

Universal and Objective Justification with Special Emphasis on a Recent Controversy

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Background

I was sitting at my desk one day last February with the secure feeling that all was well in the world of WELS. Doctrinal unity. A determination to proclaim an unconditional Gospel. What blessings God has given our church body! Those blessings must have crossed my mind in my reflections on that February day. Those blessings surely rank high on our prayer priority list for the church at large.

A real bombshell shattered my reflections as I walked back from the mailbox. Here was a letter from Kokomo, Indiana. “Who do I know from Kokomo?” I thought.

The letter was from some WELS members, and it revealed that a full-blown doctrinal controversy had been raging in one of our congregations. And what a serious charge it was:

On June 20, 1979 a special voters’ meeting of Faith Lutheran Church, WELS, Kokomo, Indiana was called to determine if all of its members supported the doctrine of justification as practiced by the WELS... We could not with a clear conscience support those statements since they teach universalism and are contrary to the clear teachings of the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions.¹

Every congregation in our synod received that same letter, and to make matters worse, *Christian News* decided to add coals to the fire by publishing letters regarding that controversy. All was not well in the world of WELS.

That controversy prompted a considerable response on the part of our church body. The Southeastern Wisconsin District President appointed a special committee to investigate the matter, meet with the congregation and the people involved and report on their findings. A copy of that committee’s report is available from Prof. Armin Panning, a member of the committee. Unfortunately the response of Faith Congregation had to be to suspend from fellowship those who leveled the charges.

A more important response in regard to ourselves is perhaps a renewed awareness that we cannot take for granted any doctrine of Scripture, even one so basic to our biblical faith and Lutheran heritage as justification. The importance of thoroughly teaching and proclaiming justification cannot be overemphasized. And with that opinion we’re in good company. Luther said, “The most necessary and important thing is that we teach and repeat this doctrine daily... For it cannot be grasped or held enough or too much.”ⁱⁱ

Therefore in the spirit of the great reformer, President Wiechmann strongly urged the agenda committees of our district to consider treatment of justification at future conferences. Hence this paper. Pastor Kobleske of the agenda committee suggested to me that special emphasis be given to the status of those in hell in regard to justification, since that was a major issue in the Kokomo controversy. Because so many other things must be established to adequately discuss the status of those in hell, that issue itself has become a subpoint in this paper. Against the background of this recent controversy we take up the topic Universal And Objective Justification.

Terminology

Since this paper deals with two particular terms, we best begin with a few words about these terms and about a few related terms which will come up in the discussion.

Regarding the term “justification,” an exact definition of “justify” will be dealt with later when examining the Hebrew and Greek words which the Bible uses for the term. In a general way, justification has to do with the forgiveness of man’s sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner. This is what we have learned in the past and continue to teach in the treatment of the phrase “I believe in...the forgiveness of sins” in the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed.

The German theologian Heinrich Schmid beautifully describes this end result of justification when he writes,

By justification we are, therefore, by no means to understand a moral condition existing in man, or a moral change which he has experienced, but only a judgment pronounced upon man, by which his relation to God is reversed, and indeed in such a manner, that man can now consider himself one whose sins are blotted out, who is no longer responsible for them before God, who, on the other hand, appears before God as accepted and righteous, in whom God finds nothing more to punish, with whom He has no longer any occasion to be displeased.ⁱⁱⁱ

Putting it more succinctly and clarifying the basis for justification, Koehler’s *Summary of Christian Doctrine* quotes E. H. Little who writes, “Justification properly consists in the non-imputation of sins, or their forgiveness, to the sinner, which is the negative side; and the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness... which is the positive side.”^{iv}

Justification then is the reason we can be sure we are acceptable to God. Throughout the history of the church the questions that have naturally arisen are “Who is justified?” and “Why are they justified?” Theologians have offered various phrases which emphasize the particular aspects of justification that answer these questions.

“Universal justification” emphasizes the fact that God has justified all people.

“Objective justification,” often used synonymously with “universal justification,” emphasizes that God’s justifying act took place completely on His own and apart from man.

“General justification” is an older term which has been used in the same way as “universal justification.”

