

On Francis Pieper's Misuse of Romans 4:25 as a Biblical Basis for Objective Justification

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INTRODUCTION

All the Lutheran church bodies that once made up the former Synodical Conference have, since their earliest beginnings, held to a version of objective (and subjective) justification. While some have pointed out differences in how the teaching is explained—unsurprisingly, since it is not defined in the Lutheran Confessions—it is significant that every teacher of objective justification, regardless of the version, uses a similar set of Bible passages as the *sedes doctrinae* of this teaching, which invariably includes Romans 4:25. Since the doctrine is only as solid as the exegesis of the *sedes* from which it is drawn, one must ever return *ad fontes* in order to test the teachings of men.

Romans 4:25 is not the only *sedes* for objective justification; Romans 5:18-19 and 2 Corinthians 5:19 are also commonly cited and worthy of a thorough exegesis. But Romans 4:25 stands apart from the other *sedes* as the primary *sedes* for objective justification, for two reasons. First, it is the only passage of the New Testament that expressly and directly links the resurrection of Christ to the sinner's justification; Walther has no Scriptural basis for his famous "Easter Absolution" without this verse. And second, it is the passage most often cited from the commentaries of the orthodox Lutheran Fathers to deduce the supposed continuity of the Waltherian doctrine of objective justification, pronounced by God on Easter Sunday, with that of the historical Lutheran Church.¹

We will limit ourselves, for the most part, to discussing a single version of objective justification, as described by Francis Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics*—and this for obvious reasons. Pieper was directly familiar with Walther and his doctrine, so his explanation of the terms, i.e., objective and subjective justification, which Walther himself introduced into American Lutheranism can hardly be assumed to differ essentially from Walther's own teaching. Furthermore, Pieper has thoroughly influenced and practically defined the doctrine of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod for well over a century—not to mention his influence on the WELS, ELS, and other church bodies—and it would be absurd to claim that the official doctrine

¹ Indeed, one could hardly begin to prove objective justification from the commentaries of the Fathers on Romans 5. From Augustine to Luther, Hunnius, and Gerhard, to the Lutheran Confessions themselves, all expressly state that Romans 5:18-19 is not referring to a one-time justification of all men, but to the justification that takes place through faith in Christ. Cf. especially the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Art. III: "Therefore it is considered and understood to be the same thing when Paul says that we are *justified by faith*, Rom. 3, 28, or that *faith is counted to us for righteousness*, Rom. 4, 5, and when he says that we are *made righteous by the obedience of One*, Rom. 5, 19, or that *by the righteousness of One justification of faith came to all men*, Rom. 5, 18. 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; for this must be applied and appropriated to us by faith, if we are to be justified thereby."

of the LCMS differs substantially from what Pieper taught in his *Christian Dogmatics*. Indeed, his teaching of objective justification is still reflected in *The Brief Statement* and in the more modern *Theses on Justification* produced by the LC-MS's CTCR, including the use of Romans 4:25 to support it. If it can be shown that Pieper misinterpreted Romans 4:25 and misused it as a *sedes* for objective justification, then the doctrine itself, which has served, since the days of Walther, as a unique hallmark of the self-proclaimed orthodoxy of the churches of the former Synodical Conference, must be discarded.

It is the assertion of this essay that Pieper did, in fact, misuse the passage in question and misrepresent the Lutheran Fathers whom he adduced in support of his interpretation. This will be demonstrated both from a contextual exegesis of the relevant Scriptures and from a contextual consideration of the Lutheran Fathers, namely, Johann Gerhard and Abraham Calov.

PIEPER'S DEFINITION OF OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION

Let us begin by allowing Pieper to define objective justification for us, as he understood it from Walther. He refers to it several times in his *Christian Dogmatics*.

Now, then, if the Father raised Christ from the dead, He, by this glorious resurrection act, declared that the sins of the whole world are fully expiated, or atoned for, and that all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal. This gracious reconciliation and justification is clearly taught in Rom. 4:25: "Who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, 321).

Here Pieper attributes two distinct "declarations" to Christ's resurrection: (1) that "the sins of the whole world are fully expiated, or atoned for," and (2) that "all mankind is now regarded as righteous before God's divine tribunal." He claims that this twofold declaration is "clearly taught in Rom. 4:25."

Some, in trying to grasp the concept of objective justification, have, in their minds, equated it with the atonement. The atonement made by Christ is, indeed, the first part of Pieper's objective justification, but it is not the whole of it. Objective justification, as defined by Pieper, includes the atonement made by Christ, but it also includes (and draws its very name from) a supposed resulting status that has already been granted to all mankind, namely, being "regarded as righteous before God's divine tribunal." Let it be noted that the objection of the essayist is to the latter assertion, not to the former.

One also encounters here Pieper's assertion of the resurrection of Christ as declaratory in the very specific matters of man's salvation. This procedure on his part is tenuous at best, especially in the most lofty matter of what is going on in the heart of God, as we shall see in Pieper's explanation of the doctrine. To say that God "declares" things by means of His acts alone is accurate, but limited in scope. To be sure, "the heavens declare the glory of God, etc." (Psalm 19:1), and certain of His divine attributes can and should be discerned from His acts in nature (cf. Rom. 1:19-20). But the only clear declaration apparent to all in Christ's resurrection itself is that

which the apostle ascribes to it in Romans 1:4, that Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Beyond this, it remains for God to reveal the significance of Christ’s resurrection from the Scriptures, especially in matters of salvation, which cannot be discerned by the light of reason. Since, as noted, Romans 4:25 is the only passage that explicitly links the resurrection of Christ to the sinner’s justification, Pieper will have to substantiate his claim based on a proper understanding of Romans 4:25.

Finally, we note here Pieper’s equation of the terms “reconciliation” and “justification,” which will become even more apparent in the following citations. Some say that they believe in an objective reconciliation, but not an objective justification. It must be noted that Pieper used both terms interchangeably to refer to the same “truth,” namely, “that all mankind is now regarded as righteous before God’s divine tribunal.”

Pieper goes on to explain “Objective and Subjective Reconciliation.”

Scripture teaches the objective reconciliation. Nineteen hundred years ago Christ effected the reconciliation of all men with God. God does not wait for men to reconcile Him with themselves by means of any efforts of their own. He is already reconciled. The reconciliation is an accomplished fact, just like the creation of the world.² Rom. 5:10: “We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” When Christ died, God became reconciled. As Christ’s death lies in the past, so also our reconciliation is an accomplished fact. 2 Cor. 5:19: “God was in Christ, reconciling” (namely, when Christ lived and died on earth) “the world unto Himself.” The καταλλάσσειν of Rom. 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:19 does not refer—let this fact be noted—to any change that occurs in men, but describes an occurrence in the heart of God. It was God who laid His anger by on account of the ransom brought by Christ. It was God who at that time already had in His heart forgiven the sins of the whole world, for the statement: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” means—and that is not our, but the Apostle’s own interpretation—that God did “not impute their trespasses unto them.” And “not imputing trespasses” is, according to Scripture (Rom. 4:6–8), synonymous with “forgiving sins,” “justifying” the sinner. The resurrection of Christ is, as Holy Writ teaches, the actual absolution of the whole world of sinners. Rom. 4:25: “Who was raised again for our justification.” At that time we were objectively declared free from sin. (See the section “The Resurrection of Christ.”)³⁴ (Ibid., 347–348)

Leaving for another time Pieper’s claims about the reconciliation based on Romans 5:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:19, let us note here again that he equates objective reconciliation with objective justification, stating its significance in that “a change occurred in the heart of God,” who “laid His anger by,” who “at that time already had in His heart forgiven the sins of the whole world,” that “at that time we were objectively declared free from sin.”

