

# **Making Use of Our Lutheran Heritage – “Objective Justification” in Our Mission Outreach Based on an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18-19\***

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When your secretary wrote and asked me to assume this assignment, he stated that the title for this paper was admittedly a little bit long but that it did specify the direction of the paper pretty clearly. Thus when I began to work on this paper it seemed that the topic divided itself quite naturally into three parts: 1) An exegesis of the two verses in 2 Corinthians 5 which focus on the twin subjects of objective justification and its proclamation; 2) The use of objective justification in our mission outreach; 3) The realization that this is a unique heritage of ours as Lutherans. This threefold division is the outline we will follow in this presentation.

## **I. An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18–19**

The section of which these two verses are a part begins with verse 11 and does not end until verse 21. This necessitates that we look at least briefly at verses 11–17 since they lead into the two verses which are of special interest to us. Paul begins with the statement in verse 11 that ministers of the gospel are “trying to persuade men” (NIV; ἀνθρώπους πείθομεν = “we are engaged in winning men” M).<sup>1</sup> He ends with the message they proclaim to accomplish this goal in verse 21, namely, the message of Christ’s substitutionary death and the perfect righteousness which is ours as a result.

Let’s look briefly at the development of the thought through this whole section. Remember that in Corinth some false teachers were trying to undermine the Corinthians’ confidence in Paul and thus also in the gospel which he had taught them. They ridiculed Paul for writing a harsh letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians). They faulted him for writing this letter from a safe distance and then for delaying his coming. They implied that he did not have the courage to face the Corinthians on the early date which he had promised. Earlier in the letter Paul explained the reason for the letter and the delay. He had written the letter because the Corinthians had sinned in numerous ways and needed correction lest they fall completely away from God. He had delayed his coming in order to give them time to take hold of matters themselves and straighten them out without an apostle being present to do it for them.

Paul reminds the Corinthians in the last part of verse 11 and verse 12 that everything he had done was an open book to God and, he was sure, also understood by them as no trick or adulteration of the Word (cf. 4:2). In verse 12 he again reminds them that when he thus commends his own integrity he does not do it so they will admire him but that it might give them some ammunition against the false prophets who are attacking Paul. In verse 13 he says he wrote the first severe letter (“out of our mind,” ἐξέστημεν) because they were guilty of much which was condemned by God; and he wrote this second moderate letter (σωφρονοῦμεν) because they had repented and now needed to be built up in a stronger faith.

With verse 14 Paul turns the focus from himself to Christ whose love compelled him to carry out his work among the Corinthians as he had. Christ’s love of which he speaks he identifies as Christ’s willingness to die for all men that his death might be credited to them as the payment for their debt of sin. Note here how objective justification is stated: The fact that Jesus died for all means that all men died (i.e., as far as God’s accounting of the payment for sin is concerned Christ’s death is credited to their account, cf. v 19b and v 21a). In verse 15 Paul states that the Christian knows also by faith (κρίναται) that Jesus’ death for all had a purpose in mind, that is, that the believers (οἱ ζῶντες) would have a whole new outlook on life, no longer living for themselves but for

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<sup>1</sup> J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1963), p 50.

him who died for them and was raised to seal their salvation. It is knowing this combined truth (τοῦτο ὅτι) of Jesus' substitutionary death and the change it works in believers which was the reason Christ's love compelled Paul to conduct his ministry to the Corinthians as he described it in verse 13.

In verses 16 and 17 Paul adds two obvious results of the two truths which he knows by faith (vv 14b and 15). First, he no longer looks on a person according to his body, that is, according to sex, age, appearance, personality, health, skin color or nationality. Such distinctions can no longer be made if we know that Christ died for all and therefore all are credited with Christ's death. Paul adds an aside that he once mistakenly judged Christ only according to the human body he saw, but now he by faith knows much better. The second result Paul realizes is that if anyone is a believer, he is not just given a partial overhaul, but he is made a totally new creature. All his former attitudes about himself, his life, his relationship with his fellow man are now completely overshadowed by a new attitude; he now has a totally new outlook which despises all that is contrary to God's will and he delights in serving his Savior in faith-born love.

### Verse 18

δέ translated "now" connects what follows to the foregoing.

Τὰ πάντα refers to the truths of justification and sanctification expounded in the preceding verses 14–17, i.e., the two parts of the ὅτι clause (v 14b in which we are told Christ's substitutionary death is credited to all and v. 15 which adds that Christ's substitutionary death had our sanctification as its purpose) and the two ὥστε clauses (v. 16 we regard no one according to his body; and v. 17 every Christian is a new creature). Translation: "all *these* things," the article pointing to the definite points in the foregoing context.

ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ. ἐκ may be used in place of διά to express the agent but its basic usage is to indicate source. (NIV "all this is from God"; TEV "all this is done by God"). Note that διά is used with Christ in the relative clause which follows to state the agent by whom this was done. Thus it would seem that here the source idea would be stressed by ἐκ. All of the foregoing things flow from God. The rest of Scripture underscores the fact that he is the only source from which such spiritual blessings (justification and sanctification) could come.

τοῦ. We note that the two participles which follow are tied together by this one article into a unit thought. The reconciliation without the ministry to proclaim it will not benefit anyone, and the ministry of reconciliation would be vanity without God's gracious act of reconciliation. We will deal with this more a little later.

The article makes the participles attributive, or adjectival (translate with relative clause). God is being described for us in such a way as to explain how the τὰ πάντα are ἐκ θεοῦ. This is not meant to be a full description of God, but our attention is being focused on these two close-knit things which God did. Once we realize fully that this is the kind of God we have, a natural conclusion follows (cf. v 20 οὖν) for every minister of the Word.

