

## JUSTIFICATION

*Introduction* - In this study from God's Word we are considering the term 'justification' both in its use and in its explanation with other words. We as Lutherans coming out of the Reformation know this teaching well as the heart of our confession. It is at the center of our teaching. Through the Reformation God gave back to us this great teaching from the Word in all its beauty and clarity. In the Augsburg Confession of 1530 it was stated, "We receive forgiveness of sin...when we believe...that for (Christ's) sake our sin is forgiven." Seventy-five years ago American Lutherans made a fine statement of faith in the Brief Statement which made the following points on justification.

17. Holy Scripture sums up all its teachings regarding the love of God to the world of sinners, regarding the salvation wrought by Christ, and regarding faith in Christ as the only way to obtain salvation, in the article of justification. 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 that is, believe, accept, and rely on, the fact that for Christ's sake their sins are forgiven. Thus the Holy Ghost testifies through St. Paul: "There is no difference; for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," Rom. 3:23, 24. And again: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law," Rom. 3:28.

18. Through this doctrine alone Christ is given the honor due Him, namely, that through His holy life and innocent suffering and death He is our Savior. And through this doctrine alone can poor sinners have the abiding comfort that God is assuredly gracious to them. We reject as apostasy from the Christian religion all doctrines whereby man's own works and merit are mingled into the article of justification before God. For the Christian religion is the faith that we have forgiveness of sins and salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, Acts 10:43.

19. We reject as apostasy from the Christian religion not only the doctrine of the Unitarians, who promise the grace of God to men on the basis of their moral efforts; not only the gross work-doctrine of the papists, who expressly state

that good works are necessary to obtain justification; but also the doctrine of the synergists, who indeed use the terminology of the Christian Church and say that man is justified "by faith," "by faith alone," but again mix human works into the article of justification by ascribing to man a co-operation with God in the kindling of faith and thus stray into papistic territory.

*Terms* - When Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world, this focus is on what we term objective, universal, general justification. The three words all have been used to describe this justification. 'Objective' is used because it is not for any specific group to the exclusion of others. 'Universal' and 'general' give the idea that it is for all, not just some.

As to the word 'justification' or to 'justify', we go to court to hear a verdict declared of innocent, righteous or just.

When 'justification' or 'justify' are used with the word 'faith', we call it 'subjective' or 'individual' justification. The idea 'individual' is clear enough in seeing what Christ did on the cross applied to the individual. The word 'subjective' means that Christ's forgiveness is applied to the subject of the sinner, it being his own personal possession. Faith receives, accepts and appropriates for its own the forgiveness won on Calvary.

*The Heart of God* -Why some are ultimately saved and go to heaven and some not so, is answered by man being able to reject, but God saves. This paradox is beyond our understanding and needs to be accepted by faith in the Word that teaches it. The love of God is explicit for all. He desires all to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. I Tim. 2:4 He does not wish that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Pet. 3:9 God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30) and look to the accomplishment of the Son on Calvary. That not all do is to man's shame and discredit.

As we go through a study of passages teaching objective and subjective justification, we will be considering illustrations by which we can highlight this great teaching of God's Word to our people.

\*A man is on death row in a prison. He has been convicted of crimes that warrant his execution. No appeal is possible as he awaits execution. The Governor has power to grant a reprieve and full pardon and he does. But this does not benefit the man on death's row until the pardon is communicated to the prison and bestowed on the man in the prison cell. So our God has granted a full pardon for our numerous and varied crimes that deserve the worst punishment, eternal death in the Lake of Fire. The message of salvation comes to me the criminal and I receive it. It is totally by the favor of God that I have it, received with a Spirit- engendered faith that clutches it to me as a man on death row would a pardon.

## Passages That Teach Objective Justification

It is also taught in the Old Testament, though we do not look at it found there in this study. There the grace of God is clearly taught in forgiving the sins of His people: Is. 43:25, 44:22, Jer. 31:34, Ps. 32:5. The passages that we study do not exhaust those given in the Word.

