

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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This month's topic for consideration in the light of Holy Scripture is: **justification**. There has been and is confusion on the subject of justification even among professed Christians; so, it is timely to make a brief study of the topic.

First and foremost, the proper definition of the term "justification" is required. The word "justification" is used in Holy Scripture three times, all in the book of Romans. For example, concerning Jesus our Lord, Romans 4:25 states it is He, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." The word **justification** is a translation of the Greek word (transliterated) **dikaiosis**, the root of which is **dikaiosis** from the Greek word **dikaioo** which Strong's Greek/English dictionary defines as follows: "to render (i.e. show or regard as) just or innocent." Liddell & Scott's Greek/English Lexicon supplies the following definition for the Greek word **dikaioo**: "to deem righteous, justify, N.T." And, Noah Webster's 1828 American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language in its entry on the word "**justification**" states: "In theology, remission of sin and absolution from guilt and punishment; or an act of free grace by which God pardons the sinner and accepts him as righteous, on account of the atonement of Christ." Hence, Luther's Small Catechism is absolutely correct when it declares: "How does God forgive your sins? God no longer *charges*, or imputes, *my sins to me*, but *declares me righteous*. (Justification.)" [Luther's Small Catechism, pg. 138, Concordia Publishing House 1943]

Thus, JUSTIFICATION, in the Biblical sense of the term, is a judicial act in which God graciously declares a person or persons righteous for Jesus' sake.

In the Holy Bible the term "justification" is used in an objective sense (universal justification) and in a subjective sense (personal justification). It is important that both these uses of the term "justification" be properly understood since they are interdependent as we shall see as we proceed in this bulletin.

Objective (universal) justification is plainly taught in the following Scripture passage:

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence

death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." (Romans 5:6-19 KJV)

Comment: Note well that the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is the "free gift" that "came upon all men unto justification of life." Yes, "...if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:1-2 KJV) Thus, on God's part He has from His heart forgiven all the sins of all people in Jesus Christ and accounts all people righteous for Jesus' sake— this is objective or universal justification. However, on the individuals' part the forgiveness of sins and salvation must be accepted by faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior and Lord if one is to benefit from the objective justification, for it is written: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John 3:16-18 KJV) Take it to heart that those who are condemned to never-ending death in hell are condemned ONLY because of their unbelief! The unbelievers by their own lack of faith reject the objective justification – the righteousness – that Jesus Christ actually has earned for them, yes, for all mankind. On the other hand, those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ actually benefit from the objective justification since they are personally justified by faith— this is subjective or personal justification; for, "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." (Romans 4:5-7 KJV)

Objective or universal justification and subjective or personal justification are taught together in the following Bible passage:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:17-21 KJV)

Comment: Observe that God in Christ reconciled "the world unto Himself, not imputing [no longer counting] their trespasses unto them"— that is objective or universal justification, which is an accomplished fact since Jesus Christ has truly paid for the sins of the whole world. And, that very "word of reconciliation" is the Gospel of Christ, the good news that Jesus has truly paid for ALL the sins of ALL people. However, as mentioned earlier, the objective or universal justification will NOT benefit the individual unless the individual believes it, that is, apprehends it by personal faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work, which is why the above Bible passage says, "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as

though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Take it to heart that because of the objective universal justification (reconciliation) on God's part, subjective justification is possible and takes place freely by faith which is a gracious gift of God.

Realize that objective or universal justification does not benefit anyone unless it is followed by subjective or personal justification; and, subjective or personal justification is only possible because of the preceding objective or universal justification. To God alone be ALL glory! "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10 KJV)

Again, objective or universal justification and subjective or personal justification are taught together in the following Bible passage:

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for 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: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (Romans 3:19-28 KJV)

Comment: Notice that nobody can be justified in God's sight by his or her own works, for God's Law shows us our sin since none of us has or can keep it perfectly as it demands. Perfect righteousness is obtained personally ONLY by those who have faith OF Jesus Christ, that is, God-given faith which has Jesus Christ AND His atoning work as its object: "faith in His blood." But, also notice that "all have sinned" and that same "all" are "justified freely" by God's grace "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". Hence, we again see that subjective or personal justification is had only by those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ who shed His blood in full payment for the sins of the entire world, God declaring ALL the world righteous in Christ (objective, universal justification). Consequently, "a man" – an individual sinner – is personally justified by God-given faith in Jesus Christ who has in fact paid for all the sins of all people who have been "justified freely" by God's grace in that Christ's blood has indeed fully paid for all the sins of all people. So, remember that justifying faith has Jesus Christ AND His atoning redemptive work as its object.

In the Old Testament we read:

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and

when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:1-12 KJV)

Comment: In the above words of Scripture prophecy Jesus Christ’s redemptive work is described. Note the underlined portions from verses 6 and 11 which clearly teach objective or universal justification since the “iniquity of us all” has been borne by Christ, God the Father’s righteous Servant, who would and did “justify many,” that is, “all.” In fact, Martin Luther understood it thus, for he clearly comments in regards to Isaiah 53:11— “Isaiah here uses the word “many” for the word “all,” after the manner of Paul in Rom. 5:15. The thought there is: One has sinned (Adam), One is righteous (Christ), and many are made righteous. There is no difference between “many” and “all.” The righteousness of Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord and Savior, is so great that it could justify innumerable worlds. “He shall justify many,” says he, that is to say, all. It should therefore be understood of all, because He offers His righteousness to all, and all who believe in Christ obtain it.” [What Luther Says, #1857, pg.608 (W 40 III, 738ff— E op ex 23, 523f— SL 6, 720)] Additionally, in commenting on Isaiah 53:5 Luther wrote— “The Person is eternal and infinite, and even one little drop of His blood would have been enough to save the entire world.” [What Luther Says, #568, pg.196 (W 40 III, 717— E op ex 23, 490— SL 6, 686)]

Regarding our works and justification, consider the following Bible passage:

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Galatians 2:16 KJV)

Comment: Observe that “a man” – and individual human being – is NOT justified by his or her own works, but rather “by the faith of Christ.” Hence, our works have no part in subjective (personal) justification, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31 KJV) God does the saving, all of it! Luther rightly states: “This is the chief article and foundation of Christian doctrine: We are unable to atone for sin or to blot it out by our

works; but we believe that Christ has atoned for it with His blood. This faith, without any works, blots out sin." [What Luther Says, #737, pg.247 (W 12, 155f— E 53, 215f— SL 21a, 561)]

Additionally, the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, Article IV states: "Of Justification: Also they teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. This faith God imputes for righteousness in His sight. Rom. 3 and 4." [Triglot pg.45]

Thus, our gracious God indeed does the saving, all of it! "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." (Romans 8:33; Titus 3:5-7 KJV) Hence, we who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord do so by God's grace, mercy, and power. Jesus alone has paid for all the sins of all people. Those who believe on Jesus Christ, which includes believing that His work – His perfect keeping of God's Law and His paying for our lack of keeping God's Law – is the work that has provided salvation for sinners, personally receive the remission of sins and salvation, for "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." (Acts 4:12; John 3:36 KJV) Let us thank and praise God regularly for all that He has done for us sinners in justifying us!

m.e.l.