καταλλάξαντος. The root meaning of the word suggests a complete change (κατα = perfective, ἀλλάσσω which has the same root as ἄλλοις = change or alter). The New Testament usage indicates that this root meaning of the word still prevails. Besides the use of this verb here in 2 Corinthians 5, it is also used in a very similar context in Romans 5:10, "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." Note the emphasis of the *change of status* from God's enemies to those who can stand before him without fear. In a somewhat different context in 1 Corinthians 7:11 καταλλάσσω is used to describe the change of status of a woman, "She must *remain unmarried or else be reconciled* to her husband." In this case

the change is a return to a *former* status as wife. It is this idea of bringing back or restoring to a former position which is also the meaning of ἀποκαταλλάσσω in Colossians 1:21–22, “You were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight.”

To summarize: καταλλάσσω means to make or bring about a complete change; when used with a personal object it most often refers to a change in the status of an individual by restoring him or her to a former status. Thus the meaning also to restore friendship between two people who have become enemies or to “reconcile.”

What exactly is the change in status which is meant in this context? In the next verse Paul gives the details (ὡς ὅτι). There we will see that the change is not something which took place either in the heart or mind of God or man. Rather it is simply a change in the legal status of a sinner before God. But more on this later also.

The participle is in the aorist tense which means that the time element is not a matter of emphasis at this point in the discussion. It simply indicates that the kind of action which the writer is describing is action which has been brought to pass (or completed action). In the parallel usage in verse 19 we will have to wrestle a bit more with this same verb because the writer chooses to use the present tense of καταλλάσσω rather than the aorist. The change in tense is significant.

ἡμᾶς. The two possibilities are that Paul is using a very general pronoun with no special meaning involved or, what is clearly the use here, that Paul is referring to believers. That ἡμᾶς is not to be understood as an exclusive meaning with καταλλάσσω (i.e., only believers are reconciled) is evident by the parallel word in verse 19, κόσμον. Still the best understanding is to take ἡμᾶς to refer to believers. Then verse 19 explains that believers’ reconciliation to God is a fact just because we are part of the κόσμον which God reconciled.

The accusative case indicates that we are the direct object of God’s action, that is, that God’s action directly and primarily affected us.

ἑαυτῶ. This dative, following immediately upon the ἡμᾶς as it does, stresses to whom the direct object was reconciled. The change in status was not affected among us toward one another (as the accusative standing alone might be understood), but rather we as a group were reconciled to God.

διὰ χριστοῦ. In emphatic position at the end of this relative clause (introduced by the attributive participle) stands the agent by whom God reconciled us to himself. With χριστός Paul is not just referring to Christ’s person but also his work. This is evident from the parallel use of ἐν χριστῷ in verse 19 and also from verses 14 and 21 where Paul spells out in more detail what he means by διὰ χριστοῦ. In verse 14 Christ’s death as our substitute is described as being credited to all; in verse 21 the innocent Christ is described as bearing the guilt and punishment of our sins as our substitute.

Thus διὰ χριστοῦ in this emphatic position stresses that God’s act of reconciliation was not the act of a kindly old grandfather who just chose to overlook our sins (which had alienated us from him) without punishing them. Rather, it is the act of the just and holy God who punished our sins by placing them all on His Son. Christ served as our substitute in keeping the law perfectly for us; and Christ by his death paid the full price which God demanded as the just payment for our transgressions. Christ was the agent, the one and only agent by whom God reconciled us to himself. To quote Acts 4:12, “Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”

Καὶ δόντος. The καὶ ties this participle to the previous one and the single article ties these two participles in a unit thought. God is not only to be known as one who reconciled us to himself but also as the one who gave the ministry of reconciliation. Because this reconciliation is entirely God’s doing and none of ours, all that needs to be done is that this truth be made known to us. But this proclamation was necessary

because without our grasping it by faith it does not benefit us. This is why God also took the second step of giving the ministry of reconciliation, and although it is a second step we can see why it is tied together with the first step as a unit. Neither one is of any benefit to us without the other.

The vocable meaning of δόντος (δίδωμι) stresses the truth that this is something which God gave. That is, it is a ministry which he established, not one which the early church or we decided in Christian liberty to establish for ourselves. How this ministry is to be administered then is not a matter of our choice but of his direction. This truth we will touch on more in our study of verse 19 and in the second part of this essay as we examine how objective justification provides the motive, message and method in our mission outreach.

The aorist tense of δόντος again indicates that the writer is not stressing the time of God's giving but merely that this is an act of God which has taken place.

ἡμῖν. As with ἡμᾶς in the previous clause Paul is most likely referring to believers, especially the Corinthians whom Paul includes with himself and Timothy in this term. Here, then, the Ministry of the Keys which is given to all believers is what Paul is speaking about. Some might like to limit ἡμῖν to mean just Paul and Timothy and thus have this clause refer to the public ministry. This might be argued on the basis of verses 20 and 21 which at first glance might seem to refer to the public ministry of the Word. However, closer consideration will reveal that verses 20 and 21 do not have to be limited in this way. Most telling of all, however, is the fact that the two relative clauses in this verse are closely linked together, and if the ἡμᾶς in the first clause is taken to mean believers and not just Paul and Timothy, then the ἡμῖν in the second clause will also mean believers. At the same time we must add that this does not rule out the fact that to Paul as an apostle and to others as pastors this administration has been given in a special sense.