“Cosmic reconciliation” is certainly not Lutheran in its origin, but we mention it to show what a contemporary theologian offers in an attempt to get close to the Greek of II Corinthians 5. (More will be said later about the relationship between justification and reconciliation.) To me “cosmic reconciliation” sounds a little too much like the final outcome of “Star Wars.”

Another word that is used in conjunction with universal and objective justification is “forensic.” “Forensic” has to do with legality and judgment. It emphasizes the declaratory nature of justification in a legal setting. God’s justifying act takes place in His courtroom, and the verdict depends not on man’s condition but on God’s declaration.

Universal and objective justification are, of course, the terms with which we are most familiar. I have to admit that until I wrote this paper, I had just assumed that these terms had always been in the Lutheran glossary. An investigation into their history will show that these terms are relatively new.

History

The term “objective justification” is little more than 100 years old in our Lutheran circles. It’s a term used frequently by Dr. Francis Pieper and other Lutheran theologians of the early 20th century. Pieper writes in his *Christian Dogmatics*, “The Gospel offers him the forgiveness of sins gained by Christ. for the whole world (objective justification).”^v Hoenecke is more at home with the term “universal justification,” but he also

mentions in his *Dogmatik* a distinction between “the objective act of justification and the subjective possession and enjoyment thereof in blessed peace.”^{vi} “Objective justification” is also used by John Schaller, August Pieper, August Graebner and George Stoeckhardt, almost exclusively as a synonym for “universal justification.”

A quotation from Schaller shows us that the term “objective justification” was commonly used in his day. “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.”^{vii} But does the fact that he refers to it as “so-called objective justification” indicate that the term had originated in recent years? It seems so.

In studying the history of the term Prof. Reim contended that the use of “objective justification” was rare in the days of the Synodical Conference’s founding (1872), although it was mentioned occasionally by Walther. In trying to determine the exact origin of the term, Reim leans heavily in the direction of the orthodox Norwegian Lutherans in the U.S. in the mid-19th century. Reim refers to a book called *Grace for Grace*, in which the Norwegians reflect on their battles against the subjectivism of the pietists in their midst. The book states,

It is the bane of Pietism that it centers its attention so much on the feelings and the spiritual condition of man’s heart that it forgets or pays but slight attention to the great *objective facts of God’s love* (emphasis mine) for men and the all-sufficient atonement of the Savior and Redeemer. Jesus Christ.^{viii}

Although the above reference does not specifically use the term “objective justification,” Reim feels there is sufficient evidence for crediting the Norwegians for coining the phrase.

Previous to this development in the mid-19th century, Lutherans used the terms “universal justification” or “general justification.” Even Stoeckhardt, a contemporary of Schaller and Francis Pieper, is more comfortable with the older term, “general justification.” In an article entitled “General Justification,” he states,

The article of justification remains pure, firm and unshaken if we keep in mind the statement of doctrine and faith concerning general justification, if we hold firmly that the entire world of sinners has already been justified through Christ, through that which Christ did and suffered.^{ix}

But this is not to say that orthodox Lutherans began teaching something new in the mid-19th century. Prof. J. P. Meyer, in his commentary on II Corinthians, *Ministers of Christ*, points out that classical Lutheran theologians clearly taught “objective justification” without actually using the term. He quotes Gerhard (1607 - 1676), “In Christ’s resurrection we were absolved from our sins, so that they can no longer condemn us before the judgment seat of God.”^x Such a clear statement shows that orthodox Lutherans have always believed that our absolution before God depends only on the objective facts of Christ’s atonement, and not on any condition of faith in the heart of man.

The same could be said of the Lutheran Confessions. The Confessions do not even treat universal justification itself as a separate topic, but deal exclusively with “justification by faith,” or “subjective justification.” However, the objective fact, of God making a universal pronouncement of forgiveness is brought out clearly in the Confessions.

Consider just three examples.

For the Gospel convicts all men that they are under sin, that they all are subject to eternal wrath and death, and offers, for Christ’s sake, remission of sin and justification. (*Apology*, IV, 62)
All have sinned and are justified without merit. (*Smalcald Articles*, 11, 3)
Accordingly, we believe, teach, and confess that our righteousness before God is that God forgives us our sins out of pure grace, without any work, merit, or worthiness of ours preceding,

present, or following, that He presents and imputes to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience, on account of which righteousness we are received into grace by God, and regarded as righteous (*FC*).