The content of Pieper’s Footnote #34 is highly relevant, as he cites Heinrich Meyer approvingly:

Meyer on 2 Cor. 5:18–19: “Mankind was on account of its uncanceled sins under God’s holy wrath, ἐχθροὶ θεοῦ, Rom. 5:10, *Deo invidi*, the object of God’s hatred; but with the cancellation of their sins, effected by the death of Christ, God’s wrath came to an end. The reconciliation of all mankind

² If the reconciliation of mankind with God is an “accomplished fact, just like the creation of the world,” one wonders if Pieper conceived also of an objective and a subjective creation.

took place objectively through the death of Christ.” *Proceedings of the Southern District, 1883*, p. 20 ff.: “As God, prompted by His grace, made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us men (2 Cor. 5:21), that is, imputed the sins of mankind to Christ as His own, so He also regarded the satisfaction rendered by Christ as though it had been rendered by men (2 Cor. 5:14). By Christ’s suffering and death the sins of all men have been atoned for so completely as though all the thousand millions of men had themselves endured the torments of hell. The result is: God is perfectly reconciled to all men and with every individual among them. No man need henceforth do or suffer anything to reconcile God to obtain righteousness and salvation. 2 Cor. 5:19: Nineteen hundred years ago God reconciled the world unto Himself. We know what it means to be reconciled to someone. A person is reconciled to someone when he has dismissed from his heart all wrath against him. Now, just so God has for Christ’s sake dismissed from His heart all wrath against men, with whom He was angry because of their sins. God now feels toward men as though they had never offended Him by sinning, as though never a disagreement between God and men had occurred. Here, then, the so-called objective justification is clearly taught: If God is reconciled with men, if He no longer has anything against them, then He has evidently in His heart absolved them of their sins, then He regards them as righteous for Christ’s sake. Hence, according to Scripture, the reconciliation between God and men, their justification, took place before they came to faith. This fact is indicated also by the circumstances of Christ’s death: by His cry: ‘It is finished’ ... and by the rending of the veil (for God has actually declared by that miraculous occurrence that every sinner now has free access to Him).”

Some of the relevant phrases from the above quotation: “With the cancellation of their sins, effected by the death of Christ, *God’s wrath came to an end.*” “The result [of the atonement] is: God is perfectly reconciled to all men *and with every individual among them.*” “Now, just so God has for Christ’s sake *dismissed from His heart all wrath against men*, with whom He was angry because of their sins. God *now feels toward men* as though they had never offended Him by sinning, as though never a disagreement between God and men had occurred. Here, then, the so-called objective justification is clearly taught: *If God is reconciled with men, if He no longer has anything against them, then He has evidently in His heart absolved them of their sins, then He regards them as righteous for Christ’s sake. Hence, according to Scripture, the reconciliation between God and men, their justification, took place before they came to faith.*”

There is much here in Meyer’s statements, accepted by Pieper, that is contradicted by clear passages of Scripture³, by the Lutheran Confessions,⁴ and by Lutheran Fathers from the age of orthodoxy⁵. For our purposes, we note that Missouri’s position as taught by Pieper, involves changes in the heart of God, the entire removal of God’s wrath against men, the in-the-heart-of-God absolution of all men, the righteous status before God shared by all men, and that all this applies to “every individual among them.” Those who claim that the LC-MS version of objective justification does not apply to individuals, but only to mankind as a whole, cannot so easily discount Pieper’s citation of Meyer.

Pieper goes on to explain:

³ E.g., Mal. 3:6; John 3:18-20, John 3:36, Eph. 2:3, Rom. 1:18, Rom. 2:5, Eph. 5:6, Col. 3:6.

⁴ E.g., AC IV, etc.

⁵ See especially Aegidius Hunnius in his refutations of Samuel Huber.

All soteriological teaching must be based upon the historical, accomplished fact of the objective reconciliation, or justification, of all sinful mankind, namely, that through Christ's vicarious satisfaction God has reconciled mankind unto Himself. This reconciliation, as Scripture plainly tells us, does not consist in a change of heart in man, but in a change of heart in God. God no longer looks upon sinful man with wrath, but "before His divine tribunal" forgives the sins of mankind, does not impute their trespasses unto them (2 Cor. 5:19). "By the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). And this reconciliation is, as has been shown, complete and perfect, extensively and intensively, for we certainly have no right to restrict the meaning of either the terms "world" (2 Cor. 5:19) and "all men" (Rom. 5:18) or the terms "not imputing their trespasses" (2 Cor. 5:19) and "justification" (Rom. 5:18). Nor do these passages speak merely of a new relation between God and man, but they state definitely that God's action produced the new relation, God's action in not imputing their sins unto men, in forgiving them their sins, in justifying men in His heart. This is the meaning of the objective reconciliation, as taught in 2 Cor. 5:19; Rom. 5:18; 5:10; 4:25. (Ibid., 398-399)

Again, the change has occurred in the heart of God. Sinful man is no longer viewed with wrath. God forgave all men before His divine tribunal. A new relation exists between God and all men. He has justified them all in His heart.

But this "wondrous" justice of justification by faith is based on that "wondrous" fact that God has reconciled the world unto Himself by Christ's vicarious satisfaction, that in His heart He has forgiven their sins and offers this forgiveness, this righteousness, in the Gospel. One cannot present the doctrine of justification by faith without constant reference to the universal, objective justification. (Ibid., 505) An essential prerequisite of justification by faith, or of subjective justification, is the objective justification (the reconciliation) of all mankind. If God had not in His heart justified the whole world because of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, and if this justification were not offered in the Gospel, there could not be a justification by faith. (Ibid., 508) Objective justification precedes faith, for it is the object of faith, and its proclamation creates faith (Rom. 10:17). (Ibid., 552)

According to Pieper, the forgiving of the sins of all men has already taken place in the heart of God. What He offers in the Gospel is the fact that He has already forgiven all men in His heart. The doctrine of justification by faith cannot be presented without reference to this "universal justification." There can be no justification by faith if God has not already in His heart justified the whole world.