τὴν διακονίαν. The vocable meaning of διακονία could either be "office" or "administration." There are a number of reasons why "administration" is preferable. First of all in this context Paul is not stressing the office of the ministry but rather the work of the ministry. The genitive which immediately modifies διακονίαν stresses this. And the word λόγον which is substituted for διακονίαν in the parallel phrase in verse 19 also stresses this. And verses 20 and 21 stress this.

Note also that the use of διακονία earlier in 2 Corinthians indicates the meaning "administration." In chapter 3:6ff., Paul spoke of the Old Testament as a "ministry that brought death" (3:7) and of the New Testament as a "ministry of the spirit" (3:8). Then in verse 9 he adds, "If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness." Note that ministry is not spoken of in chapter 3 as an office but as an administration of something, namely, the judgment of condemnation or of righteousness.

Thus in our verse διακονία is best translated as "administration" and understood as the sharing of the message (cf. λόγον of v 19) of reconciliation with others both by believers according to Christ's Great Commission and by public ministers of the Word in accordance with the administration entrusted to them through a call by a group of believers.

The article indicates that Paul is referring to a well-known administration, namely, the work given to his church by Christ and most recently discussed by Paul at length earlier in this letter (3:6ff).

τῆς καταλλαγῆς. Again the article refers to a very specific reconciliation, namely, the one which the previous clause had just spoken of as God's reconciling us to himself through Christ, and, therefore, a reconciliation which is now present as a ready blessing for us to administer.

The genitive leads us to see this thought as a limitation of διακονία because the genitive ties one word to another in an adjectival or limiting sense. The administration which God gave us is not just any kind of administration which we might choose to make it but it is a reconciling administration. Verses 20b and 21 indicate very clearly what is meant: ours is a ministry which consists of the proclaiming of the message of God's reconciling act in Christ. Thus when anyone looks upon his ministry as primarily a

means of bringing about social justice or helping people in their physical needs or promoting love and brotherhood among men, he is no longer carrying out the *διακονία* for the limited reason God gave it, that is, that it would be a reconciling ministry.

### Verse 19

ὥς ὅτι. This combination as a conjunction is used only two other times in the New Testament and both by Paul (2 Cor 11:20; 1 Th 2:2). The usage in these three passages suggests that ὥς is adverbial (“thus” or “in this way”) and that ὅτι introduces a noun clause (“that”). Neither of the other two is exactly the same usage as here, however. Here we have what are basically the same thoughts in verses 18 and 19 joined together by ὥς ὅτι. Verse 19 then is obviously supplementary to verse 18 and gives a little more specific explanation of verse 18. Thus the thought of ὥς ὅτι can be paraphrased in this way: “What happened was this that...”

θεός. Again God is stressed as the one who is acting or doing all of this.

ἦν. Some Lutheran exegetes understand the ἦν by itself to be the verb in this clause (then καταλλάσσω is an appositional adjective); others understand the verb to be ἦν καταλλάσσω (i.e., a periphrastic imperfect). What is the difference in sense? The first (i.e., ἦν alone) would stress primarily the fact that God was incarnate in Christ; the second would stress that God was reconciling. Which is to be preferred? We believe the latter is, for several reasons: 1) The ὥς ὅτι at the beginning of verse 19 indicates that the thoughts of verse 19 will parallel those of verse 18. Since the first action of God described in verse 18 is reconciliation, not incarnation, the primary thought in the first part of verse 19 also is best taken as reconciliation; 2) If ἐν χριστῷ is tied directly to God by ἦν and thus speaks of incarnation, and if then καταλλάσσω is tied to this as adjectival (i.e., building on the key thought of the incarnation) then the second participle θέμενος would also be built on this key thought of incarnation. But basing the θέμενος clause on the incarnation does not seem to follow well at all (that is, that God’s giving us the Word of reconciliation is tied to the incarnation). Note also that the ἐν ἡμῖν after θέμενος seems to be a literary device to contrast with ἐν χριστῷ. (i.e., it was “in Christ” that God carried out the reconciliation, but it is “in us” that he carries out the ministry of reconciliation); 3) Taking ἦν as an independent verb linking θεός and ἐν χριστῷ limits the meaning of ἐν χριστῷ primarily to the incarnation. However, taking the verb as a periphrastic allows a wider meaning of ἐν χριστῷ, namely this that both the person and work of Christ are the sphere in which God reconciled us to Himself. 4) The periphrastic tense does not have to mean, as Prof. Meyer says it inevitably would, 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”).<sup>2</sup> As Prof. Meyer himself hints, 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. The ἐν χριστῷ indicates exactly what period of time is meant. When, on the other hand, God established the ministry of reconciliation he did so with a command (e.g., the Great Commission). Thus the switch to the aorist periphrastic in θέμενος.

The one seeming problem with a periphrastic is the separation of ἦν from καταλλάσσω by the intervening words ἐν χριστῷ κόσμον. Usually the participle and the form of εἰμί are kept together in a periphrastic. One exception to this rule, though, is when the speaker or writer wishes to emphasize the words which he intervenes and to make the whole thought a unit concept. In this verse Paul is expanding

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p 110.

on the truth of reconciliation which he had begun in verse 18. We can see how the unit-thought serves this purpose well. We could attempt to reflect the thought in English this way: It was a Christ-worked-world-reconciliation which God carried out.

To summarize: We see ἦν καταλλάσσω as in an imperfect periphrastic by which Paul explains that God's reconciliation which had been described in verse 18 as action brought to pass (aorist participle) was actually accomplished by God's continued action over a period of time in the past.