All are offered remission and justification. All are justified without merit. Righteousness before God is out of pure grace without merit. That's universal and objective justification, taught clearly by the Confessions without using the terms.

The same could be said of Luther. In the Third Article in the Large Catechism he says, "The work of salvation is done and accomplished; for Christ, has acquired and won the treasure for us by His suffering, death and resurrection." In a sermon on Matthew 9:1-8 Luther said,

The sum and substance of this Gospel is the great, sublime article of faith which bears the name: Forgiveness of Sins... 1. Our righteousness before God. Now this consists in what we call God's grace, or forgiveness of sins. 2. It came about in this way that Jesus Christ, God's Son, came down from heaven and became man, (and) suffered and died for our sins. 3.... You see that here you have everything that comprises this article of Christian righteousness: it consists in the forgiveness of sins; it is given through Christ; it is received by faith through and in the Word.^{xi}

In a lecture on Genesis 15:6 Luther said, "By faith... I lay hold of the divine judgment."^{xii}

According to Luther salvation is accomplished, forgiveness and righteousness is by God's grace, divine judgment has been rendered even before my faith. Luther also clearly teaches universal and objective justification without using the terms.

Theological terminology then has developed as the church militant has seen the need to clarify its expressions of faith in the saving grace of God. No matter what the history of the terms, and no matter which prominent theologians have made use of them, unless they agree with clear statements of God's inspired Word, theological terms are of little use to us. An examination of the biblical words for "justify" and a discussion of important biblical doctrines related to justification prove that universal and objective justification are clearly taught in the Word of God.

Scriptural Basis

It is basic to man's sinful nature to want to take credit for his salvation. This sinful tendency has always cropped up in the discussion of justification. In both the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible, the word "justify" is the verb related to an adjective meaning "righteous." [Hebrew: adjective – קָדוֹשׁ verb – קָדַשׁ; Greek: adjective – δίκαιος verb – δικαίω] The age-old question that has arisen is, Does justify mean 'make righteous' or 'pronounce righteous'?" This debate has not been confined to the Roman Catholic - Lutheran battleground. Even the late Dr. Beck seemed to be confused on the issue, for, in his American Translation of the Scriptures he often rendered δικαίω as "make righteous." If this understanding of the word justify is an attempt to give man some of the credit for his right standing with God because of a righteousness in him, then we've got problems. It is the sinful nature wanting to take credit for his salvation.

An examination of how both the Hebrew and Greek words for justify are used in Scripture reveal that there is a forensic and declaratory nature to both קָדַשׁ and δικαίω. They deal with a legal pronouncement not at all dependent on the moral condition of the person "on trial." Some key passages of Scripture bring out very clearly that the biblical word for justify is to be understood as "declare righteous" or "pronounce righteous."

Old Testament

In the following passages the italicized word or words are the NIV's translation of קָדַשׁ "justify."

Exodus 23:7—I will not *acquit* the guilty.

Deuteronomy 25:1—take it to court...*acquitting* the innocent and condemning the guilty.

Proverbs 17:15—*Acquitting* the guilty and condemning the innocent—the LORD detests them both.

Isaiah 43:9—Let them bring in their witnesses to *prove* they *were right*. (KJV:...that they may be justified.)

The above passages deal with a legal pronouncement in a civil court. “Justify” in these verses only makes sense when understood as “declare righteous” or “declare innocent.”

Psalm 51:4—so that you are...*justified* when you judge.

Isaiah 50:8—He who *vindicates* me is near.

In the first passage God is “justified” by man, and in the second the suffering Savior is “justified” by the Father. Since our Father and Savior are inherently righteous and cannot be made more righteous, these passages obviously deal with a declaration; a pronouncement of their righteousness.

II Chronicles 6:23—*Declare* the innocent *not guilty* and so establish his innocence. (part of Solomon’s prayer of dedication)

Isaiah 53:11—By his knowledge my righteous servant will *justify* many, and he will bear their iniquities.

