

Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

Essay 2 – Justification: The Theme of Our Outreach Message

*Rev. Egil Edvardsen
Norway*

“The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raises up our consciences before God. Without this article the world is utter darkness and death”(Martin Luther).¹

The biblical doctrine concerning how a person is justified before God is the doctrine on which the church stands and falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Of all the doctrines in the Bible the doctrine of justification is the most important doctrine that God has revealed to sinners. Consequently, it is the most important doctrine we are to preach to other people.

The doctrine of justification above all is the doctrine in holy Scripture that divides Christianity from all other religions in the world. If this doctrine is being falsified in the church or if the church stops proclaiming this doctrine, the church is no longer a Christian church, and the religion which the church is trying to spread is no longer a religion which is distinguished from other world religions. The Christian doctrine of God's universal justification by grace alone, through faith alone, for Christ's sake alone, is completely unique because it gives all credit for man's salvation to God and him alone, in opposite to all other religions, which give credit for man's salvation to a lesser or greater degree to man himself.

But because the Christian doctrine of justification is so unique, it is therefore so conclusive and of such a great importance that the believers proclaim this doctrine to the world. If not men get to hear the

¹ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, Vol. 2, p. 703.

good news that God is forgiving all their sins, they must live their whole life carrying their heavy burden of sin.

1. The doctrine of justification defines our mission field: the whole world

All men are by nature born with sin. “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit,” Jesus said to Nicodemus (John 3:6). And King David must confess: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:7). Because all men are born with sin, they are under the wrath and condemnation of God. Sin is universal.

But as the sin is universal, the Bible also teaches a universal justification. By “universal justification” we mean that God has declared all men not guilty. In the first place Paul is writing, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). But then he continues immediately: “and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Christ died for all. He was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of *the world*” (John 1:29). By “the world” it is impossible to understand anything else but all people. The sins of all human beings were laid on Christ, and because Christ made a perfect atonement for the sins of all human beings, God forgives all human beings. The apostle John says: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody 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 also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1,2).

The atoning sacrifice for sin is complete and universal. It covers all the sins of all human beings. The letter to the Hebrews teaches that Christ has won a perfect and eternal reconciliation for men. “He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). “Now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people” (Hebrews 9:26-28).

Because of Christ’s complete atonement of all the sins of the whole world, God forgives all human beings. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Here the apostle teaches clearly three important aspects about our justification.

First of all, it is God who is the active part. It is *He* who is reconciling the world to himself. It is *He* who is not counting sins against men.

Secondly, Paul is teaching by which reason God is justifying, namely because of Christ. Christ is the agent by whom God reconciled us to himself. The cause of justification, therefore, is not something in man, but the cause of justification is Christ and his complete work of reconciliation. Paul says: “God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And thirdly, Paul clearly teaches who God is justifying, against whom he is not counting their sins, namely the same people who he has reconciled to himself, “the world,” that is, all human beings. God does not count their sins against “them,” that is, “the world,” all human beings. In other words, God justifies the whole world because of Christ’s universal atonement.

With this word [“world”] 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.²

Paul is teaching exactly the same in Romans 5:18: “Consequently, 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.” Because of Adam’s fall all men were condemned or declared to be guilty by God. “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). But because of what Christ did as the substitute of all men, all men were acquitted or declared not guilty by God.

Justification doesn’t concern only those who ultimately come to faith, but justification concerns all men. This we learn from Paul’s word in Romans 4:5. There the apostle says: “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies *the wicked*, his faith is credited as righteousness.” And in Romans 5:10 he says: “When we were *God’s enemies*, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.”

There is also another important aspect in the biblical teaching on man’s salvation that emphasizes the universality in God’s justification. The Bible clearly teaches that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Nobody will go to hell because God wanted it. “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

God has a general will of grace. God’s grace is universal. It is not limited to a certain part of mankind, as the Reformed churches are teaching³, but it extends to everyone. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Several places it is emphasized that God’s grace even extends to those who ultimately are perished. Christ also died for their sins (see Romans 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:11).

Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ God has justified the whole world. Yet all men are not saved. The Bible teaches a universal justification and forgiveness. God’s grace is universal. But the Bible doesn’t teach universalism, that is, the notion that all men will be saved at last. If they don’t believe in Christ, they cannot be saved. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

The Christian mission work is a natural consequence of the doctrine of universal justification. The reconciliation, which Christ has won for all men, implies a total change in all men’s status before God. As the highest judge God has acquitted all sinners because Christ has paid the penalty in their place. What has happened, then, has happened totally outside the sinner. He has in no way contributed to his own justification. His changed status before God has happened without the sinner’s knowledge. Consequently, if the sinner is going to have any benefit from the fact that he is justified by God, someone has to tell him about it. Therefore Paul is writing 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?”

² David P. Kuske, *Making Use of Our Lutheran Heritage – “Objective Justification” in Our Mission Outreach* Based on an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18,19, p. 6, www.wlssays.net.

³ Cf. the Westminster Confession of Faith: “The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.” (Quote from Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 25).

But the gospel of God's free forgiveness in Christ is so foreign to men's way of thinking that no human being is able to comprehend this message by himself. God must reveal it to them. This he is doing when the Holy Spirit operates through the gospel, which is proclaimed and creates faith in the heart of those who hear it. Paul says: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10). And concerning all those who believe, he says: "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Who will tell the sinner about his changed status before God? All those who have accepted the gospel about the justification and forgiveness should do this. If the sinner doesn't hear that God has acquitted him, it will be of no benefit to him, and the Holy Spirit cannot create faith in his heart so that he accepts and comforts himself with the free forgiveness of God.

If we turn back to 2 Corinthians 5, we realize how the apostle not only teaches about the objective reconciliation which has happened in Christ, and the fact that God because of Christ's atonement not counts the sins of the world against them. Paul also connects this completed reconciliation and justification to the proclamation of it. He writes: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:19,20). In other words, God gave us the responsibility of sharing the gospel message with the world.

Because the whole world is reconciled to God and justified by him, Christ admonishes all his disciples through all ages: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We must in every way hold sturdily and firmly to this, that, as the preaching of repentance, so also the promise of the Gospel is *universalis* (universal), that is, it pertains to all men, Luke 24:47. For this reason Christ has commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations. For God so loved the world and gave his Son, John 3:16. Christ bore the sins of the world, John 1:29, gave His flesh for the life of the world, John 6:51; His blood is propitiation for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 1:7; 2:2. Christ says: Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, Matt. 11:28. God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all, Rom. 11:32.⁴

The Christian mission work is a corollary of the doctrine of universal justification, and it is a natural consequence for all those who through faith have accepted and comforted themselves with the wonderful message of God's free forgiveness for Christ's sake. Because we know that God in Christ has reconciled the whole world to himself so that he doesn't count the world's sins against them, we can with great confidence share this message with all people. We don't have to think about if there are certain individuals that are not included in the justification. As the gospel is universal, so also our mission field is universal. The doctrine of the universal justification defines our mission field: the whole world.

2. The doctrine of justification proclaims that salvation is by grace alone

⁴ Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., XI:28, *Trigl.* p. 1071.

Because all human beings are born in sin, they are devoid of the righteousness which God demands. They are under the condemnation of God. The apostle Paul says that “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18). All human beings are by nature under the wrath of God. “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). This is the Lutheran doctrine of inherited sin.

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.⁵

When the sinner is justified because of the reconciliation in Christ, this doesn’t imply a change in the sinner’s nature but a change in the sinner’s status. The Greek word *dikaioo*, which we translate to “justify,” leads us into the courtroom. It means “to declare righteous; to acquit.” God took our sins and laid them on Christ. He “made him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He suffered the punishment, which we had deserved because of our sin. The prophet Isaiah proclaims about the suffering Messiah: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

We are acquitted, not because we are not guilty, but because Christ paid the penalty as our substitute. God’s justification of the sinner is therefore completely undeserved. Christ got something he didn’t deserve, namely our punishment, while we got something we didn’t deserve, namely God’s justification and acquittal. Christ had no sin, but was punished; we are born in sin and are sinning every day, but yet we were acquitted.

