

Justification

God's Righteous Verdict



Justification is universal and objective

Introduction

At the time of the Reformation in the 1500s, the main question about justification centered on whether a sinner comes into a right relationship with God by God's grace through faith in Jesus, or whether good works play a role in a person's own justification. The Evangelical Lutherans held to justification by grace through faith, while Roman Catholics pointed to human works as a cause of one's own justification.

After the Reformation, however, other attacks on justification surfaced. In the late 1600s a movement called *pietism* swept Western Europe. Pietists were reacting to what they perceived to be an overemphasis on doctrine that resulted in head knowledge and dead orthodoxism, while people neglected Christian living and love in practice. In response they emphasized feelings and personal experience, self-examination, and visible fruits of Christian love in action.

In response to an environment that strongly emphasized believers' feelings and experience, it was necessary to emphasize the *objective* and *universal* nature of justification. The reality of what God has accomplished for us in Jesus remains objectively true, regardless of how we individually perceive it.

Justification is objective

It doesn't matter how we feel about it. It stands independently as a decree of God.

Luke 23:34 Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

1 John 3:19,20 This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

German proverb: *Jesus Christus starb für mich, fühl ich's oder fühl ich's nicht.*

If justification were not an objective, unilateral decree of God, what would it mean for your personal comfort and certainty of salvation if any part of our justification *depended* on us, or on something inside of us.

Agree or disagree with this statement: We are justified by faith, that is, faith causes us to be justified.

Think for a moment about things you have no control over:

- You had no control over when and where you were born.
- You had no control over the family you were born into.
- You had no control over how and when you came to trust in Jesus—that was the work of the Holy Spirit in you.
- You have no control over what will happen tomorrow.
- You have no control over when you will die.
- You have no control over the sentence that will be passed on you in the judgment.

What is the only thing that keeps these realities from filling you with terror, when you really think about them?

God's declaration of "not-guilty" is universal

When we say justification is *objective*, we mean that it is completely and unilaterally in the sphere of God's doing, apart from our personal perceiving or working. When we say justification is *universal*, we mean that it applies to every human being, without exception.

Romans 5:18,19—Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, *so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.* For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience *the many will be made righteous.*



Romans 3:23-24 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:13, 14 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Martin Luther wrote of the universality of forgiveness achieved:

We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But he has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the supper or sacrament. There he has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the gospel, where it is preached. He has won it once for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously, before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world . . .

Considering the words from Scripture and from Luther above, answer this question: When did God forgive your sins?

Consider a criminal who in fear is running from the law. While he is in hiding in New York he is acquitted (declared “not-guilty”) *in absentia* in a courtroom in Los Angeles. What is his status before the law? How does he feel about his standing before the law?

Jesus’ atonement is universal

1 John 2:1,2 If anyone does sin we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but for the sin of the whole world.

John Calvin taught *limited atonement*. He taught that Jesus died only for the elect—for those who were predestined for salvation. Jesus’ blood would not be “wasted” on people who were going to perish anyway. Think about the ramifications of Calvin’s teaching. Why is this a dreadful false teaching?

The result of Jesus’ resurrection is universal

Romans 4:25 He was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

When Jesus was put to death he was the substitute for a world of sinners. His resurrection is the seal of God’s approval on everything Jesus did, and by placing his seal of approval upon Jesus he placed his seal on the world, for which Jesus is proxy.

God’s reconciliation is universal

2 Corinthians 5:19 That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

To reconcile is to make peace. God makes peace with the world by removing the barrier of hostility (sin) that separates sinners from him and by changing the world’s status from “enemy” to “friend” in Christ.

How does the Bible’s declaration that you have peace with God bring you peace in your own heart?

Jesus’ righteousness is a universal substitute for the world’s sin

2 Corinthian 2:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Use the space below to draw a diagram illustrating *God’s Great Exchange*, trading the world’s sin for Jesus’ righteousness.

Jesus' redemption is universal

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

Jesus' blood paid the price to buy back the whole world from slavery to sin and a sentence of death.

Bring together the important truths we've discussed today. How can you be absolutely sure that *your* sins are forgiven, and that *you* have been reconciled to God?

Using words and illustrations correctly

Don't use individual metaphors to describe universal realities, i.e. "Robe of righteousness," "Healing from sin." Careless language can become confusing