These two passages clearly show God’s pronouncement of righteousness on man. In the first the innocent is not benefitting from his guiltlessness until it is declared. In the second the Savior can make a pronouncement of righteousness over the unrighteous because he took their sins upon himself.

Thus the claim that justify means “make righteous” makes no sense in view of the above Old Testament passages. In his Hebrew lexicon Gesenius offers as meanings for קָדַשׁ (piel of קָדַשׁ) “render just,” “declare righteous,” “absolve,” “acquit.” It is a declaratory and objective pronouncement not dependent on man’s subjective condition. We find the same in the New Testament.

New Testament

A few important New Testament references show that the very same declaratory nature also belongs to $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\acute{o}\omega$, the Greek word for justify. Again the translation of $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\acute{o}\omega$ is indicated by italicizing.

Luke 7:29—All the people,...when they heard Jesus’ words, *acknowledged* that God’s way *was right*. (KJV: *justified* God)

I Timothy 3:16—He appeared in a body, was *vindicated* by the Spirit.

Luke 10:29—(an expert in the law) wanted to *justify* himself.

In the first two passages God is again justified by man, and in the third passage the expert in the law was attempting to pronounce himself innocent, by asking Jesus to define who his neighbor was. The most important passages which reveal the forensic and declaratory nature of $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\acute{o}\omega$ are found in Romans, which deals with God’s pronouncement of righteousness on the sinner.

Romans 3:20—No one will be *declared righteous* in his sight by observing the law.

Romans 3:23-26—all have sinned...and are *justified* freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus...he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who *justifies*.

Romans 4:5—God...*justifies* the wicked.

Romans 5:18—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 for all men.

The theme of Romans 3-5 is that God justifies the sinner because of the grace He showed the world in offering up His Son as the “sacrifice of atonement” (Romans 3:25) which removed the burden of guilt from humanity. God even justifies “the wicked,” for His justification is set up in contrast to the condemnation lie pronounced on fallen mankind. Justification has nothing to do with man’s own righteousness. It has everything to do with God’s forensic, objective declaration of the sinner’s innocence made on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection.

Lexicographers and New Testament Greek scholars agree with this forensic and objective understanding of δικαίω. The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon defines δικαίω as “justify,” “vindicate,” “acquit,” “pronounce as righteous.” *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* traces this forensic aspect of δικαίω back to classical Greek. It states that it is used as a legal term in classical Greek meaning “to regard as fair or right; to pronounce sentence.”^{xiii} It goes on and says the following of Paul’s use of the word.

In Paul the legal usage is plain and indisputable...For Paul the word δικαιοῦν does not suggest the infusion of moral qualities...It implies justification of the ungodly...an act of grace rather than of retribution according to works...forensic because in the ἱλαστήριον [propitiation - appeasement of God’s wrath through Christ’s blood sacrifice] judgment is executed on all sin in the Substitute.^{xiv}

It becomes apparent from the above scriptural references and from the observation of linguistic scholars that justification in the biblical sense is not only objective in nature, but it is also universal. It is a legal pronouncement made on all mankind.

Romans 5:18 stated clearly that justification is “for all men.” Earlier in this same chapter Paul intimately links justification with Jesus’ vicarious atonement. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood...” (Romans 5:8b,9a) Romans 4:25 says that Christ “was delivered over, to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” Paul could hardly mean that God’s pronouncement of innocence is limited to just the believers. If that were true, then Christ’s atonement would have to be limited to just believers. The above Romans passages and a host of other biblical references shoot down the limited justification/atonement theory.

Some of the more well known references to a universal atonement, by no means an exhaustive list, are as follows:

Genesis 3:15—(a promise to all humanity to follow)

Genesis 12:3—all peoples on earth will be blessed

Isaiah 53:6—has laid on him the iniquity of us all

Mark 10:45—give his life as a ransom for many

John 1:29—takes away the sin of the world

II Corinthians 5:14—one died for all

I Timothy 2:6—gave himself as a ransom for all men

I Peter 3:18—Christ died for sins once for all

II Peter 2:1—denying the sovereign Lord who bought them

All of these passages show that Christ purchased forgiveness of sins for all people. The last passage even shows that Christ redeemed those who rejected Him.