Jn. 1:29 ...Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. – John the baptizer by inspiration of the Spirit points directly at Jesus and states that what he will do on Calvary is for the world and not just the Jews.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men – As Titus labors on the isle of Crete, Paul gives him this reassurance that all on that island are fair game for the Gospel, whether Jew or Gentile.

Heb. 2:9 But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. – As the author of this epistle writes to the Jewish Christians in Rome, he bolsters them with that certain knowledge that Christ is the Savior of them and of the Gentiles who are the majority in the city.

I Pet. 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous...- Peter writing to likely heavily Jewish Christians in dispersion assures them not only of their salvation on Calvary, but that they can announce this to any who are unrighteous, which is everyone.

Heb. 7:27 He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself. – The ‘once for all’ refers back to ‘the people’ showing how it is across the board that Christ suffered and died, across time and nations, for all.

2 Cor. 5:14-15 For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all...he died for all...- As we read this in context, the application is obviously to the Corinthians in their wicked city. But it is based upon the cross of Calvary where for all time and generations it was done.

Rom. 4:25 who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. – Anyone reading this passage has the proclamation of the eternal Gospel. And here is the word ‘justification’ used as for all in that the empty tomb is the proof of salvation won on Calvary. With this passage we begin to consider the many passages of Romans that present this teaching.

Rom. 5:18 Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. – All are sinners self-condemned by their own wickedness, and all have been declared righteous by His one act. This is how we can go out and announce, “Your sins have been forgiven.” All time focuses on His work on Calvary.

\*A man is in debt and overwhelmed by all the money he owes. A rich benefactor declares in his will that his wealth is to go to this poor, debt-ridden man. But that poor man has no benefit from this until the money is deposited into his own personal bank account. Our Lord Jesus is indeed our great Benefactor. All that He has won for mankind is of no benefit unless it is deposited into one’s personal account to draw upon. Righteousness is reckoned to us by faith. The deposit is made by the Holy Spirit. He creates the account of faith that receives the wealth our Lord won for us.

Rom. 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? – Some would use passages like this one to say that Christ died for the ‘world’ of eventual believers or for those who would believe. But with all the passages reiterating the absolute all-encompassing act of Christ on the Hill of a Skull, they are wrong.

Rom. 11:32 For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all. – Here again we have the double use of ‘all’, which precludes any limitation on who was forgiven on the cross.

What are some favorite passages you have to teach objective justification?

## **Passages that Teach Subjective Justification**

Faith is the hand that receives the forgiveness of sins. Inevitably, man at the devil’s urging will try to claim some merit or worth that makes faith at least in part an act of man. The power that implants and impels the hand is God. No man can say Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Spirit. I Cor. 12:3 It is not on account of faith or in view of faith as if my faith has any merit. My condition does not allow God’s righteousness. I need help from the outside, God.

It is also taught in the Old Testament that the righteousness is imputed to me through faith: Zech. 3:4, Jer. 23:6, Gen. 15:6.

\*As we look up into the sky we see the vast bank of clouds that has all the water that is necessary for this earth to thrive and produce. But unless it precipitates, rains, that moisture in those clouds does us no good. The rain falls on this earth without our assistance. The earth receives the moisture. Faith is like the earth receiving heaven’s blessings gained for all, just as the clouds above bestow on all.

Jn. 3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life... - What Jesus states here is repeated voluminously.

Acts 10:43 – To him all the prophets bear witness that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. – The church went forth and proclaimed that forgiveness, already won, might be imparted through faith.

Eph. 1:7-8 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us. - The grace of God is superabundant, more than we need. Like the rain it falls upon us and we in turn thrive.

Eph. 1:19 ...the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might – The power is of God. Faith is God’s work in us.

I Cor. 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. - Personally it becomes my own, this forgiveness, when the Spirit creates faith. It all depends on God to His great glory. We were lost, but now found.

