

Scripture passages that are used to prove that God has already justified all people whether they believe in Christ or not

Mark 16:15 ¹⁵And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

John 1:29 ²⁹The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 3:17 ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

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

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

Romans 5:18-19 ¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹For 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.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Colossians 2:13-14 ¹³And 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, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

1 John 2:2 ²He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

A brief explanation of these same passages that is consistent with all the clear passages that teach that God justifies sinners through faith alone

Mark 16:15 ¹⁵And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.”

A valid interpretation of this passage: The promise of the Gospel is universal, intended for all people. The simple Gospel message is that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Or, as the next verse says (Mark 16:16), “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.”

It doesn't necessarily mean... That “the gospel” that is to be proclaimed to the whole world is that God has already forgiven all people their sins or declared all people to be righteous through Christ, whether they believe in Christ or not.

John 1:29 ²⁹The next day [John] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

A valid interpretation of this passage: Jesus is the true sacrificial Lamb foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices. He was chosen by God to bear the sins of the world, which were charged to Jesus' account. He suffered the curse of God's Law in place of all sinners. He satisfied the demands of God's holy Law that requires the death of sinners. He paid the penalty for all sins of all sinners with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death, so that no one needs to be condemned or cursed under God's Law any longer. This is called “universal atonement,” “satisfaction” or “propitiation.” All people are invited in the Gospel to “behold the Lamb of God” in faith and so be rescued from the condemnation of God's Law, forgiven, justified and saved through faith in the blood of Christ.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That God has already absolved all people or forgiven all people or declared all people to be righteous, whether they behold the Lamb of God in faith or not.

John 3:17 ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

A valid interpretation of this passage: God does not desire the death of anyone, but sent His Son to rescue all people from sin, death and condemnation. God wants all people to be saved through faith in Christ.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That the whole world has actually been saved or justified. God's will is to save and justify all sinners through faith in His Son, not apart from faith in His Son. But by their own fault, many people do not believe in the Son, and so they “stand condemned already” (John 3:18), not justified already.

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

A valid interpretation of this passage: As the surrounding verses (3:22-26) make crystal clear, God justifies sinners 1) motivated by His grace alone, 2) because of the merit of Christ alone, 3) through faith alone in Christ. As He brings sinners to faith in Christ, one by one, He justifies them, not because of their own righteousness, but because of the righteousness of Christ that God credits to faith.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That every sinner has already been justified by God, or that any sinner is justified by God without faith in Christ. Not "all" who have sinned end up "being justified...by faith," because not all have faith in Jesus.

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

A valid interpretation of this passage: As the surrounding verses (especially 4:22—5:1) make clear, God credits the righteousness of Christ to believers in Christ and so justifies believers in Christ. Christ Himself is our righteousness, and the Father raised Him from the dead so that we could receive His righteousness by faith and so be justified by faith in a living Savior and Mediator between God and man.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That God already justified all people 2000 years ago when Jesus' rose from the dead.

Romans 5:18-19 ¹⁸Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹For 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.

A valid interpretation of this passage: Adam earned condemnation for all men with his sin that is passed down to us, his children. Christ earned righteousness for all men and passes His righteousness down (by imputation) to all who believe in Him, resulting in our justification and eternal life. The Formula of Concord specifically mentions this verse as referring to justification by faith.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That all of Adam's descendants have already been declared righteous before God, or that all of Adam's descendants will ever be granted eternal life. As Luther says about Romans 5:18, "Yet not all men are justified through Christ, nevertheless he is the man through whom all justification comes." How does it come? Through faith alone.

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

A valid interpretation of this passage: God Himself walked the earth in the Person of Christ and was reconciling all people to Himself through the ministry of Christ, as Christ called all people to trust in Him as the atoning sacrifice and as the one Mediator between God and man. Before His ascension, He committed this same ministry of reconciliation to His apostles so that they might point all people to Christ, the Reconciler (2 Cor. 5:20). It is still Christ who, through the office of the ministry, reconciles men to God as, by faith in Him, we "become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

It doesn't necessarily mean... That God did this reconciling without means, or that these words are to be understood universally about all men regardless of faith.

Colossians 2:13-14 ¹³And 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, ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

A valid interpretation of this passage: As the surrounding verses make clear, the Apostle Paul is speaking about those who have been “made alive” together with Christ through the “circumcision” of Holy Baptism, through faith. God “forgave us all our trespasses” in the waters of Holy Baptism, and there, in a union with Christ that surpasses all understanding, put us up on the cross with Christ and brought us to life with Christ.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That every human being was made alive together with Christ or forgiven. Paul does not have the unbaptized unbelievers in view at all in these verses.

1 Timothy 2:3-4 ³This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

A valid interpretation of this passage: That God wants all people to be saved and doesn't want anyone to be condemned.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That God actually saved or justified all people, or that anyone is saved without “coming to the knowledge of the truth.”

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

A valid interpretation of this passage: Throughout His life Jesus appeared outwardly to be a failure who was rejected by God, especially when He was crucified. But in the end, Jesus was proved right about everything He did and said, especially when He was proved to be the righteous Son of God (see Romans 1:4) by His glorious resurrection.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That God justified the whole world or absolved Jesus of the sins of mankind as the Substitute for mankind, meaning that all people have now been absolved of their sins vicariously. It certainly cannot be said that the whole world was “manifested in the flesh” or “seen by angels” or “preached among the Gentiles” or “believed on in the world” or “received up in glory.”

1 John 2:2 ²He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

A valid interpretation of this passage: Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole world and won forgiveness for all people. In the Gospel, God offers Christ's atonement (propitiation) to all sinners, so that, by faith in Him, all people may be cleansed of their sin and know that, through Christ, they have a gracious, loving and forgiving Father.

It doesn't necessarily mean... That all people are already justified or forgiven, whether they trust in Christ's propitiation or not. As John says a few verses earlier, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:7-9).