But some want to maintain a distinction between Christ purchasing forgiveness and God actually forgiving. This distinction was one of the chief points in the Kokomo controversy. A passage which erases any such distinction is 11 Corinthians 5:19, which states, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” In Christ’s death God pronounced all men innocent since He no longer counted their sins against them. This orthodox Lutheran understanding of the passage has always linked reconciliation of II Corinthians 5 and justification of Romans 3 - 5 as meaning one and the same thing.

Prof. Meyer develops this point very thoroughly in commenting on II Corinthians 5 in *Ministers of Christ*. Other prominent Lutheran theologians have made the same observation. Stoeckhardt cites the parallel phrases “justified by his blood” and “reconciled...through the death” of Romans 5:9,10 and says, “St. Paul the Apostle uses the concepts ‘reconciliation’ and ‘justification’ interchangeably...[They] mean one and the same thing to Paul.”^{xv} Schaller draws the same conclusion when comparing the concepts of Psalm 32, Romans 4 and II Corinthians 5. He states,

This profusion of expressions obviously is to serve the purpose of describing the justifying act of God from various points of view: when God justifies, He is forgiving iniquity, He is covering sin, He is not imputing sin. These three expressions fuse for Paul into one concept, justification, so that he can in a given instance describe the entire act of justification by means of any one of these expressions. In each of these expressions the others are implied; one can substitute one for the other without altering the intended meaning.^{xvi}

Dr. Ed. Preuss draws a similar conclusion in commenting on II Corinthians 5:19. “This is not the justification which we receive by faith, but the one which took place before all faith. In Christ we were justified before we were even born.”^{xvii}

Thus it is clear that though the terms “universal justification” and “objective justification” are found neither in the Scriptures nor in the Lutheran Confessions, the terms have been used by orthodox theologians to describe for us the central doctrine of God’s Word—justification. It is a justification that is universal, for God has pronounced His forgiveness over all mankind. It is a justification that is objective, for the legal pronouncement was issued by God’s grace for Jesus’ sake without being prompted in the least by anything in man.

Lutheran Misunderstanding

One would think that heresy which removes the universality and the objectivity of justification would be limited to those who espouse a limited atonement and a conditional Gospel—the Reformed, the Baptists. But oddly enough to our way of thinking, that’s simply not the case. There have also been “Lutherans” who have ripped the heart out of the Gospel and have taught that God has not actually forgiven all the sins of all mankind.

In *Ministers of Christ*, Prof. Meyer quotes a statement which came out of the old Ohio Synod, now part of the ALC.

We believe and confess: Through the reconciliation effected by Christ the holy and gracious God *made an approach* to us, so that now He *can* forgive us our sin and justify us; justification itself, however, does not take place until the spark of faith is kindled by God’s grace in the heart of the poor sinner; *then* God forgives the sinner his sins.^{xviii} (emphasis Meyer’s)

This “Lutheran” statement makes God’s forgiveness dependent on man’s faith.

Even Lenski, whose “big green line” adorns most WELS pastors’ bookshelves, is guilty of the same error. In commenting on II Corinthians 5:18,19 he says, “We do *not* (emphasis mine) find the idea that Paul here says that when Christ died, when in and by his death God reconciled the world objectively, he then and there forgave all sins to the whole world.”^{xix} If Lenski meant that God *did* reconcile the world “objectively,” he certainly did not understand objective justification as we do, for he denies that on the basis of Christ’s death and resurrection God once and for all forgave all the sins of all mankind.

The misunderstanding which prompted the writing of this paper was unfortunately closer to home. The pastor of Faith Congregation in Kokomo discovered that one of the members of the congregation did not believe that God has forgiven all the sins of all mankind. The people who disagreed with Faith’s position drew up the now famous Four Statements, to which they pressed Faith Congregation to subscribe. The Four Statements are as follows:

1. Objectively speaking, without any reference to an individual sinner’s attitude toward Christ’s sacrifice, purely on the basis of God’s verdict, every sinner, whether he knows it or not, whether he believes it or not, has *received* the status of a saint.
2. After Christ’s intervention and through Christ’s intervention, God regards all sinners as guilt-free saints.
3. When God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, He individually pronounced forgiveness to each individual sinner whether that sinner ever comes to faith or not.
4. At the time of the resurrection of Christ, God looked down in hell and declared Judas, the people destroyed in the flood, and all the ungodly, innocent, not guilty, and forgiven of all sin and gave unto them the status of saints.