ἐν χριστῷ. The meaning of this prepositional phrase was discussed in part in the preceding. There we saw that with the periphrastic imperfect verb it referred to all that Christ did for us in his humiliation. To assure ourselves that this is what is meant, we might return to the parallel in verse 18 and see that there δια χριστοῦ is used by Paul. Why the switch to ἐν χριστῷ in verse 19? We have hinted at one reason already when we called attention to the contrast of this and ἐν ἡμῖν in the second part of the verse. A second reason was indicated by the reference to how ἐν χριστῷ limits the continued action in the past introduced by the periphrastic imperfect. The Greek preposition ἐν basically indicates a delineated sphere in which something is present, or in which an action takes place (cf. the use of ἐν χριστῷ in verse 17 in this regard). The contrast to ἐν is ἀπό. The latter preposition is used to indicate that something is outside of an action, which takes place apart from the clearly defined sphere. Thus ἐν χριστῷ emphasizes that God's reconciling of the world to himself did not take place in creation nor in the laws and precepts of the Old Testament. No, there is one clearly defined sphere in which this was done, namely, the life and work of the promised Redeemer. Because the preposition ἐν delineates in this way, the phrase ἐν χριστῷ indicates that outside this sphere there is no explanation for what took place

κόσμον. With this word Paul clearly teaches that God's act of reconciliation covers the whole world. It applies to the whole world, to every person, whether he lived before Christ, or at the time of Christ, or any time since Christ, or in any of the time still remaining before Christ comes again. Thus everyone is included in this word regardless of whether he ever comes to faith or not.

This same truth is taught in the similar context of Colossians 1. There in verses 16 and 20 we read: "For by him *all things were* created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... and through him (God was pleased) to reconcile to himself *all things* (τὰ πάντα), *whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*"

In this context it is also most important to note that κόσμον in verse 19 is parallel to ἡμῶς in verse 18. Remember that verse 19 is an expansion or explanation of verse 18 (cf. ὡς ὅτι) and then it becomes apparent that Paul is indicating that our reconciliation as believers is assured by the fact that the world was reconciled.

ἑαυτῷ. As in verse 18 this pronoun is added to stress that God did not reconcile the people of the world to one another, but rather reconciled the whole world as a group to himself.

μὴ λογιζόμενος. This participle is in apposition to ἦν καταλλάσσω and thus explains God's Christ-worked-world-reconciliation as merely a matter of accounting. Every individual in the world sinned and thereby incurred an unpayable amount on his account before God. Here Paul refers to the truth that while Christ was on earth he lived a perfect life which God put on the account of all men and he died as the substitute for all which God also credited to the account of all (cf. v 14b). Since by this perfect life and death Christ "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances which was against us" (Col 2:14), God no longer imputed anyone's sins to him; they were imputed to Christ. In verse 21 this truth is described in this way that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." It is important to note that this appositional μὴ λογιζόμενος makes God's act of reconciliation basically one of negative accounting (i.e., not imputing, or not charging) rather than some kind of inner change in God or in man. God never changed in either his love or his justice; he loved man ἐν χριστῷ,

and ἐν χριστῷ the justice which God's holiness required as the punishment for sin was satisfied completely. The spiritual change in man is worked, as Paul said in verse 17, only after he is "in Christ" and thus becomes a totally "new creation" who despises sin and loves God's good and gracious will. The only change which took place as a result of God's Christ-worked-world-reconciliation was in every sinner's account before God. And the fact that this was the only change has far reaching implications in regard to our work of mission outreach, as we will note in part two of this essay.

αὐτοῖς. Since this clause is in apposition to the previous clause, αὐτοῖς refers to every person in the world. It tells us that when Paul spoke of κόσμον he was referring to people. The plural indicates that God did not deal with the world in the abstract but as a group of individuals, that is, each individual in this group had his account wiped clean of any debt.

τὰς παραπτώματα. A παράπτωμα in Greek is a misstep or a falling to the side. It is but one of the many picture-words used in the New Testament to convey the concept of sin. Though the picture which lies behind each of the New Testament words is different (e.g., a miss of the bull's-eye, a failure to measure up to a standard, misstep, a stepping over a forbidden line) the force of each is the same. Thus no particular special meaning needs to be attached to παράπτωμα in this context. It simply conveys the thought that the missteps or sins which each and every sinner has recorded on his account (αὐτῶν) have been wiped out. The article with παραπτώματα indicates that these missteps or sins are not something vague but are all very well known. Time and repetition may dim their memory in the minds of men, or dulled or hardened consciences may make men completely unaware of them, but they are all well known to God. What a joyous and comforting truth it is to know then that in Christ the entire slate of these well-known missteps has been wiped clean!

καὶ θέμενος. In verse 18 two descriptions were given of God: He reconciled the world to himself and he established the ministry of reconciliation. The first of these Paul has explained more fully in 19a; now he takes up the second. The conjunction καὶ ties θέμενος back to καταλλάσσω. Thus we supply ἦν with θέμενος and read it as an aorist periphrastic. The aorist normally means that the author merely wants to indicate an action which was brought to pass without any special emphasis as to the time or the kind of action. However, when the aorist is linked with an imperfect as it is here, there is a contrast implied. As was noted earlier, the contrast in this instance is that 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).

We note also that the verb has been changed from verse 18. The δόντος of verse 18 stressed that this administration was *given* by God, not something the church established. The θέμενος of verse 19 stresses that God assigned a responsibility in giving this ministry. And a great responsibility it is! God places on us the responsibility of making known to the world his gracious action of reconciliation. Since we by faith have learned to treasure this reconciliation, this responsibility to tell others is not a burden we bear or an assignment we do unwillingly. In verse 14a Paul says that it is the love of Christ which compels us (συνέχει) and in verse 20a he describes our telling others as a begging, beseeching, or imploring (δεόμεθα).