The apostle says of all human beings: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23,24). “Freely” is a translation of the Greek word *dorean*, which means “without cost; as a free gift.” When God justifies the sinner, it is a free gift. God gives the justification to the sinner freely, and doesn’t ask for any payment.

The sinner is justified by grace (Greek *charis*). Grace excludes all human works. “And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:6). In addition Paul says that the justification relies on “the redemption (Greek *apolutrosis*) in Christ Jesus.” The sinner is redeemed. By whom? By Christ Jesus who with his own precious blood paid the ransom for the sinner. He “gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Timothy 2:6). The apostle Peter writes: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18,19). By means of three different expressions – “freely,” “by his grace,” “through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” – Paul emphasizes in Romans 3:24 that the justification of a sinner before God is by grace alone. In verse 28 he adds that God justifies a man “apart from observing the law” (Greek *choris ergon nomou*).

We understand how this influences all men’s relationship to God. Instead of looking upon us as condemned sinners, God has forgiven us and declared us not guilty because of his free grace in Christ. This is really good news which we will proclaim to all human beings. Because it implies that the salvation

⁵ Augsburg Confession, II:1,2 (German text – English translation in Lyle Lange, *God So Loved the World, A Study of Christian Doctrine*, p. 336).

is a completely free gift of God. There are no conditions attached to the sinner's justification. It is a completed and finished fact, which Christ has accomplished by his perfect life, his innocent suffering and death, and his triumphant resurrection.

Only because the gospel about the sinner's justification before God is an unconditional message, it is a real gospel for the sinner.⁶ This is the core of the gospel. The gospel is totally different from the law. While the law contains commandments, demands, threats and condemnations, and the law saves only if it is perfectly fulfilled, we find nothing of this in the gospel. The gospel is the glad tidings, which tells us that God by grace alone, "apart from observing the law," has declared all men righteous for Christ's sake.

3. The doctrine of justification proclaims that all is finished

Immediately before Jesus died on the cross of Calvary he said: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). With that he proclaimed to all human beings that the work of salvation was finished and completed. There was nothing that remained to be done for the salvation of all men. His vicarious life, suffering and death were a perfect sacrifice for the transgressions of all men. In Hebrews 10:10-14 the writer points out that Jesus has born one single sacrifice for sins once for all. There is no need for more sacrifices. He says: "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." There is no need for man to do anything to complete the justification. Everything, which had to be done, is already done by Christ. "And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin" (Hebrews 10:18).

All men by nature have a legalistic mind (*opinio legis*). Because of that all men have a work-righteous attitude towards salvation. This attitude is so deep-rooted in the natural man that when he hears the gospel, he will not accept that it is possible to be saved without any conditions. He doesn't believe that God's justification is complete without any contributions of himself. But the Bible is very clear. There is nothing we can do. There is nothing we have to do. Jesus did it all for us. God has declared the whole world righteous because of the work of Christ. This is an objective reality, whether we believe it or not. Even if the whole world would reject the message of the gospel about the justification in Christ, it would still remain an objective truth that God really has acquitted the whole world from their sins. We call it *the objective justification* to emphasize that the justification is a finished fact because of Christ's work, and that the justification is unaffected by how men respond to it.

The Roman Catholic Church rejects above all the completed, objective justification. It teaches that man is saved by faith *and* good works. It claims that the merit of Christ enables man to earn his own salvation. Rome states:

They, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church, faith cooperating with good works, increase in that justice received through the grace of Christ and are further justified.⁷

⁶ August Pieper says about this: "In defining the essence of the gospel, everything depends on whether it is a conditional or an unconditional message of grace." (*The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel and Its Application For Pure Teaching and Spiritual Life*, in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. II, p. 41.)

⁷ H. J. Schroeder, editor and translator, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sixth Session, Chapter 10, p. 36 (quote from Lange, p. 345).