These are bold claims indeed. Since no one can be justified by faith without this supposed pre-existing universal justification, one would think that the Scriptures (and the Lutheran Confessions!) would be full of such clear presentations of the Gospel that "the whole world has been justified in God's heart." And yet, such a statement is conspicuously absent from the Scriptures and the Confessions.

Pieper adds:

While Scripture and the Confessions thus know of only one object of justifying faith and use the terms "Christ," "Christ's righteousness," "Christ's obedience," "Christ's suffering," "Christ's merit," "forgiveness," "justification," etc., *promiscue*, or as synonyms, some later Lutheran dogmaticians differentiated, as to the object of faith, between Christ's merit as the thing that justifies (*bonum iustificum, res iustificata*) and justification, or remission of sins, itself, presenting only

Christ or Christ's merit (the *bonum iustificum*) and not the forgiveness of sins, or justification itself, as the object of faith.⁷¹ Thus, as Dr. Walther complained (cp. *Lehre und Wehre*, 1876, p. 193 ff.), they really obscured the doctrine of justification.

Here Pieper builds on his previous claims that there can be no justification by faith without all men having already been forgiven in the heart of God. He wants to make the "universal justification," which has already occurred, the proper object of faith.

He goes so far as to bemoan the sad state of affairs when only Christ and His merit are preached, insisting that the only way for men to believe that their sins are forgiven now is if they were already forgiven in the past:

If this distinction were consistently applied—which happily is not always the case—one could no longer believe in the forgiveness of sins, or justification, on the basis of the gracious promise in the objective means of grace, but would have to deduce the fact that one is justified from the fact that one truly believes. In other words, when the sinner smitten by the Law asks: Does God forgive me my sins? he could not be directed to the forgiveness of sins pronounced in the Gospel, but would have to be instructed first of all to examine himself whether he has the faith in the "*bonum iustificum*." Thus justifying faith would be based not on the objective promise of grace in the means of grace, but on itself, contrary to the correct axiom that *fides directa* is required for justification, not *fides reflexa*. To forestall this error, Walther added in his edition of Baier a series of quotations which state that the means of grace are the *causa media* of justification on the part of God and that the "universal justification, fully accomplished," is the object of justifying faith.⁷⁴ (Ibid., 539–541)

Again, the content of the Footnotes (#71 and 74) is revealing:

⁷¹ Gerhard, too, occasionally uses such language. "We do not say that justification, but Christ's righteousness is applied by faith to us." And: Strictly speaking, we do not say that justification is to be apprehended by faith, but we say that Christ, and in Christ God's compassion, remission of sins, righteousness and life eternal are to be apprehended by faith and that thus justification takes place" (De iustif., § 179).

⁷⁴ Baier-Walther, III, p. 260 ff.; 271 ff. Walther's personal copy contains these notes: "The *causa media* on the part of God—the means of grace—the promise—is missing in the whole presentation." "There can be a justification by faith only because of the universal justification already accomplished. This statement, too, is missing in Baier's exposition."

Pieper admits that Walther did not always follow Johann Gerhard in his presentation of justification. Baier, too, apparently failed to present the Gospel as clearly as Walther supposedly understood it, forcing Walther to add his own quotations about universal justification as the proper object of faith. Indeed, as will be seen below, neither Calov nor Gerhard made an already-accomplished remission of sins or justification of the world the object of faith, and therefore, according to Walther and Pieper, they "really obscured the doctrine of justification."⁶

⁶ One also notes in the above quotations from *Christian Dogmatics* that Pieper has shifted his understanding of "promise." He believes that the "promise of forgiveness/justification" means the "promise" that God has already forgiven/justified everyone. But this is not what the word "promise" means, nor is it what the Scriptures or the Confessions mean by "promise." When the Confessions make the forgiveness of sins the object of faith, it is a reference

I do not wish to imply that Gerhard or any other Church Father could not have erred. But this discrepancy between Walther's understanding of justification and that expressed by Gerhard (in his very *Locus* on justification!) forces one to ask the question: Was it Gerhard who was inconsistent and sometimes weak in his explanation of justification, or is it possible that Walther, instead of bringing the historic Lutheran doctrine of justification to North America, actually modified it, imagining an already-existing justification of the world as necessary for justification by faith to occur, and then reading his modified views back into the Lutheran Fathers, and back into the Scriptures themselves? Is it further possible that his modification has been so oft repeated and ingrained in the Lutheran church bodies that grew under his influence that they, too, fall naturally into the same error?

Let us see for ourselves what the Lutheran Fathers and the Scriptures actually teach.

ROMANS 4:25 (4:22 – 5:1)

²² Διὸ καὶ «ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.»²³ Οὐκ ἐγράφη δὲ δι' αὐτὸν μόνον ὅτι ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ,²⁴ ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἡμᾶς οἷς μέλλει λογίζεσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἐγείραντα Ἰησοῦν τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν ἐκ νεκρῶν,²⁵ ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν καὶ ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν. ¹ Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως, εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν διὰ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

²² Therefore also "it was counted to him for righteousness." ²³ Now, it was not written for his sake alone that "it was counted to him," ²⁴ but also for our sake, to whom it would be counted, to those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up for the sake of our trespasses and raised for the sake of our justification. ¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Since Romans 4:25 is merely one clause in a longer sentence, and since it is tied to the next sentence with the particle οὖν, the verse must be considered from the surrounding sentences and from the chapter as a whole, naturally, without discounting the rest of the book of Romans up to this point.

Throughout chapter 4, Paul has been proving his teaching in Rom. 3:21-28 that God justifies sinners (i.e., people who are, for their part, ungodly and have no inherent righteousness of their own because of their universal failure to keep God's holy law) by faith in Christ Jesus. The mechanism for this justification, as Paul describes through the example of Abraham (and Psalm 32), is that God "counts/imputes" righteousness to those who have not worked for it, but who, instead, believe in Him (Rom. 4:5-6). He first cited Genesis 15:6 back in Rom. 4:3 in order to

to God's offer or "promise" to forgive sins to all who believe in Christ, not the "promise" of something God already did long ago.

establish from Scripture that Abraham was justified, not by works, but by faith alone. That is, justification was the result of Abraham's faith. As he concludes the chapter, he demonstrates that what was true for Abraham is true for all who believe as Abraham did.

Διὸ καὶ «ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.» *Therefore also "it was counted to him for righteousness."*

Here in 4:22 Paul cites Gen. 15:6 again. Διὸ means "therefore," pointing back to a reason previously given, in this case: "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform" (4:20-21). "Therefore," for this reason—because Abraham did not waver through unbelief but was strengthened in faith, trusting that God was able to do what God had promised—"it was counted to him for righteousness." Faith was that very thing that was counted to Abraham for righteousness.

Also noteworthy in the case of Abraham is that his faith was in a promise of something God would do for him in the future, not in anything that already existed. All that existed for Abraham's faith to grasp onto was the divine promise of future progeny. The promise of what God would do for him in the future was all the object his faith needed.