ἐν ὑμῖν. As in verse 18 the ὑμῖν would refer to believers. The ἐν would indicate the limited sphere in which God assigned the responsibility. The whole world was reconciled, but administration of this reconciliation is "the peculiar authority" of the church. As was noted in 19a, the ἐν ὑμῖν also contrasts with ἐν χριστῷ. While it was in Christ that God reconciled the world to himself, Christ did not remain on earth to proclaim the truth of reconciliation to all men. He ascended in triumph to his throne of glory and left the great responsibility of administering this reconciliation to all our fellowmen to us.

τὸν λόγον. The article makes this word or message a very definite one. It is not a word or message we are to develop by introspection or observation or speculation. No, it is something definite which God established through the prophets and apostles by inspiration. It is not something we are at liberty to chop up piecemeal and proclaim only in part; no, it is a definite, unified whole which is to be proclaimed without addition or subtraction.

Again we must note that λόγον here in verse 19 is the parallel of διακονία in verse 18. This parallel indicates that the administration of the reconciliation is to be carried out by means of the Word. Or, to put it another way, the Word was made the vehicle for bringing reconciliation to the world. God has established no other way. So our task as administrators of God's reconciliation is clear; we are to share his Word with the world.

τὴν καταλλαγῆς. The article makes the reconciliation spoken about a very definite reconciliation, namely, that reconciliation spoken about in the first part of the verse, God's Christ-worked-world-reconciliation which stands prepared as a ready blessing for us to administer.

The genitive limits the meaning of λόγον. It thus indicates what the heart and center of the Word is which we are to share with the world, namely, God's gracious act of reconciliation.

### Summary of Verses 18 and 19

God from whom the blessings of justification and sanctification flow is a God who reconciled the world (and thus us) to himself through Christ's substitutionary life and death. This reconciliation was a legal change in our status before God in this way that God no longer imputes our sins to us (but to Christ). That this blessing which God accomplished in Christ might benefit all men, God also established the administration of his reconciliation. This administration God gives to believers. The means by which believers are to carry out this task is simply sharing the message of God's Christ-worked-world-reconciliation with all men.

In verses 20 and 21 Paul ends this section by stating what the obvious conclusion (οὖν) is for every Christian (and therefore also for Paul as he ministers to the Corinthians) who knows that God has both reconciled the world to himself and established the ministry of reconciliation as the responsibility of believers. He says that the Christian who administers this reconciliation will consider it throughout as work he is doing as an ambassador on behalf of Christ because he realizes that it is God who is channeling his appeal through his believers. Driven by the love of Christ and the urgent message he bears, the believer pleads with sinners to accept the great treasure which God is graciously offering them (NB "Be reconciled" parallels καταλλαγὴν λαμβάνειν of Romans 5:11). It is a free and completed blessing which we beg all to accept. We simply point out to all who will listen that God laid all our sins on Christ in order that we might be declared perfect in God's sight in Christ.

## II. The Use of Objective Justification in Our Mission Outreach

In applying the truths of verses 18–19 and their context of 11–21 we wish to develop two theses: 1) Mission outreach is the natural corollary of objective justification. 2) Objective justification provides the motive, the message and the method in mission outreach.

First, then, the thesis that mission outreach is the natural corollary of objective justification. In the exegesis of verses 18–19 we saw that the καταλλάσσειν did not change the nature of the sinner, but only his legal standing before his Judge. What has taken place is entirely outside of the sinner. Unless someone tells him, the sinner does not know about the change which took place in his status before God. Thus Paul writes in Romans 10:14 "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

Before we focus our attention on the need for telling the sinner about the change in his legal status before God, we must also remind ourselves that just telling sinners about God's reconciliation does not mean



that they will accept it. This message is so far removed from man's way of thinking that a sinner cannot by himself grasp what is being told him. Paul says in I Corinthians 2:9, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." It is only when the Holy Spirit works through the Word in the sinner's heart that he will grasp by faith God's-gracious-Christ-worked-world-reconciliation. 1 Corinthians 2:14 reminds us, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned." In regard to us believers 1 Corinthians 2:12 states, "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God had freely given us."

However, we note that the necessary bridge which links the reconciliation of the world by God and the Spirit's leading the individual sinner by faith to accept this gracious gift of God is the telling of this truth to each sinner. Without that telling, God's reconciliation does not benefit the sinner because without that telling the Holy Spirit cannot work in the heart of the sinner to appropriate God's free gift to himself.

God was well aware of this gap of telling which he left between his world-reconciliation and the individual appropriation of his free gift, but, as Paul reminded us in verses 18–19, God did not leave that gap unbridged. He established the administration of reconciliation to be carried out by believers; he placed on us the responsibility to share the message of his reconciliation with the world. "Go and make disciples of all nations," he said (Mt 28:19) and "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15).

Thus mission outreach is a natural corollary which God commanded in connection with objective justification because without it his reconciliation of the world to himself would have remained an unused gift and thus of no real benefit to sinners. And mission outreach is a natural corollary for all who by faith learn what a wonderful, eternal treasure it is which God has prepared not only for us but for all men.

This last thought leads us to the second thesis: Objective justification provides the motive, the message and the method in mission outreach.