If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.⁸

To refute the Roman teaching that justification is not complete, but gradual, and the hope of eternal life is uncertain, the Formula of Concord states:

In order, therefore, that troubled hearts may have a firm, sure consolation, also, that due honor be given to the merit of Christ and the grace of God, the Scriptures teach that the righteousness of faith before God consists alone in the gracious reconciliation or the forgiveness of sins, which is presented to us out of pure grace, for the sake of the only merit of the Mediator, Christ, and is received through faith alone in the promise of the Gospel. In like manner, too, in justification before God faith relies neither upon contrition nor upon love or other virtues, but upon Christ alone, and in Him upon His complete obedience by which He has fulfilled the Law for us, which is imputed to believers for righteousness.⁹

Because all is finished, God wants us to proclaim to all people that their sins are forgiven. Jesus did that when he said to the paralytic: “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2). He didn’t say to him: “Your sins are forgiven *if* you now fulfill certain obligations.” Nor did he say to him: “Your sins are forgiven *if* you accept the gospel and believe.” Jesus only said that his sins were forgiven, because that was a completed fact.

In the Lutheran church we believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, not by works. Yet there are many who call themselves Lutheran, who claim that God does not forgive us our sins if we don’t believe. They regard faith as the reason for God’s forgiveness. They believe that Christ has achieved a perfect forgiveness for all men by his perfect life and his innocent suffering and death, and that God, therefore, is willing to forgive. But before he really forgives us, we first must repent our sins and come to faith in him. First we must believe, then God will forgive, they say.

But God does not forgive us *because* we believe. He does not forgive us *if* we believe. He has forgiven us long time ago when he raised his Son from the death, that is, he has forgiven us long before we began to believe. It is not our faith, which brings about the forgiveness in God’s heart. He forgives us solely by grace for Christ’s sake alone.

The same false opinion about faith we find in the so-called decision theology, which is common within many reformed and charismatic churches. There they regard faith as a work, which man must perform to complete the justification. It is important to make a decision for Christ. This decision, then, becomes the foundation for man’s hope of salvation. In decision theology it is not Christ who has won salvation for all men, who is the hope of salvation, but man’s own decision for Christ.

But isn’t faith so important then? Faith is important because God’s forgiveness comes to us through words. God offers us his forgiveness in the good message of the gospel. And when people hear the gospel about forgiveness, always one of two things will happen. Either the hearer will believe what he hears, or he will reject it in disbelief. The believer receives all the blessings, which the gospel gives. He receives forgiveness, peace and salvation. The non-believer receives nothing of this. He will get neither peace, nor comfort and hope. But the message is true no matter whether it is accepted in faith or rejected

⁸ Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 45 (quote from Lange, p. 345).

⁹ Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl. III:30, *Trigl.* p. 925.

in disbelief. God has really declared all men righteous in Christ. God has really forgiven all sinners because Christ has paid the guilt of all.

Paul speaks about the non-believing Jews, and he asks: “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all!” (Romans 3:3,4). God’s word and promises are always true. If we reject God’s promises, we make God to be a liar. And to make God to be a liar is identical with blasphemy. The apostle John writes: “Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son” (1 John 5:10). Martin Luther once said that those who don’t believe God’s message of forgiveness will one day find out how sure their sins were forgiven, although they didn’t believe it.¹⁰

Through faith the sinners receive what is promised in the gospel, namely forgiveness of all sins, eternal life and salvation. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The Lutheran dogmaticians therefore have called faith “the receiving instrument” (*organon leptikon*) in contrast to the gospel, which is the means that God uses to give us faith, “the giving instrument” (*organon dotikon*).

Faith is like the empty hand of a beggar, which receives the gift that someone puts in it. If the beggar refuses to accept the money, which is given to him, he gets no blessings from it. Yet it is not the beggar who creates the gift. The gift is already there and it is reached out to him without his cooperation. In the same way it is with faith. The faith doesn’t create the gift. The faith only accepts the gift, which is already there and is offered to us in the gospel. Non-converted man is like a poor beggar who must get everything from God. He doesn’t do anything to his salvation. He only accepts the complete and perfect gift, which is offered to him in the gospel.