Titus 3:7 so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. – It is by grace through faith that we are saved. Eph. 2:8-9 Faith is the channel through which we have the blessing.

Phil. 3:9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. –

it cannot be any more explicit that this. Faith is the channel through which we have the grace of God. The faith is in Christ. It is the object of faith Christ that makes it valuable, not our attempts or will. Righteousness depends on faith. If there is no faith, there can be no reception of righteousness.

Heb. 11:7 ...Noah...became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

\* A man dies and leaves a will. In the will one is bequeathed what he does not deserve. But it is written in the codicil, one was added in when another was deleted. Unless the presumed heir is notified he cannot possess the inheritance. When he is notified, it is made known to him and he receives what is so undeserved. We think about the wonder of us Gentiles brought into covenant promise. Christ died and bequeathed to us the riches of heaven, first of which is forgiveness of sins which gains us entrance. We are notified in the Gospel and receive by faith.

Gal. 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith...- Jesus came to His own and His own received Him not. But He was the Savior of all nations, a light to lighten the nations. We Gentiles have the same route as the Jew. Not by works or by the law, but through faith we appropriate the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Gal. 3:22 But the scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe...26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. – It easy to see why this epistle and Romans were such important books for the church to be reformed back to justification. I am just, righteous in the Father's eyes due to Christ whose righteousness covers me over being cloaked by faith.

Gal. 2:16 yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ...20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God...- This faith is now a living thing in me such that Christ lives in me ruling from the throne of my mind. His Spirit works with my spirit to will and to do. I am saved by the cross and see Christ as my substitute there so that I realize I have been crucified with Christ. It all depends on Christ. Faith is operative because of the object of faith, Christ.

Rom. 4:3 Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. – In Abraham we have an example that also points back to the Old Testament that God operated then as now. What was not Abraham's but Christ's was imputed, reckoned, credited to Abraham's account.

Rom. 8:30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. – In God's grand scheme of things the faith is implanted in time to receive the righteousness of the crucified One.

Rom. 3:30 since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith. – There is only one way to receive salvation, by faith.

Do you have some favorite passages on justification by faith?

\* In the village is a large mango tree with mangos enough for all the children in the village. A child looks up into the mango tree and sees the proliferation of ripe fruit but is

unable to reach and pluck a juicy fruit. A man comes along and lifts the child upon his shoulders and the child reaches and plucks and eats. We are like that child in that we cannot reach the wonderful proliferation of salvation that is there. God must come and hoist us up that faith then can reach out as a hand and possess.

### **Passages that Teach Objective and Subjective Justification Together**

In the Old Testament this also will be found for instance in Dan. 9:24.

Rom. 3:25 whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. – Expiation means a sacrifice by which the wrath of God is appeased. Jesus death on Calvary is that. The benefit of it comes through seeing Him with eyes of faith.

I Jn. 2:2 and he is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. – Ours is the God of love, all-encompassing love, from generation to generation. Believe it.

2 Cor. 5:19-21 that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation...For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – Here we have other words than justification, but the same teaching. What joy we have to bring this message in whatever words we can.

Jn. 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. – In this most familiar of all Bible passages we have the coupled teaching.

\*In the beginning God created light on the first day. This was before there was any instrument of light. Then on the fourth day He created the sun and moon by which our day and night are lighted through which light comes.

So it is with justification. God sent His Son to death and that salvation won is as pervasive over all this world as light is. Where sin abounded, grace does much more abound. As now we have the sun and moon through which there is light, so faith is now the instrument through which we have salvation. By grace are you save through faith.

## **Conclusion**

Perhaps you have passages that you can think of where both objective and subjective justification are presented. Our Lord is everything to us. In Him we live and move and have our being. This most important of Bible teachings comes to us with such clarity from the Word because it is so vital for our life here and the abundant one beyond this veil. The Lord is our righteousness as well as everything else. I Cor. 1:30 To Him alone belongs the glory.