We might say that the motive for our mission outreach is God's command and in a sense that would be true. However, at the same time we must also note that a command in and of itself does not motivate. Whether I follow through on someone's command to me will depend on whether I feel like doing it or not. And whether I feel like doing it or not depends on what motivates me. If I'm afraid that the one who commanded me will clobber me if I don't obey him, it will be fear which will motivate me to do what he says. If the one who commands me also offers me a reward for obedience, then it might well be the reward which motivates me. If the one who commands me is one for whom I have a great deal of admiration, my admiration will motivate me. If the one who commands me adds that my obedience will benefit many people, it might be my generosity and brotherly good-will which motivates me. If the one who commands me is one who has done endless favors for me, it might be my sense of indebtedness which moves me to act.

We saw in our exegesis that God established the administration of reconciliation and laid this responsibility on us in the form of the Great Commission. What motivates us to obey? Paul says in verse 14, "Christ's love compels us." But then note how he continues: "because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." Yes, it is objective justification which motivates us. When we see Christ's love reaching out to all men and crediting them with his death, this love compels us to tell them all about the wonderful reconciliation which they have with God in Christ. And in verse 16 Paul draws this conclusion, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view." We no longer see people as male or female, bond or free, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, black or white, young or old, healthy or unhealthy, educated or uneducated, beautiful or ugly. No, we see every person as one who has been washed in Jesus' blood and justified. We play no favorites, we make no exceptions, we degrade none. For all are the redeemed of God with whom we are driven by an inner compulsion (the love of Christ) to share the message of God's Christ-worked-world-reconciliation.

But if we go back to the verse which we skipped for a moment, verse 15, Paul reminds us that this inner compulsion is not only fueled by the fact that Jesus' death is credited to all men but it is also fueled by the whole new outlook on life which is ours when we by faith embrace the Savior of all men as our personal Savior. Paul puts it this way, "And he died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him

who died for them and rose again.” When we realize by faith that Christ humbled himself unto death for all men, we also realize by faith simultaneously that “love so amazing, so divine / demands my life, my soul, my all.” In the face of this amazing grace I no longer can live for myself but for him. In verse 17 Paul adds the conclusion, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!” No longer do I see my life as an opportunity to let my Old Adam have his fling. I hate the sinful pleasures of the world according to my New Man; the treasures of the world have no attraction for me since I know moths and rust will corrupt and destroy them. I have a whole new view of life and its purpose. My life I give into my Savior’s service; it is his will alone that I find pleasure in doing. And what do I hear him bidding me do? “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,” he says. He speaks and I march to his word. No sacrifice is too great, no hurdle too difficult, no human being too despicable to turn me aside from doing his will.

And what motivates me to obey? Fear of punishment if I don’t obey? No, I fear no punishment from my Redeemer. Reward for obedience? No, I already have heaven as my home. A sense of indebtedness? Oh, I know I could never even begin to pay him back for what he has done for me. What then? Simply love. With Paul we say, “Christ’s love compels us.” His sacrificial love dwelling in my heart by faith has made a whole new creation of me. The love which he had for all men when he died for them surrounds me and guides me in all I do. With Paul in his words of Galatians 2, I say I am “in Christ” and “Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”

In two ways then objective justification provides the motivation for mission outreach: It provides us with a whole different view of our fellowmen which compels us to tell them about Jesus; and God fills us with a whole new view of our lives which moves us gladly and willingly in thanks to serve as his instruments in bringing the gospel to all men.

Here objective justification also serves in another way in our mission outreach. It gives us, who are God’s instruments in bringing the gospel to all men, also the message to share with the world.

After crystallizing in verses 18–19 God’s act of justifying the world in Christ and the corollary of establishing the ministry of reconciliation, Paul goes on in the last part of verse 20 and in verse 21 to give an example of how he used the word of reconciliation in approaching the Corinthians, “Be reconciled to God! God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Note that this message is composed of three parts, each part centering in objective justification.

First is the appeal, “Be reconciled to God.” Implicit in this appeal are both the fact that we need to be reconciled and that the reconciliation stands as a completed blessing for us to receive. The need for reconciliation can only be made clear by the preaching of God’s law. It is only when a person comes to a realization of his sin and its consequences before God that he will be ready to hear of his reconciliation. The person whose sinful pride and self-righteousness have been crushed so that he cries out, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Ro 7:24) needs to hear what God has done for him in Christ so that he can also say, “Thanks be to God (I am rescued)—through Jesus Christ my Lord” (Ro 7:25). To such a person we can say, “Be reconciled to God!” We can tell him that no matter how scarlet or crimson his sins, they have been made whiter than snow or wool. His forgiveness is an accomplished fact.

Why can we assure him of this? Because “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.” We can tell the sinner in his despair that it is true that if he would have to pay for those sins himself, he would never be able to do it. But he need not despair anymore because God took all of his sins and laid them on the spotless Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2) so every sinner by faith can say, “Chief of sinners though I be, Jesus shed his blood for me.”

The result is that the condition of all men before God is that they are justified, or as Paul said in verse 19, God no longer is counting men’s sins against them. This was God’s very purpose in making Christ to be sin for us. Paul says in the concluding part of verse 21: “So that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Yes, this is the message we can proclaim to all sinners. God’s purpose which he accomplished in Christ is that we might be assured that we are justified, that is, that our status before him might be the absolute perfection

which God required. And “God’s righteousness” is exactly what we have become in Christ. “Jesus thy blood and righteousness, My beauty are my glorious dress ... Fully absolved through these I am, From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.”