The Bible uses several pictures to describe the non-converted man. These pictures show how unable non-converted man is to do anything to save himself. The Bible says that we by nature are *dead* in transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1), *spiritually blind* (1 Corinthians 2:14) and *enemies of God* (Romans 8:7). Therefore we cannot by our own strength believe in Christ. There is only one possibility for a non-believing man to become a believer, a dead man to become alive, a spiritual blind man to become seeing, a man who is an enemy of God to become a child of God, namely that God must in his almighty power create faith in the human heart. Luther says: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”¹¹

Faith is not a good work, which man must do to achieve justification by God. The justification is an objective, completed fact in Christ, even before anyone believes it. The faith accepts the justification; it doesn’t complete it. The justification is already complete because of the work of Christ.

Only God can lead us to faith in the salvation, which is offered in the gospel. In Ephesians 2:8 Paul contrasts faith with work: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” It is correct that it is man himself who believes, and as such faith is a work, which is performed by man. But faith is worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel in Word and sacraments. We can say that faith saves, but it saves not because it is a good work, but because it takes hold of the justification that God promises in the gospel. The Lutheran Confessions expresses it like this:

¹⁰ Luther’s Works, 40:366f.

¹¹ Small Catechism, Third Article, *Trigl.* p 545.

For faith justifies, not for this cause and reason that it is so good a work and so fair a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel.¹²

Neither contrition nor love or any other virtue, but faith alone is the sole means and instrument by which and through which we can receive and accept the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins, which are offered us in the promise of the Gospel.¹³

What are the consequences of this fact? The doctrine of justification by faith alone without works of men has an important consequence for all who proclaim the gospel. All preachers can take Christ's words in their mouth and say: "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). Or as he said to the sick woman: "Take heart, daughter; your faith has healed you" (Matthew 9:22). In our mission work we do not put new burdens on people. We do not demand that they fulfill certain conditions before they can take hold of salvation. We do not expect that they must do good works before they have got faith. Instead of putting new burdens on people we refer them to Christ who says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). To all penitent sinners we say: "God has forgiven all your sins. Because of our Lord Jesus Christ, his perfect life in your place, and his innocent suffering and death in your place, God has deleted all your sins. For Christ's sake you can be a child of God."

4. The doctrine of justification for Christ's sake alone is the only message that can save the world

In our postmodern time many people think that all religions worship the same God. We only use different names for him. All ways lead to salvation. Everyone is saved in his own faith. Or they say that it is not so important what you believe, you only have to be honest in your belief. The result of this kind of thinking is that Christian mission is unnecessary. Because why would it be necessary to preach the gospel if all human beings will be saved at last no matter what they believe? And how can Christian missions be defended if everyone is saved in his own faith? If all religions lead people to salvation, despite their use of different expressions of salvation, it is unnecessary to do Christian mission work.

Jesus Christ says: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). To people who are used to thinking in the postmodern way of thinking, this sounds both intolerant and pretentious. In a time when people deny that there is only one truth, the words of Jesus are intolerable. How can Jesus say that he alone is the way to the Father when there are many ways? And how can he claim that he is the truth and that God's word is truth (John 17:17) when there are many truths?

But we believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. We believe that he is the only way to God. And we are convinced that he is the only one who can save the world. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

Why is Christ the only true Savior? Because he is the one who has atoned for all sins of all human beings. Because of sin all human beings are under condemnation of God. But because of Christ all human beings are acquitted and declared righteous. He has made a perfect atonement for every man when he became the holy substitute for all men. He lived a perfect life without sin and was punished for all the sins of all men by his suffering and death on the cross of Calvary. Therefore he is the only true Savior, and the

¹² Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., III:13, *Trigl.* p. 919.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, III:31, *Trigl.* p. 925.

gospel of the justification for Christ's sake alone is the only message that can save the world. This is an absolute truth, which is true for all men in all times. It was true in Jesus' time, and it is true today, and it will be true till the last day of history.

