guilty? On the day we die? (A.) No, before we were born, when Jesus rose from the grave. What was God saying by letting people become alive on Easter Sunday (Matthew 27:52-53)? That the sins of the whole world are wiped out. This verse doesn’t say that Jesus was raised so that some day we might be justified. Our sins were forgiven when Jesus came out of the grave... He is always declaring us not guilty, for Jesus’ sake.<sup>172</sup>

All men are declared guilty because Adam did something that was wrong. All men are declared not guilty because Jesus did what was right. It is true that we are justified by faith. It is also true that God justifies the whole world, “all men.” That’s why the gospel message should be preached to everybody. I can go to anyone on earth and say, “Your sins are forgiven.” I don’t have to ask him first, “Are you saved?” There again you have this tremendous difference between Lutheranism and Reformed theology... God says you are forgiven, whether you believe it or not. If you don’t believe it you’re calling God a liar... You will be condemned...<sup>173</sup>

**WELS Exposition of Luther’s Catechism (1982/1998) Q/A #251-253**

**Robert Preus (1924-1995)** In 1981, a controversy arose over the concern that a Concordia Theological Seminary (Ft. Wayne) professor (Maier) denied Objective Justification. President Robert Preus addressed the matter in his President’s Newsletter (**Spring 1981**).<sup>174</sup> He wrote:

The doctrine of objective justification is a lovely teaching drawn from Scripture which tells us that God who has loved us so much that He gave His only [Son] to be our Savior, has for the sake of Christ’s substitutionary atonement declared the entire world of sinners for whom Christ died to be righteous (Romans 5:17-19).

Objective justification which is God’s verdict of acquittal over the whole world is not identical with the atonement, it is not another way of expressing the fact that Christ has redeemed the world. Rather it is based upon the substitutionary work of Christ, or better, it is a part of the atonement itself. It is God’s response to all that Christ died to save us, God’s verdict that Christ’s work is finished, that He has been indeed reconciled, propitiated; His anger has been stilled and He is at peace with the world, and therefore He has declared the entire world in Christ to be righteous...

(Robert Preus continued at length. After meetings, it was determined that Maier confessed Objective Justification, but did not see it in Romans. For that reason, President Preus announced that “the administration of the seminary, with the concurrence of the Board of Control, determined that it would be best for the seminary and for Dr. Maier if he not teach the course in Romans...” Preus then recommended the following resources for further study:

- Theodore Engelder, "Objective Justification," *CTM*, Vol. 4, 1933, pp. 507-516, 564-577, 664, 675.
- Theodore Engelder, "Walther, a Christian Theologian," *CTM*, Vol. 7, 1936, pp. 801-815.
- Martin H. Franzmann, "Reconciliation and Justification," *CTM*, Vol. 21, 1950, pp. 81-93.
- E. W. A. Koehler, "Objective Justification," *CTM*, Vol. 16, 1945, pp. 217-235.
- G. Stoeckhardt, "General Justification," "CTQ," April, 1978, pp. 139 – 144.

**LCMS CTCR Statement (1983)** – The preceding controversy in the LCMS led to this doctrinal statement.

<sup>172</sup> S. Becker, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 63 (Mequon, WI: WLS Press, 1992). Transcript of lectures by G. Lemke

<sup>173</sup> S. Becker, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 66-67 (Mequon, WI: WLS Press, 1992).

<sup>174</sup> <http://www.angelfire.com/ny4/djw/PreusJustification.html>

“In May 1983 the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LC-MS) issued a report entitled *Theses on Justification*. This was in response to a 1981 resolution of the LC-MS calling for a study by the CTCR, the joint faculties of the seminaries, and the Council of Presidents of all aspects of the doctrine of justification.”<sup>175</sup> Dr. Becker’s essay on “Universal Justification” begins by calling this: “an excellent statement on the doctrine of justification which our Synod would be able to accept without changes.” Here are excerpts:

**19.** Christ is the Savior of all. This means that the whole world of sinners has been redeemed, forgiven, and reconciled to God in Him. (Rom. 3:24-25; 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 9:28; Ap IV, 103; XXIV, 22-24; FC SD III, 57; XI, 15)

*It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That it is improper to speak of God being reconciled to man; That we can only speak of man being reconciled to God by man's repentance or change of heart; That God has redeemed but not reconciled the world.*

**20.** God has accepted the vicarious offering and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, in whom therefore God is propitiated and reconciled with all sinners, so that for Christ's sake God's wrath against all sinners has been and remains stilled, and Satan, sin, death, and hell have been and are conquered. (Rom. 5:18; Col. 2:14-15; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 7:27, 10:12; 1 John 2:2; AC III, 3; Ap XXIV, 22-24; FC SD XI, 28)

*It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That God's acceptance of His Son's perfect sacrifice does not have as its necessary concomitant the propitiation of His wrath against all sinners.*