Οὐκ ἐγράφη δὲ δι' αὐτὸν μόνον ὅτι ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ,
Now, it was not written for his sake alone that "it was counted to him,"

Paul makes it clear that he is referring to "what was written" in Holy Scripture, specifically in the Book of Genesis 15:6, "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

He says that it was written not "for his sake alone," using the preposition διὰ + *accusative*, which expresses cause. Gerhard on this construction:

This preposition, constructed with the accusative, denotes (1) the efficient and driving cause, *Luke 1:78*; (2) the adjoining limit or reason according to which something is done, *Eph. 4:18, Gal. 3:14*,⁷ *Matt. 27:18*; (3) temporal circumstance, *Heb. 5:12*; (4) purpose, *Mark 2:27, 1 Cor. 9:29*. (Gerhard, *Summae Evangelii*)

The context must determine in each case what kind of cause the διὰ + *accusative* construction is being used to express. The apostle uses this same construction **four times** in these three verses. In each case, the context leans toward a final (purpose) cause.

In this verse, Paul refers to Abraham, whose justification by faith (c. 2000 BC) preceded Moses' writing of Genesis in c. 1500 BC. Moses wrote his words "it was counted to him" δι' αὐτὸν, for the sake of Abraham, namely, for the sake of demonstrating how Abraham was justified. But Moses did not only write these words δι' αὐτὸν.

ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἡμᾶς οἷς μέλλει λογίζεσθαι, τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἐγείραντα Ἰησοῦν τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν ἐκ νεκρῶν

...but also for our sake, to whom it would be counted, to those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

⁷ This seems to be a misprint.

ἀλλὰ καὶ δι' ἡμᾶς. Not only for Abraham's sake, *but also for ours*. Moses, writing in 1500 BC under divine inspiration, was not looking *backward* at "us," as if his writing were caused by our existence in 1500 BC or by our justification having already taken place in 1500 BC. Rather, he was looking *forward* to us, as people who would one day read his inspired writing and would benefit from it. He wrote for the purpose of demonstrating that future generations would be justified in the same way Abraham was, namely, by faith. Therefore, Paul is clearly using the construction διὰ + *accusative* here to indicate *final cause*, a goal or purpose, that is, not only for the purpose of showing how Abraham was justified, but also for the purpose of showing (prospectively) how we would be justified in the present time.

Who is the "us"? It is Paul and those to whom he was writing, namely, "all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7). But he immediately qualifies the "us" as being οἷς μέλλει λογίζεσθαι, those "to whom it would be counted." And what is the special characteristic shared by Paul and the Romans to be noted here? Paul spells it out: τοῖς πιστεύουσιν, "to those who believe, etc." "For our sake" can, therefore, be extended to all who share the same characteristic, i.e., faith.

...to those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. Here God the Father is said to be the object of faith, that we believe in "Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." Paul gives the solid comfort of Scripture to those who believe in the Father who sent His Son to die and then raised Him from the dead: Our faith is not in vain. Since the first book of the Bible, God has testified that He freely justifies those who believe in Him and His promises in Christ, as we do. Just as Abraham's faith alone, without works, resulted in his justification, so the same is certain for us.

Thus Paul has carefully identified the "us" for whose sake Genesis 15:6 was written as those to whom believing would be counted for righteousness, namely, those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. It is simply grammatically impossible to expand the scope of the "us" here to refer to anyone except for "those who believe."

At the same time, Moses' writing has a universal purpose attached to it, for all are invited in the Gospel to walk in Abraham's footsteps, to believe. Those who would be justified in the same way as Abraham was justified are not all men. But the offer is made and sincerely presented to all men.

ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν

...who was delivered up for the sake of our trespasses and raised for the sake of our justification.

With these words Paul concludes the sentence that he began in 4:23. Παρεδόθη ("was delivered up") is an aorist passive with "who" as the subject, namely, "our Lord Jesus Christ." He was delivered up into the hands of sinners, into death. This is the same word Jesus used to describe His betrayal: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again" (Matt. 20:18-19). It is also the word used for Pilate's action: "So Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd,

released Barabbas to them; and he delivered Jesus, after he had scourged Him, to be crucified" (Mark 15:15).

In the New Testament, it is normally wicked men who are charged with "delivering up" Jesus, using this verb. There is one reference in the Old Testament to the Lord being the one who "delivered up" the Messiah, and that, found only in the unique translation of Isaiah 53:6 in the LXX which is remarkably similar to St. Paul's own words: "And the LORD delivered Him up for our sins (κύριος παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ἡμῶν)." Paul also speaks of Christ having "delivered Himself up (ἑαυτὸν παρέδωκεν)" in Eph. 5:25.

Christ was delivered up διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν, *for the sake of our trespasses*.

Παραπτώματα are trespasses, a "falling to the side" of the path. Paul uses the word as practically synonymous with "sins." He will use a different word (παράβασις - transgression) in Rom. 5:14 to refer to Adam's specific sin against a commandment.

They are "our" trespasses. As Gerhard points out, "our" means "of all the saints who are in Rome, to whom this epistle was written." But, he adds, "the sins of the rest of men are not thereby excluded, for the inclusion of one does not mean the exclusion of the other. Cf. 1 John 2:2" (Gerhard, *Summae Evangelii*). While Gerhard will rightly extend this "our" to encompass all men as he comments on this verse, he does so, not because it is clearly taught in this verse, but because this verse is being interpreted in the light of similar passages which extend the purpose of Christ's death to encompass all men—a very sound method of interpretation.

What does it mean that Christ was delivered up "for the sake of our trespasses," again using a form of διὰ + *accusative*, which expresses a causal relationship? One can certainly understand it retrospectively, according to the first or second use mentioned above by Gerhard: our trespasses, imputed to Christ, were the driving cause for Him to be delivered up to be punished for them.

But I believe it is best to take it as a final cause, again expressing the idea of purpose as the apostle did in Rom. 4:24, and as He does in many passages where similar language is used (See Gal. 1:4, Eph. 5:25-26, Titus 2:14). Thus here Paul's meaning would be similar: Christ was delivered up for the sake of our trespasses, that is, for the purpose of making satisfaction for our trespasses.

This is also how Gerhard takes it:

Delivered up, that is, into death, which is described from the purpose, namely, the expiation of our sins and the satisfaction for them...Principally and primarily, this Savior of ours is said to have been delivered up in the ultimate suffering and death, where we understand at the same time the wrath of God, the anguish of conscience, etc., which all He sustained in order to expiate our sins and to pay the ransom for the whole human race. Therefore, when Christ is said to have been delivered up for sins, the sense is: Christ, by doing and by dying, made satisfaction for the sins of the entire human race. See Ps. 53:4ff., 1 Pet. 2:24, 1 John 2, etc. (Gerhard, *Summae Evangelii*, emphasis added)

...and raised for the sake of our justification. Christ "was raised (ἡγέρθη)," an aorist passive indicative, the same verb Paul had just used in an active form in Rom. 4:24 to speak of Him "who

raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.” God the Father raised Jesus from the dead “for the sake of our justification.”