Thus Paul demonstrates how objective justification serves as the *message* in our mission outreach. But in the intervening verse (v 20a) he shows how objective justification also provides the *method* for the administration of God’s reconciliation. “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” God’s reconciliation is not a message we have prepared but one which he has prepared. No tampering with that message on our part may be done. So our method is to simply serve as God’s ambassadors. We are God’s mouthpiece through whom the message which God has both established and caused to be written down exactly as he wanted it expressed is brought to men. Therefore Paul can say that it is just as if God himself were making an appeal to men through us. If we remember that in verse 19 Paul could substitute the word λόγος for the word διακονία in verse 18, then we realize our method in carrying out the ministry of reconciliation is merely the proclaiming of God’s Word.

But the fact that what we are proclaiming is God’s Word and not our own does not mean that we will make a detached or indifferent presentation. Note what Paul says, “We *implore* you on Christ’s behalf” (v 20b). The word Paul uses is δέομαι: to beg, beseech, implore. This is not the action of one who does not care whether his message gets across or not. This is not just a peremptory fulfillment of duty, but this is the act of one who is vitally concerned about the message which he is conveying as an ambassador. He acts as an ambassador who wants the blessing which he is bringing from his Lord to be received by all who hear. This kind of presentation which begs and implores the hearer to listen is the direct result of the effect which this message first had on the ambassador’s own heart. He knows it is the greatest treasure which men can ever receive, and he knows his Lord has provided it free of cost for all men. He knows that without this blessing man is doomed to an eternity of frightful pain and suffering, and he knows that all who accept it by faith are assured of an eternity of bliss and joy which go beyond man’s understanding. An ambassador who carries such a message will be so wrapped up in what he has to say that he will not let the words fall lightly from his lips but will speak every word from the heart. And he will not be indifferent as to whether men accept his message or not but will say to them as Paul does in 6:1, “As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.”

Thus objective justification also provides, indirectly at least, the *method* for our mission outreach. It reminds us that our mission is to share with all men the truth of God’s-Christ-worked-world-reconciliation, not in words which reflect our human analysis of religious truth but simply in the divine words which God himself has spoken about it. Also, this message of objective justification which is so dear to us leads us to be active, enthusiastic and concerned ambassadors of this truth.

We have seen in general terms that objective justification provides the motive, the message and the method for mission outreach. Now let’s summarize and become more specific. What does objective justification mean for a missionary from the Wisconsin Synod of our day? It motivates you also in two ways. It leads you to look beyond the flock entrusted to your care to see all those in your community who are unchurched or who are being misled by non-Christian teachers as souls to be won for Christ. You do not regard anyone of them from a worldly point of view (v 16), such as sex, age, wealth, social status, etc. No, you see only souls bought by the blood of Christ which are losing the benefit of this blessing through ignorance and unbelief. You are also motivated by objective justification in this way that it gives you according to your new man a whole new view of the purpose of your life. To be sure you will not neglect your wife and children, for they are gifts God has given you to appreciate and to care for. But the greatest treasure you have is the knowledge that Jesus died for you and that in him you are a totally new creation. Therefore, you no longer can live for yourself but for him who died for you and rose again (v 15). He has given you the special privilege of being a public minister of his Word and it is Christ’s love in you which compels you to share it with all men.

Objective justification also provides the message for your mission outreach. This is not to say that you will neglect or lay aside any part of God’s Word in your proclamation of God’s reconciliation. Rather the situation is this that you will use all of God’s Word in proclaiming justification. When you use the law in a mission call, you will not find your delight in being able to make someone squirm, but you will be using the law

with the one purpose in mind of preparing a heart to hear the wonderful message of objective justification. Then when you teach the repentant sinner about his salvation, you will use the truth of God's-Christ-worked-world-reconciliation to show him that his salvation is sure because it is a *free* gift provided by God for *all* men. You will lead him to understand that in Christ he has been made perfect and holy in God's sight. His sanctified life which is a fruit of faith is not something he must add to his record in order to be justified. No, God's reconciliation was complete in Christ so his life of service to Jesus is his heartfelt expression of thanks for the perfect and completed gift of salvation which God gave all men in Christ.

And the method you use to convey this message is not gimmicks or games or verbal gymnastics of your own devising. No, yours is a ministry established by God which begins and ends with the Word. With Paul we say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God" (Ro 1:16) and (1 Cor 2:1-5) "When I came to you brothers, I did not come with *eloquence* or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.... My *message* and my *preaching* were not with *wise and persuasive* words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." And this message you do not speak mechanically but with an inner conviction which makes every word you speak a concerned appeal: "Be reconciled to God!"

### III. The Use of Objective Justification in Our Mission Outreach Is a Unique Heritage of Ours as Lutherans

As Lutherans we are alone in the proclamation of this doctrine because neither branch of the Reformed churches teaches a biblical justification that is both objective and universal. The Arminian approaches to Christ's saving work do not want to limit grace and atonement, but they seem to have a great reluctance to proclaim an unconditional gospel, a universal and objective justification. Take for example this quote from the new Expositor's Bible Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:15, "There is a *universalism in the scope* of redemption since no man is excluded from God's offer of salvation: *but* there is a *particularity in application* of redemption, since not all men appropriate the benefits afforded by this universally *offered* salvation."

Conservative Calvinists, found in the small Reformed and Presbyterian bodies, still cling staunchly to the greater error of an actual and outright limitation of the atonement and its grace to the elect, or as they often call them, "the saved."<sup>3</sup> We quote one example. The new Tyndale New Testament commentary (Eerdmans) says in connection with verse 19, "Whenever the word of reconciliation is proclaimed by those to whom God has committed it, and *whenever* it is appropriated by an individual sinner, *that person* is reconciled by God to Himself." Note the qualification—it must be proclaimed and appropriated before there is a reconciliation.