The first three statements were adapted from *Ministers of Christ* by a member of Faith Congregation, and the fourth is “from materials used for study purposes in a Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod worker training school.”^{xx} The panel which dealt with the Kokomo controversy “feels that these Four Statements without explanation or context are an inadequate presentation of the doctrine of objective justification.”^{xxi}

The confusion appears to have arisen particularly over the use of the phrase “status of a saint.” “Status of a saint” is employed by Meyer in his comments on II Corinthians 5:18-21. He uses the phrase to explain all that was involved in God reconciling the world to himself, not charging men with their sins, but imputing to them the righteousness of Christ, who became sin for us. The word “status” is particularly important because it reflects Meyer’s attempt at getting behind the original meaning of the Greek word for reconcile, *καταλλάσσω*, which has to do with change. It’s not a change in man, but it’s a change in God’s attitude toward man; a change in man’s standing with God because of what Christ did. The recipients of this change in status are indeed the entire world.

The Bible therefore does teach that all the sins of all mankind are completely forgiven. That means also the sins of Judas, the sins of the people destroyed in the flood, the sins of all the ungodly, and the sins of all people who will from now to the end of time die apart from Christ and end up in hell. All people have a changed *status*. But that is not to say that all people *are saints*.

And that is where the problem lies. When we hear the phrase “status of a saint” we dwell more on the word “saint” than on the word “status,” because of how we have heard “saint” used. “Saint” is always used in Scripture to describe the child of God. So without a thorough study of Meyer, it’s easy to jump to the false conclusion that Meyer says all are saints; that all people are going to heaven; that WELS has endorsed universalism. But that’s certainly not what Meyer or the WELS teaches, as we will hear in our subsequent paper on subjective justification. To say that all are justified and all are forgiven is not the same as saying all are going to heaven.

The position that all men's sins have been forgiven, even the sins of those in hell, has always been held to by orthodox Lutheran theologians. Koehler writes, "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."^{xxii} Schaller says,

Salvation is just as perfect and complete for those who are finally lost. This is the only reason, but a sufficient one, why he that believeth not is damned. Unbelief is the rejection of life and salvation achieved and personally intended for every unbeliever.^{xxiii}

Orthodox Lutherans therefore, on the basis of the scriptural doctrine of universal and objective justification, teach, believe and confess that all people who have lived, are living or will ever live on earth have been declared righteous by God and have thus been forgiven of all their sins.

APPLICATION

It is quite obvious why Luther said in regard to justification, "The most necessary and important thing is that we teach and repeat this doctrine daily."^{xxiv} I don't really expect that, following Luther's advice, you all will place this paper next to your Bible and reread it daily along with the Scriptures. Nor do I expect that all of us are going to make a conscious effort to study this particular doctrine in a special way on a daily or even a weekly basis. But it is most important that each of us remember the important truths of universal and objective justification continually, because each day we are faced with situations in which the precious gem of the Gospel needs to be held out or shown forth.

Consider first of all our homes. I once heard a frazzled pastor's wife say to her little dickens, "Jesus doesn't love you when you do things like that!" No objective justification in that reprimand! The poor little guy was suddenly pulled from the universality of God's justifying love in Christ. Could he earn it back by good behavior? Isn't the most important aspect of our Christian discipline the objective reality of God's love and forgiveness? We dare not replace the clear water of life with the goeey protestant sludge of "Jesus loves me when I'm good."

And don't forget there are some other sinners in the home too—you and your spouse. How can spouses learn to accept each other's faults, which drive one another crazy, unless they believe that God in Christ has already forgiven all their shortcomings? Question God's loving forgiveness in regard to your own faults and it could lead to the tranquilizer bottle. Question God's loving forgiveness in regard to your spouse's faults, and the precious one to whom you are pledged will get uglier and less lovable every day.

Then of course there is our life's calling as proclaimers of God's own message. How can the lonely, the depressed, the grieving, the suffering and the insecure be pulled from the pits of their bad feelings unless they hear the objective reality of God's love apart from their feelings; unless they hear no condition attached to the universal salvation Christ procured for them as individuals?