Here the noun is δικαίωσις, which occurs only twice in the entire New Testament: here and in Rom. 5:18. As Gerhard points out, it means “the act itself of justifying, the remission of sins and justification” (Gerhard, *Summae Evangelii*).

Paul has described this act in several ways throughout this epistle (e.g., Rom. 1:17, 3:22, 3:24, 3:26, 3:28, 3:30, 4:3, 4:5, 4:7-9, 4:11-12, 4:22-24). Now, in Rom. 4:25, he finally ascribes a noun to the act: δικαίωσις — justification.

The “our” is the very same “us to whom it would be counted, to us who believe.” No change of subject has taken place. The genitive here is an objective genitive: “the justification of us” or “the act of justifying us.” As in the protasis, so here in the apodosis: the purpose expressed is universal, the effect particular.

We are confronted once again with διὰ + *accusative*. Valid options in English include, “for the sake of our justification, on account of our justification⁸, on account of the justification of us⁹, for the purpose of justifying us¹⁰, that He may justify us¹¹,” or even the simple, “for our justification.” As we have already seen with the διὰ + *accusative* construction, a causal relationship is clearly indicated. “The justifying of us” was, grammatically, either an existing circumstance that caused Christ’s resurrection, or it was a purpose (the final cause) of Christ’s resurrection.

Gerhard interpreted this prepositional phrase in the latter sense, just as he also interpreted the protasis as expressing a final cause:

The resurrection. This is likewise described from an adjoining **final cause**, that is, a declaration or manifestation of our justification. Therefore, our justification is indicated as the fruit of the resurrection of Christ, insofar as through His resurrection, the Savior has manifested and testified that payment for our sins has now been made and perfect redemption accomplished; and that salvation and righteousness have been provided anew (see Rom. 8:34, 1 Cor. 15:17, etc.). To be sure, the resurrection of Christ was necessary, both on account of the demonstration and the application of our justification. For if Christ had not been raised, then He would not have conquered death; rather, He would have been conquered by death. Therefore, He would not have merited for us life and righteousness. And even if He had merited them, He still would not be able to confer and apply them now if He had remained in death. (Gerhard, *Summae Evangelii*)

Note the two purposes which Gerhard ascribes to Christ’s resurrection with regard to our justification. First is the purpose of the “demonstration” of our justification. What does this mean? Not that Christ rose to demonstrate that all men were already justified, but, as Gerhard describes, to demonstrate that Christ had conquered death and had *merited* for us life and righteousness. This demonstration is essential for our justification (by faith), because if Christ had remained in

⁸ This reflects the Vulgate translation, as noted by Gerhard in *Summae Evangelii*

⁹ This reflects Piscator’s translation.

¹⁰ This reflects Beza’s translation.

¹¹ This reflects Tremellius’ translation.

death, then He would have been a liar and His atoning work would have been a sham. Second is the purpose of the application of our justification. Not to apply to us a previous act of justifying us that took place on Easter Sunday, but, as Gerhard describes, that a living Christ might apply to us the “life and righteousness” which He had merited for us.

The Wisconsin Synod—the synod Francis Pieper’s brother August—has historically interpreted this phrase in Rom. 4:25 in the former sense—the retrospective, causal interpretation that places “our justification” prior to Christ’s resurrection, as the thing that drove or caused Christ to be raised.

The WELS either ignores or quickly discounts the possibility of a prospective, final use of the prepositional phrase, claiming that, since διὰ + *accusative* expresses cause, the phrase ἡγέθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν must mean that “our justification” (that is, the justification of all human beings of all times, believers and unbelievers) had already taken place prior to or simultaneously with Christ’s resurrection in order for “our justification” to serve as a cause for Christ’s resurrection, so that the already-effected justification of all sinners prompted the Father to raise Jesus. This view is exemplified in the following quotations by current and former professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary:

In Romans 4:25 we are informed that Christ “was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” The resurrection of Christ two thousand years ago demonstrated the grand truth that our justification, or pardon, was already a reality. (Forrest Bivens)

With this διὰ phrase Paul takes us down Golgotha’s hill to Joseph of Arimathea’s garden. Now he invites us to stare into the empty tomb and ponder the meaning of Christ’s resurrection from the dead. It seems that limiting διὰ to “for” would perhaps limit our hearers’ understanding of what exactly God was doing on that first Easter Sunday. Why was Jesus raised from the dead by God the Father? It was “because of our justification.” By using the word δικαίωσις rather than δικαιοσύνη for the Lord’s not guilty decree, Paul especially emphasizes the *activity* involved in God’s declaration of innocence. Yes, the holy God actively declared sinners to be innocent for Jesus’ sake, and that act of declaring not guilty *caused* Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday. (Leyrer, p. 131)

When Paul says that Christ was delivered because of our transgressions the διὰ is without doubt retrospective. He was put to death because our sins had been imputed to him. And while it is true that “our” in this context refers to believers and only believers can *say* what Paul says here, yet it is crystal clear that what Paul asserts here of believers is true of all men. This is so well known to every orthodox Lutheran that we need not cite the Bible passages that place that fact beyond all doubt. It is clear that παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν stands in exact parallelism to ἡγέθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν. If the διὰ is retrospective in the first member of the parallelism it is very natural that we should understand the second διὰ as retrospective also. δικαίωσιν is the act of pronouncing a verdict of not guilty over someone. The genitive pronoun ἡμῶν obviously must be an objective genitive, and the normal way to translate in this context would then be, “Christ was raised because we had been justified.” (Becker)

Thus the WELS teaches the basic tenet of objective justification, that God has already declared the whole world of sinners righteous in His sight. They cite the resurrection of Christ as proof of this,

based on the grammatical possibility of interpreting “our justification” (that is, the justification of every human being) as a pre-existing thing that caused Christ to rise, although they ignore the grammar of the preceding and following verses that limits the apostle’s discussion to “us” as “those who believe.”

Still, one may give credit to the WELS for caring about the grammar here, even if one finds fault with them for ignoring the context.

Kittel would certainly agree that they are ignoring the context. In his monumental *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, he takes this second διὰ clause as expressing a *final cause* specifically *because* of the context:

In R. 4:25: παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν, **the first διὰ denotes the cause and the second the goal**. If we take the second διὰ in the sense of ‘because we are justified,’ i.e., that we may be partakers of ζωὴ αἰώνιος on this basis, this is out of line with the example of Abraham, whose justification is represented as the result of faith in God who awakens the dead.

In short, the WELS is wrong to find objective justification in Romans 4:25:

(1) With regard to the prospective or retrospective use of διὰ + accusative: Becker deduced that “if the διὰ is retrospective in the first member of the parallelism it is very natural that we should understand the second διὰ as retrospective also.” However, we already noted how the first two uses of the same construction (in vv. 23-24) pointed forward, expressing *purpose*. We, together with Gerhard, have seen good reason to understand that the διὰ in the first member of the parallelism (delivered up “for the sake of our trespasses) was also intended prospectively, pointing forward to the purpose of Christ being delivered up, namely, in order to expiate our sins. So, using Becker’s own logic, since the first three uses of this construction pointed forward to purpose, why not the fourth?