All man-made religions teach that man must save himself in one or other way. They teach that god or gods or some other standard must be satisfied by man's own work. The Christian religion therefore is unique because it teaches salvation by grace, without human deeds (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8,9).

Yes, Jesus is the only way to heaven. There is no other way. The idea that all religions lead to heaven or that we all worship the same God but just call him by different names is a soul-destroying lie. In fact, postmodernism today condemns Christianity for asserting that Jesus alone is the way to heaven. Postmodernism believes it is better for a person to have a variety of religious beliefs rather than just one. Yet the Bible is clear. Jesus is the only way to heaven. What a comfort it is for people of all ages to be able to rest their faith on God's promise that "whoever believes in him [Jesus] will not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Christianity is the absolute religion because it gives us Jesus, who is the only way to heaven.¹⁴

5. The doctrine of God's universal justification motivates our mission work

What is it that motivates us to reach out with the gospel? We could say that what above all motivates is Christ's command: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). In one way it is correct to say that we motivate our mission work from the fact that Christ gives such a clear command to do mission work. But in another way we also must point out that a command in and of itself doesn't give the right motivation. Professor Kuske says about this:

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 motivates me to act.¹⁵

What then, motivates us to obey the Great Commission of Christ? Paul puts it very simple in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For Christ's love compels us..." But then he immediately continues: "...because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." In other words, the certainty about God's universal and objective justification for Christ's sake motivates us. We see how Christ loved all human beings so much that he was willing to give up his own life on the cross for all their sins. This love we have experienced ourselves. Even our many sins he has born up on the cross because he loved us so much. We have been hit by the gospel, and this happy and comforting message has done something with us.

What are the consequences of this? Paul formulates it like this in verse 16: "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view." This means: "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

¹⁴ Lange, p. 23.

¹⁵ Kuske, p. 9.

justified.”¹⁶ Because Christ has loved all people so much that he was willing to die in their place, we cannot make any difference when we look at people. If his love stretches itself to all men and if he died for all, we cannot exclude anyone from our preaching of the gospel. He loves all people; therefore we must go to all people and preach the gospel. His love for all is the inner motivation, which compels us.

It is a great comfort to know that Christ has born the sins of all men up on the cross and suffered the punishment for all. And precisely this fact gives us a great confidence when we are going to proclaim the happy message of the gospel to the whole world. How could we have confidence to preach a message, which only contained a limited forgiveness or a forgiveness, which only applied to some people, but not everyone? But holy Scripture says that God has declared all men righteous and for Christ’s sake he has forgiven all men their sins. This fact gives our mission work the right motivation.

The theme of our outreach message is God’s universal justification. What a privilege it is to proclaim this message to the world! What a joy it is to tell people about our God who loves the world so dearly that he forgives them all their sins for Christ’s sake! What a confidence we have that this is the message that the world needs most of all! What a comfort this message is for every one of us, young and old, men and women, whatever nation we belong to, whatever color of our skin, whatever language we speak! Amen.

Bibliography

Becker, Siegbert W.: *Universal Justification*, in *Our Great Heritage*, vol. 3, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1991.

Bivens, Forrest L.: *Getting the Right Message Out – And Getting It Out the Right Way*, www.wlssays.net.

Concordia Triglotta, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1921.

Koehler, Edward W. A.: *A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1971 (reprint).

Kuske, David P.: *Making Use of Our Lutheran Heritage – “Objective Justification” in Our Mission Outreach Based on an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18-19*, www.wlssays.net.

Lange, Lyle W.: *God So Loved the World, A Study of Christian Doctrine*, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 2005.

Mueller, Wayne D.: *Justification*, in *People’s Bible Teachings*, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 2002.

Pieper, August: *The Proper Distinction of Law and Gospel and Its Application for Pure Teaching and Spiritual Life*, in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. II, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1997.

Pieper, Francis: *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. II, Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1951.

¹⁶ Kuske, *ibid.*