**21.** Complete and perfect righteousness and forgiveness have been acquired for all sinners. (Ps. 130:4; Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 10:12, 18; Ap IV, 103; LC II, 38; FC Ep III, 3; V, 5; FC SD III, 30, 57) **22.** God, by raising His Son from the dead, has justified Him, declared Him to be the Righteous One, and in Him (i.e., for the sake of His finished work of obedience and satisfaction) has declared (as proclaimed in the Gospel), or reckoned, the whole world to be righteous. (Rom. 3:24; 4:25; 5:18-19; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Ap IV, 40-41; SA II, i, 1-3)

*It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That forgiveness of sins and justification for all have not been declared by God when He raised His Son from the dead, but have merely been acquired or made a possibility through Christ's atonement.*

**23.** By "objective" or "universal" justification one means that God has declared the whole world to be righteous for Christ's sake and that righteousness has thus been procured for all people. It is objective because this was God's unilateral act prior to and in no way dependent upon man's response to it, and universal because all human beings are embraced by this verdict. God has acquired the forgiveness of sins for all people by declaring that the world for Christ's sake has been forgiven. The acquiring of forgiveness is the pronouncement of forgiveness. (Rom. 3:24; 4:25; 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:19-21; Ap IV, 40-41; SA II, i, 1-3; FC Ep V, 5; FC SD XI, 15)

*It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That God's acquisition and establishment of forgiveness in objective justification is a conditional verdict, depending on faith or any other human response or activity; That it is not Biblical to speak of "objective justification."*

### **WELS CICR Review of LCMS Statement (1983)**

*The WELS Commission on Inter-Church Relations (CICR) carefully reviewed the LCMS CTCR statement above. In general, it is a favorable review. This comment from 1983 provides wise advice for the controversy happening today. Perhaps a WELS statement that fits this description can be prepared:*

The history of the church has demonstrated that if a doctrinal statement is to speak clearly, exclude every form of error, and avoid all ambiguity and compromise, it is essential that it present the scriptural truth not only thetically but also antithetically. When doctrinal error rears its head, a competent and effective defense of the truth requires that the error be clearly identified and firmly

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<sup>175</sup> WLQ, vol. 81, p. 44.



rejected (Tt 3:10; 2 Tm 4:2–4). The CTCR is to be commended for drafting its statement in this time-tested confessional form.<sup>176</sup>

*Here is a summary of the CICR review:*

An area about which the CICR feels rather strongly is that it would have been well if the concept of reconciliation (καταλλαγή) had been more fully treated on the basis of an exegesis of the pertinent passages. Nevertheless, let it be said that the CICR is extremely well pleased with the document. The weaknesses noted in our analysis do not involve the substance of the doctrine but merely the manner of presentation. The doctrine of objective justification was the watchword, so to speak, of the Synodical Conference. It was a principal subject of discussion in the organizing convention of the Conference in 1872. It is heartening to discover that on this vital doctrine we and our former brethren in the LC-MS speak with one voice. It is to be hoped that this strong and clear statement will enable them to come to grips with the error that has reared its head in their midst on this doctrine.<sup>177</sup>

***Michigan Lutheran Seminary - Senior Doctrine Notes (1982-1983; p. 38)***

- I. Justification is a declaratory act of God, in which He pronounces a sinner righteous...  
Justification is the forgiveness of sins...
- II. In justification God applies to the individual sinner (subjective justification) the general (objective) justification granted to the whole world in Christ.
  - A. Objective justification is identical with reconciliation (Rom 5, 8-11; 2 Cor 5, 18-21)
  - B. Objective justification was proclaimed and guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ (Rom 4, 25; Rom 8, 11)
  - C. Subjective justification applies to the individual sinner the merits of Christ
    1. It is the individual sinner that is justified (Matt 9,2; Luke 7, 47-48).

***Our Great Heritage, vol. 3 (NPH, 1991) includes articles by J.P. Meyer and Siegbert Becker***

***ELS: “We Believe, Teach and Confess” (adopted June, 1992)***

By His perfect life and His innocent sufferings and death Jesus has redeemed the entire world. God thereby reconciled the world to Himself, and by the resurrection of His Son declared it to be righteous in Christ. This declaration of universal righteousness is often termed “objective justification.” One has this justification as a personal possession and is personally declared by God to be righteous in Christ when he or she is brought to faith in Him as Savior. This is often called “subjective justification”. If the objective fact of Christ’s atonement is not personally received by faith, then it has no saving benefit for the individual. We reject as unscriptural any teaching that people can be saved apart from faith in Jesus Christ. See 1 John 2:2, 2 Cor. 5:19, John 1:29, 2 Pet. 2:1, John 3:16-18, 2 Cor. 5:19, Rom. 4:25, 1:17 and 5:1-2.

***Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal (1993) The proper preface for Easter, “... and we praise you especially for the glorious resurrection of your Son, the true Passover Lamb, who by his sacrifice took away the sins of the world...” (p. 21; see TLH above; FC SD XI, 28)***

***Wayne D. Mueller, “Justification” (People’s Bible Teaching series; NPH, 2002)***

Salvation through faith alone rests on the truth that God’s justification of the world is already an accomplished fact. Justification does not occur because of faith. To the contrary, faith grasps the justification that already exists... In the Apostles’ Creed, we confess, “I believe in the Holy Spirit... the forgiveness of sins.” With this statement, week after week, we affirm our trust that objectively, in Christ, without and apart from our faith, God declares forgiveness to all. This

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<sup>176</sup> WLQ, vol. 81, pp. 44-45.