(2) With regard to the context, both immediate and extended. Becker is correct in defining δικαίωσιν as “the act of pronouncing a verdict of not guilty over someone.” He is also correct in identifying the genitive ἡμῶν as an objective genitive. However, he then adds his own bias to the text with his past-tense interpretation: “The normal way to translate in this context would then be, ‘Christ was raised because we had been justified.’” The problem, of course, is that, “in this context,” the apostle Paul has not once said in the entire Epistle to the Romans that all sinners (or any sinners, for that matter) were justified when Christ died and rose again. On the contrary, every verse from 1:16 to 4:24 indicates only two possible ways in which God justifies anyone: either by works, or by faith. The context unequivocally militates *against* a justification of all people apart from faith. The “normal way to translate” this verse (contrary to Becker’s claim), given the context, is, “He was raised for the sake of our justification,” or, “He was raised for the sake of justifying us,” that is, so that we might be justified by faith in the God who raises the dead, just as Abraham was.

But what does Francis Pieper do with Romans 4:25 grammatically, and specifically with the διὰ + *accusative* prepositional phrase?

He interprets the verse without any reference to the grammar.

Pieper seems to adopt a unique interpretation of this verse *which entirely discounts the grammar that makes "our justification" any kind of a cause of Christ's resurrection*. We offer his words again:

Now, then, if the Father raised Christ from the dead, He, by this glorious resurrection act, declared that the sins of the whole world are fully expiated, or atoned for, and that all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal. This gracious reconciliation and justification is clearly taught in Rom. 4:25: "Who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification." The term δικαίωσις here means the act of divine justification executed through God's act of raising Christ from the dead, and it is for this reason called the objective justification of all mankind. This truth Dr. Walther stressed anew in America. He taught that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the actual absolution pronounced upon all sinners. To refer the words: "Who was raised again for our justification," to the so-called subjective justification, which takes place by faith, not only weakens the force of the words, but also violates the context. (Pieper, Vol. 2, 321)

Thus Pieper and Walther view Christ's resurrection *as* the justification of all sinners; the two acts are equated by them as a single act. "The resurrection of Christ...is the actual absolution pronounced upon all sinners."¹²

Pieper is twisting and misusing this verse to prove his teaching of objective justification:

(1) With regard to the causal use of διὰ + *accusative*: Pieper seems not to deal with it at all, but instead takes his (i.e., Walther's) preconceived notion of an already-existing, already pronounced justification of all sinners **not by faith**, which must precede a justification **by faith**, and superimposes it on the Biblical text, without addressing the causal relationship expressed in the Greek words. The Biblical text simply says that "He was raised for (or because of, or on account of) our justification." Without any grammatical basis, Pieper has to change the words of the apostle from "...was raised *on account of* our justification" to "...was raised *as* our justification," turning God's act of raising Christ from the dead into the justification of all mankind. At least the WELS position, for as much as it violates the context, has some grammatical basis!

(2) With regard to the context: Pieper makes the striking statement that "To refer the words: 'Who was raised again for our justification,' to the so-called subjective justification, which takes place by faith, not only weakens the force of the words, but also violates the context." One wonders to which context Pieper is referring, since the whole epistle thus far—and especially the verses immediately surrounding Rom. 4:25—has been proving that sinners are only effectively justified in one way, the same way in which our father Abraham was justified: by faith—faith which God accounts for righteousness. If Pieper's view of this verse is correct, then it is the first

¹² Tom Hardt notes the discrepancy between the WELS/Becker position and the mainstream Waltherian position of Missouri, siding with Walther and suggesting that the WELS has fallen into outright Huberianism.

time in the whole New Testament in which any apostle has ever mentioned any divine act of justifying sinners that takes place **not by faith**.

(3) With regard to the Church Fathers whom he cites as support for his interpretation. As has already been shown, Gerhard did not teach that Romans 4:25 refers to the one-time justification of all men in Christ's resurrection from the dead. On the contrary, this is how Gerhard himself paraphrased the verse:

Having stated these things briefly, there emerges this sense of the passage:

PARAPHRASE: Christ Jesus our Lord subjected Himself to death for our sake and was delivered over to it in order that He might make satisfaction for the sins of the whole world and atone for them. He was, however, raised from the dead in order that He might testify and demonstrate that, with death now fully defeated and destroyed, righteousness and life have been provided for men; and that He might apply these things to those who believe in Him. (Gerhard, *Summae Evangelii*)

It is significant that Gerhard included the application of righteousness to believers in his interpretation of this verse, which Pieper elsewhere refers to as "subjective justification." We recall Pieper's claim, "To refer the words: Who was raised again for our justification, to the so-called subjective justification, which takes place by faith, not only weakens the force of the words, but also violates the context." It seems that Pieper failed to read Gerhard in context when he cited him on this verse, because, in effect, he rebuked Gerhard's own interpretation as violating the context, even while citing him as the primary support for objective justification.

As if the context leading up to this point weren't clear enough, St. Paul's next sentence should remove all doubt.

Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως, εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν διὰ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout chapter 4, St. Paul has been proving how our justification takes place: by faith alone in Christ Jesus and the Father who raised Him from the dead. Paul has just indicated that the very purpose of Christ being delivered up to death was to make satisfaction of our sins, and that the very purpose of Christ being raised from the dead was to justify us by faith. "Therefore," he says, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God..." It is absurd to imagine that Paul was talking about "our justification" in 4:25 as an objective justification that was pronounced upon all people not by faith, and then immediately changed the discussion in the very next verse to refer to "our justification" ("we, having been justified,") as a completely separate event (i.e., subjective justification), without any such indication in the text.

In the next section, we will take an even closer look at Gerhard's and Calov's teaching of Romans 4:25 and compare it with Pieper's claims.

GERHARD ON ROMANS 4:25

As noted above, Pieper cited Abraham Calov, who cited Gerhard, as the support for his teaching of objective justification based on Romans 4:25.

The term δικαίωσις here means the act of divine justification executed through God's act of raising Christ from the dead, and it is for this reason called the objective justification of all mankind. This truth Dr. Walther stressed anew in America. He taught that the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the actual absolution pronounced upon all sinners. To refer the words: "Who was raised again for our justification," to the so-called subjective justification, which takes place by faith, not only weakens the force of the words, but also violates the context. Calov, following Gerhard, rightly points out the relation of Christ's resurrection to our justification as follows: "Christ's resurrection took place as an actual absolution from sin (*respectu actualis a peccato absolutionis*). As God punished our sins in Christ, upon whom He laid them and to whom He imputed them, as our Bondsman, so He also, by the very act of raising Him from the dead, absolved Him from our sins imputed to Him, and so He absolved also us in Him." (Vol. 2, 321)

It is often the cause of great misunderstanding to cite one or two sentences from a Church Father as proof of a doctrine, especially when those sentences are only a miniscule representation of a much larger discussion. As will be shown below, Pieper ignored (whether intentionally or out of true ignorance) the context of both Calov and Gerhard to turn their words into a restatement of his and Walther's assertion that Christ's resurrection was God's pronouncement of absolution upon all sinners, that this universal absolution is the proper object of faith, and that "all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal."