The same precious truth is most important in the care and instruction of our little ones. What does frightened little Suzy need to hear when she comes to you and says, "Teacher, my Baptist friend told me I'm going to burn in hell if I don't hurry up and ask Jesus into my heart"? What a time to apply the objective reality of Jesus' love for Suzy! What a time to apply Christ's universal salvation to this trembling little lamb!

Then there's the opposite extreme for the Christian teacher—not the trembling lambs, but the haughty heifers and the brazen bullocks. "These brats are driving me crazy!" But remember, those brats are baptized brats, objects of Christ's salvation. The only way they are going to mature in their Christian faith is by the objective reality of the Gospel which you have been called to teach them.

Thus the loved ones under the roofs of our homes, churches and schools grow and are strengthened through our application of universal and objective justification.

We have, however, a broader commission, a universal calling. As Christ's witnesses we have been called to reach out to the world, not only with our wallets but also with our words. Whether it be a personal

conversation with our landlord, neighbor or friend, or whether it be a more “professional” conversation with the unchurched parent of a pupil or with the new prospect discovered by the evangelism committee, we know for certain the message we have for them. In our minds there’s no Reformed reflection on whether or not this person really is one of God’s elect. There’s no Arminian condition attached to the forgiveness we hold out to them. The only message that will bring them to faith, strengthen them in their faith and motivate them to want to hear the Word is our simplified version of universal and objective justification.

The importance of keeping this doctrine straight in the WELS can never be stressed enough. Luther said justification is “the article on which the church stands or falls.” If it is lost the reformer added, “all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time.”^{xxv}

Nor can the importance of keeping this doctrine straight in our own hearts ever be stressed enough. There will come a time when God’s angels will be ready to carry our souls to Abraham’s side. Then we will need to be assured that the universal and objective justification which we proclaimed and taught to so many is also a reality to us. As Stoeckhardt so aptly put it,

When the last encounter comes, in that critical moment, when the soul hovers between death and life, between heaven and hell, when we feel the complete wretchedness of lost, condemned mankind, then we take comfort in the justification of all men, of all sinners, and draw the conclusion that what was done for all men, must certainly be valid also for us and is intended for me personally. Thus we still our heart before God.^{xxvi}

God preserve among us the scriptural truth of universal and objective justification.

Endnotes

ⁱ Mr. and Mrs. David Hartman and Mr. and Mrs. Joe Pohlman, “An Open Letter to the Church,” Feb. 12, 1982.

ⁱⁱ Robin A. Leaver, *Luther on Justification* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), p. 71.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wilhelm Dantine, *Justification of the Ungodly* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 26.

^{iv} E.W.A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 146.

^v Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics, Volume II* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), p. 503.

^{vi} E. Reim, “A History of the Term ‘Objective Justification,’” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 52 (April, 1955), p. 83.

^{vii} John Schaller, “Redemption and Universal Justification According to 11 Corinthians 5:18-21,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 72 (Oct., 1975), p. 309.

^{viii} Reim, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

^{ix} George Stoeckhardt, “General Justification,” *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 42 (April, 1978), p. 140.

^x J. P. Meyer, *Ministers of Christ* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1963), p. 101.

^{xi} *Ibid.*, p. 102.

^{xii} *Ibid.*, p. 103.

^{xiii} Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume II* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 212.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*, p. 215.

^{xv} Stoeckhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

^{xvi} Schaller, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

^{xvii} Ed. Preuss, *The Justification of the Sinner Before God* (Chicago: F. Allermann, 1934), p. 14.

^{xviii} Meyer, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

^{xix} R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 1048.

^{xx} Wayne D. Mueller, et al., “Southeastern Wisconsin District Panel of Review of the Appeal of the Action Taken by Faith Lutheran Church, Kokomo, Indiana,” June 30, 1980, p. 2.

^{xxi} *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

^{xxii} Koehler, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

^{xxiii} John Schaller, *Biblical Christology* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1982).

^{xxiv} Leaver, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

^{xxv} Ewald M. Plass, ed., *What Luther Says—An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), p. 703.

^{xxvi} Stoeckhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

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