Even in Lutheran circles the truth of objective justification is often obscured. This Lenski does in his comments on verse 19 when he asks whether the term "world" refers to objective reconciliation and then answers, "We ought to have three aorist forms *if* objective acts are referred to; we ought to have God *did* reconcile the world, *did* not reckon, also *did* deposit .... Since it is assumed that this is objective reconciliation and thus a historic past act on the part of God, this ἦν ... is regarded as if it were an aorist, as if it expressed an aorist past act, one that God did when Christ died.... What does Paul say? That what God has finished for him and his helpers (v 18) he *is still busy* with in regard to the world (v 19) namely the individuals in it." Later in connection with μη; λογιζόμενος he excludes objective justification when he writes, "All these sinners have transgressions, but God does not charge them against sinners .... Instead of reckoning unto them their sins he reckons unto them *their faith*.... God continues to do this again and again, always when sinners are brought to faith, καταλλάσσω and μη λογιζόμενος are iteratively durative."

But does it really make any difference whether we teach objective justification in our mission outreach if we nevertheless teach subjective justification? Perhaps someone who sees no difference between the following two statements will think that it doesn't make any difference: 1) You are saved if you only believe. 2) You are

<sup>3</sup> E. C. Fredrich, "Twentieth Century Reformed Thinking Analyzed and Evaluated," Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly, LXXII (January 1975), p 45.

saved; Believe it! But we recognize at once how dangerous the first statement is because it places a condition on our salvation (if you only believe). Thus it begins to put the certainty of my salvation on the condition of my faith rather than on the sure and certain fact of God's reconciliation. Pastor Torald Teigen in a Free Conference Essay some years ago illustrated this point when he told of an old Norwegian Lutheran farmer who was met by a zealous Reformed evangelist on the street.<sup>4</sup> The man took this farmer by the coat lapels and looking him straight in the eye he asked, "Brother, are you saved?" "Yes" came the calm reply. "When were you saved?" the evangelist queried. "Oh, some two thousand years ago!" came the confident answer.

As soon as objective justification is lost, the gospel is made to say nothing more than this: God is now willing to forgive you your sins if you first do this or that. Thus the door is opened for synergism and the devil readily supplies men with notions of what they must contribute to bring about their justification.<sup>5</sup> Some will say, "God is willing to forgive your sins if you produce works of love worthy of salvation." Others will say, "God is willing to forgive you if you are sorry for your sins." Thus they make contrition a cause and a condition of forgiveness. Or, some will say as we noted above, "God is willing to forgive you if you only believe," thus making faith the condition of forgiveness because it is that one contribution which man must still make to render his justification complete. How many pastors are there that can look back over their old sermons without finding instances where, despite the best of intentions, they may have left the idea with the hearer that his sins are not forgiven until he fulfills the stipulation of faith?<sup>6</sup>

This so easily causes the terror-stricken sinner to subject his heart to an anxious, microscopic scrutiny for faith. What he then sees, namely, his desperately wicked heart, does not reassure him at all. Even the staunchest of saints in moments or days of spiritual conflict find that the hardest thing for them is to believe that they believe. Whoever is told to concentrate on something he must do before forgiveness can be his, instead of dwelling on the mighty acts which God has done, is on extremely slippery ground.<sup>7</sup> If Satan could tempt Jesus with the question, "Are you really the Son of God as your Father declared?", think how he can put a guilty sinner on the rack with such questions as: Are you saved? Are you really a believer? Do you really have the true faith?

It is of little comfort for a troubled soul to hear an ambassador of Christ say to him: "Son, be of good cheer; the moment you believe your sins will be forgiven you." This is of little comfort to him because requiring faith as a condition which man must fulfill before being forgiven turns the blessed gospel into law. The law does make promises, but they are always conditional (e.g., "If a man do my statutes, he shall live in them"). The gospel promises are unconditional. The gospel then can only be an announcing of what God has done for us, never a suggestion of what we must still do. As soon as even one condition is attached to God's gift of salvation, the gospel ceases to be the offer of a free gift, and it becomes instead the proposal of a bargain.<sup>8</sup>

But didn't the jailer of Philippi ask, "What must I do to be saved?" and wasn't the answer given, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"? Yes, but if we understand this statement of Paul's in the light of what he writes a dozen times elsewhere, this exhortation by Paul is not a law order telling the jailer that there was only one big hurdle left between him and heaven. Instead it was an invitation which encouraged the jailer to stop thinking about what he must do and rather accept what Christ had done for him.

This too is the way that we want to carry on our mission outreach, namely, according to our Lutheran heritage which is firmly founded on the Scriptural truth of objective justification. Luther wrote, "What sin, then, remains on earth? Nothing but the failure to accept this Savior and the will not to accept him who puts away sin.... Therefore the world is no longer punished or damned because of other sins, since Christ has wiped out all of them. Only the resolve not to acknowledge or accept him remains sin in the New Testament."

May we then who by God's grace have learned to know God as one who reconciled all men to himself in Christ and as one who has laid on us the responsibility of administering his word of reconciliation—may we

<sup>4</sup> T. N. Teigen, "The Proclamation of Justification," *His Pardoning Grace*, (Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1966), p 70.

<sup>5</sup> Norbert Reim, "The Appropriation of Justification," also in *His Pardoning Grace*, p 100.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p 103.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p 103.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p 104.

be faithful ambassadors who in our mission outreach are compelled by Christ's love to approach all men with this concerned and earnest appeal, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." And as we thus administer God's-Christ-worked-world-reconciliation, may God bless his Word with rich fruit which redounds to his glory.