We begin with Gerhard, whose words Calov cited in his *Biblia Illustrata*. His commentary on the book of Romans only covers the first six chapters of Romans, interrupted as it was by his untimely death. The whole of it is commended to the reader as a clear exposition of both the Pauline epistle and the Biblical teaching of justification. For now, our focus turns to his comments on Romans 4:25, which, if it teaches the universal forgiveness of all men that has already taken place in the heart of God, will be the first reference to such in the book of Romans.

In replying to the papist assertion that justification is different from the remission of sins, Gerhard says this:

(2) In this same chapter the Apostle expressly teaches that our justification before God consists in the gracious imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the non-imputation, or the remission, of sins; it does not consist in our works. He cannot be stating in the conclusion of this chapter the opposite of what is deduced from the things said above.

As he does throughout his commentary, Gerhard consistently defines "our justification" as "the gracious imputation of the righteousness of Christ and the non-imputation of sins." Both St. Paul and Gerhard state repeatedly that this imputation only takes place through faith. And as Gerhard says in the last sentence above, **"He cannot be stating in the conclusion of this chapter**

the opposite of what is deduced from the things said above.” But what has the Apostle been proving throughout Romans chapter 4? That “faith is imputed for righteousness.”

Already, then, in the beginning of his comments on the verse in question, Gerhard has stated that he does not understand “our justification” differently here than in the rest of the chapter.

He continues:

(3) The Apostle, in this chapter, is *not yet dealing with the effects and fruits of justification*, to which renewal also pertains. Rather, he is dealing *both with the cause and merit of justification*, as is concluded from the particle *διὰ*, *because of*; and with the form and method of justification, which consists in the remission of sins which have been atoned for through Christ; and with the proper object of justifying faith, which is Christ, who died for our sins and was raised for our justification.

Gerhard emphasizes throughout his commentary that Christ has **merited** justification for all. But that does not mean that all have been **pronounced** righteous or already **forgiven in the heart of God** or that they “are regarded as righteous before God’s divine tribunal.” Only when Christ’s merit is **applied** through faith is any sinner “declared righteous” before God. Notice, too, the proper object of justifying faith. This “proper object” is not a general absolution pronounced on Easter, but Christ Himself, who died, etc.

(4) Although we do not disapprove of the goal of treating the death and resurrection of Christ as a model, when explained according to the analogy of faith, nevertheless the Apostle is not yet dealing with that in this passage, although he does later, in Chapter Six and following. Here, however, he explains the other, and indeed, the principal goal of the death and resurrection of Christ, which is the expiation of our sins and our justification before God — indeed, the merit of our righteousness and salvation.

Gerhard does not say that Christ’s resurrection *is* our justification, as Pieper asserts. Instead, he shows that the **principal goal** of Christ’s resurrection is our justification.

(6) The Apostle neither in this passage nor ever, anywhere, attributes the word “justification” to renewal. Rather, he asserts that faith, which lays hold of Christ who died for our sins and was raised for our justification, is imputed to us for righteousness.

Gerhard explicitly describes, in connection with this verse, how sinners are justified. “Faith...is imputed to us for righteousness.” He equates this imputation of Christ’s righteousness to faith with “our justification,” which is the purpose of Christ’s resurrection.

Then begins the section of Gerhard’s commentary of which Pieper has cited only the very last few sentences from Calov:

But if someone further inquires: In what sense and respect, then, is our justification, which consists in the remission of sins, attributed to the resurrection of Christ? We reply: It should be understood in this way. (1) With respect to the manifestation, demonstration and confirmation, because the resurrection of Christ is the clear testimony that full satisfaction has been made for our sins and that perfect righteousness has been procured. Jerome on this passage: Christ rose in order that He might confirm righteousness to believers. Chrysostom, hom. 9 ad Rom.: In the resurrection it is

demonstrated that Christ died, not for His own sins, but for our sins. For how could He rise again if He were a sinner? But if He was not a sinner, then He was crucified for the sake of others.

This is Gerhard's first explanation of how "our justification" is attributed to the resurrection of Christ, based on Rom. 4:25. He emphasizes the resurrection as proof that "full satisfaction has been made" and "perfect righteousness procured." This is not a "pronouncement" that all men are righteous. This is the demonstration that Christ "did enough" to expiate our sins and that He possesses a confirmed righteousness that would serve to justify the whole world of sinners, if the whole world of sinners would believe in Christ.¹³ It belongs to Christ alone, who distributes it in the Means of Grace and applies it through faith, so that those who are "ungodly" with respect to their own works are counted as "godly" through faith in the Righteous One. This is far different from the assertion that "all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal." In fact, Gerhard even quotes Jerome approvingly on this passage, saying that **"Christ rose in order that He might confirm righteousness to believers."**

(2) With respect to the application. If Christ had remained in death, He would not be the conqueror of death, nor could He apply to us the righteousness that was obtained at such a high price (Rom. 5:10, 8:34). But since He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, He thus also offers to the world, through the Word of the Gospel, the benefits obtained by His suffering and death, applies them to believers, and in this way justifies them. With respect to this application, Cardinal Toletus (in his commentary on this passage, and Suarez tom. 2, in part 3, Thom. disp. 44, p.478) acknowledges that our justification is attributed to the resurrection of Christ, writing thus: Christ, by His suffering, sufficiently destroyed sin. Nevertheless, in order that we might be justified and that sin might be effectively remitted to us, it was necessary for the suffering of Christ to be applied to us through a living faith. Christ arose, therefore, for the sake of our righteousness, that is, so that our faith might be confirmed, and in this way we might be effectively justified. The Apostle notably says that Christ died for our sins and was raised, not for the sake of δικαιοσύνην, which is contrasted with sins in general, but διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν, for the sake of our justification, which consists in absolution from sins.