<sup>177</sup> WLQ, vol. 81, pp. 58-59.

creedal statement expresses belief in something that already exists by the merit of Christ and the decree of God. That is good news.<sup>178</sup>

***Who Benefits from Justification?*** Faith receives God’s justifying declaration of righteousness for sinners. Although God declares all to be free from sin through Jesus’ blood and righteousness, only believers enjoy the benefit of justification, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

***One justification*** - There is only one justification, the one God declared by grace, for Christ’s sake, on Easter morning. But the Bible speaks of this one justification from two points of view. When the Bible says God objectively declared all to be righteous, we call that *objective justification*. When the Bible says the individual sinner subjectively believes and enjoys that forgiveness for himself, we call that *subjective justification*. There are not, however, two different justifications.<sup>179</sup>

***Lyle Lange, “God So Loved the Word: A Study of Christian Doctrine” (NPH) (2005)***

*(Quoted above. This is the doctrine text book used at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, MN)*

“God justified the world because of Christ’s work. On the cross, Jesus declared, “It is finished” (Jn 19:30)... God has justified the world freely apart from anything we do (Ro 3:24-28).”

“Just as sin is universal, so justification is universal... God punished every sin in Christ, and he forgave every sin in Christ...”<sup>180</sup>

***There are many more examples. Many more testimonies could have been provided.***

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## ***APPENDIX B: “This We Believe”<sup>181</sup>***

### **IV. JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH**

1. We believe that God has justified all sinners, that is, he has declared them righteous for the sake of Christ. This is the central message of Scripture upon which the very existence of the church depends. It is a message relevant to people of all times and places, of all races and social levels, for “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18). All need forgiveness of sins before God, and Scripture proclaims that all have been justified, for “the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18).

2. We believe that individuals receive this free gift of forgiveness not on the basis of their own works, but only through faith (Ephesians 2:8,9). Justifying faith is trust in Christ and his redemptive work. This faith justifies not because of any power it has in itself, but only because of the salvation prepared by God in Christ, which it embraces (Romans 3:28; 4:5). On the other hand, although Jesus died for all, Scripture says that “whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Unbelievers forfeit the forgiveness won for them by Christ (John 8:24).

3. We believe that people cannot produce this justifying faith, or trust, in their own hearts, because “the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him” (1 Corinthians 2:14). In fact, “the sinful mind is hostile to God” (Romans 8:7). It is

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<sup>178</sup> Wayne D. Mueller, *Justification: How God Forgives*, pp. 53,55 (NPH, 2002).

<sup>179</sup> Wayne D. Mueller, *Justification: How God Forgives*, pp. 57-58 (NPH, 2002).

<sup>180</sup> Lange, p. 343, 346, 347.

<sup>181</sup> *This We Believe: A Statement of Belief of the WELS*, IV, pp. 15-17 (NPH, 1999).

the Holy Spirit who gives people faith to recognize that “Jesus is Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit works this faith by means of the gospel (Romans 10:17). We believe, therefore, that a person’s conversion is entirely the work of God’s grace. Rejection of the gospel is, however, entirely the unbeliever’s own fault (Matthew 23:37).

4. We believe that sinners are saved by grace alone. Grace is the undeserved love of God for sinners. This love led God to give sinners everything they need for their salvation. It is all a gift of God. People do nothing to earn any of it (Ephesians 2:8,9).

5. We believe that already before the world was created, God chose those individuals whom he would in time convert through the gospel of Christ and preserve in faith to eternal life (Ephesians 1:4-6; Romans 8:29,30). This election to faith and salvation in no way was caused by anything in people but shows how completely salvation is by grace alone (Romans 11:5,6).

6. We believe that at the moment of death, the souls of those who believe in Christ go immediately to be with the Lord in the joy of heaven because of the atoning work of Christ (Luke 23:43). The souls of those who do not believe in Christ go to an eternity of misery in hell (Luke 16:22-24).

7. We reject every teaching that people in any way contribute to their salvation. We reject the belief that people with their own power can cooperate in their conversion or make a decision for Christ (John 15:16). We reject the belief that those who are converted were less resistant to God’s grace than those who remain unconverted. We reject all efforts to present faith as a condition people must fulfill to complete their justification. We reject all attempts of sinners to justify themselves before God.

8. We reject any suggestion that the doctrine of justification by faith is no longer meaningful today.

9. We reject the teaching that believers can never fall from faith (“once saved, always saved”), because the Bible says it is possible for believers to fall from faith (1 Corinthians 10:12).

10. We reject the false and blasphemous conclusion that those who are lost were predestined, or elected, by God to damnation, for God wants all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

11. We reject universalism, the belief that all people are saved, even those without faith in Christ (John 3:36). We reject pluralism, the belief that there are other ways to salvation besides faith in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We reject any teaching that says it does not matter what one believes so long as one has faith in God.

**This is what Scripture teaches about justification by grace through faith. This we believe, teach and confess.**