This is Gerhard's second explanation of how "our justification" is attributed to the resurrection of Christ, based on Rom. 4:25. He unequivocally refers to the application of the benefits obtained by Christ to believers as the way in which we are justified. It could not be more clearly stated than that "He thus also offers to the world, through the Word of the Gospel, the benefits obtained by His suffering and death, **applies them to believers, and in this way justifies them.**" The application of the righteousness obtained by Christ **is** the manner in which God

¹³ Aegidius Hunnius: "We interpret those things that the Scripture contains regarding the redemption and reconciliation of the world (or of the human race) concerning the benefit gained and acquired through the death of Christ, and concerning the sufficiency of that merit of Christ—that it is sufficient for the whole world to be reconciled, justified and saved, if the whole world were to believe; that it was also intended for the world and acquired to this end, that all men should thence obtain salvation through faith. Meanwhile, God has never intended it to mean that it avails for justifying or for remitting sins without faith, through some sort of general remission of sins or justification, which is also supposedly done among those who never have faith, never had faith, or never will have faith. He who does not believe, says John the Baptist, will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3)." (*A Clear Explanation*, p.60)

justifies a person. And we are only effectively justified, and sins are only effectively remitted to us, when “the suffering of Christ is applied to us through a living faith.” Note: he does not say “when the general justification is applied to us,” but “when the suffering of Christ is applied to us.” The suffering, death and resurrection of Christ, plus the application of the same through the Word of the Gospel, through faith, results in justification.

Incidentally, among the “benefits obtained” by the suffering and death of Christ, Gerhard also includes elsewhere in his Romans commentary: adoption, the remission of sins, eternal life, salvation, regeneration, and the giving of the Holy Spirit. From these, it is clear that the “benefits obtained” by Christ do not refer to things that occurred or were “declared” or “pronounced” at a single point in time (i.e., either on the cross or on Easter Sunday). Rather, all these benefits belong to Christ. He has obtained them all on behalf of all men, and wishes to distribute them to all men through the Gospel, and **in that sense they are universal**. But not all men are regarded as righteous before God’s divine tribunal, just as all men are not regarded as adopted by God, nor as living eternally, nor as saved, nor as regenerated, nor as being the recipients of the Holy Spirit. These benefits obtained by Christ are only distributed and applied through the Word and only received through faith, so that sinners can only be said to be declared righteous, adopted, forgiven, made alive, saved, regenerated, and given the gift of the Holy Spirit, “when they believe” (cf. Augsburg Confession:IV).

Finally, after discussing Romans 4:25 at great length and after offering several interpretations that unequivocally refer to the remission of sins and justification taking place only through faith, we come to the final paragraph of Gerhard’s exposition of this verse, of which half of a sentence is quoted by some to assert that Gerhard “clearly” taught that “absolution has been pronounced upon all sinners.”

(3) With respect to the actual application from sin.¹⁴ Just as the heavenly Father, by delivering Christ into death for the sake of our sins, condemned sin in His flesh through sin (Rom. 8:3) — that is, condemned it because it had sinned against Christ by causing death for Him, even though He was innocent, and so He withdrew from sin its legal right against believers so that it cannot condemn them any longer; or He also condemned it, that is, punished our sins in Christ, which were imposed on Him and imputed to Him as to a bondsman — so also, by raising Him from the dead, by that very deed He absolved Him from our sins that were imputed to Him, and consequently also absolves us in Him, so that, in this way, the resurrection of Christ may be both the cause and the pledge and the complement of our justification. The following passages pertain to this: 1 Cor. 15:17, 2 Cor. 5:21, Eph. 2:5, Col. 2:12-13, Phil. 3:8-10, 1 Pet. 1:3. (Gerhard, *Adnotationes* on this verse, underlining added)

¹⁴ In the two Latin editions of Gerhard’s commentary on Romans that I have found (1644 and 1645), the phrase in Latin here is *respectu actualis a peccato applicationis*. Calov, in citing Gerhard on this verse, seems to have a different edition in his hands, which reads *respectu actualis a peccato absolutionis*. The latter makes more sense in context, indicating that the former examples may be misprints. However, the Latin word *applicatio* does have a legal significance in which a person attaches himself to a patron.

The key question in this paragraph is whether anything in Gerhard's words supports the conclusion "that all mankind is now regarded as righteous before His divine tribunal," or that "the resurrection of Christ from the dead is the actual absolution pronounced upon all sinners." The answer is revealed—repeatedly!—in Gerhard's words.

First, even the first part of this paragraph makes clear that, in condemning sin, the Father "withdrew from sin its legal right against believers so that it cannot condemn them any longer." These are Gerhard's own words, under the same point, in the same paragraph. Gerhard clearly does not have all unbelievers in view as those who are declared free from the law's condemnation.

Second, in calling Christ's resurrection the "cause (*causa*) and the pledge (*pignus*) and the complement (*complementum*)" of our justification, he does not at all indicate thereby that anyone's justification occurred simultaneously with Christ's resurrection, but that our justification is inextricably linked with the resurrection of Christ. Indeed, Christ had to rise as the "complement" of our justification, that is, a necessary part for completing our justification; we could not be justified without it. But, by definition, that means there is another necessary part; Christ's resurrection is not the whole of our justification. The other part, which Gerhard has pointed out throughout his commentary, is God's gift of faith in "Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."

Third, Gerhard writes that, as a result of Christ being "absolved" from our sins that were imputed to Him, the Father "consequently also absolves us in Him." This is different from Pieper's translation, "absolved us in Him." The single word *absolvit*, from Gerhard's (and Calov's) commentary on Romans 4:25, has been used by teachers of objective justification as the foundation for their teaching. They understand Gerhard and Calov to mean that God "absolved" all people "in Christ" at the moment when Christ was raised from the dead. **But the Latin word is ambiguous.**

Absolvit in Latin can be either a perfect tense verb (translated either "he absolved" or "he has absolved"), or the same form can be a present tense verb ("he absolves"). The context alone can make the meaning clear. Those who have scoured the Fathers to find evidence of Walther's Easter Absolution have latched onto this passage from Gerhard (later quoted by Calov) and insisted on a simple past tense translation, "absolved." It apparently has not occurred to them that a perfect tense translation in English is equally valid, "has absolved," which would point, not to the punctiliar moment of Christ's resurrection, but to the absolution of "us" as we have all been baptized and absolved of our sins in Christ through the ministry of the Keys.

But even more likely is the present tense translation, which is suggested both by Gerhard's use of *ac proinde* ("consequently, as a result of this") and by Calov's citation of it. Calov refers back to Gerhard's quote, "Finally, when he says that in the risen Christ we **are absolved from sin...**" There he unmistakably uses a present tense *nos absolvi* (present passive infinitive) *a peccato* as opposed to a perfect tense *nos absolutos esse*. Therefore, the evidence points, not to an absolution of "us" that took place nineteen hundred years ago (from Pieper's perspective), but to the

absolution that takes place through the Means of Grace when God grafts us into Christ by faith and thus joins us to His “absolution.”

Finally, when Gerhard asserts that God “consequently also absolves us in Him,” he does not say “all sinners,” or “the world.” He says “us.” But Gerhard himself has already told us who the “us” is in this paragraph, both in what precedes and in what follows. The “us” who Gerhard says are absolved in Him is a reference to us “believers,” as proved, not only from his statement earlier in the same paragraph with reference to believers, but also by the supporting passages he cites — “The following passages pertain to this: 1 Cor. 15:17, 2 Cor. 5:21, Eph. 2:5, Col. 2:12-13, Phil. 3:8-10, 1 Pet. 1:3” — all of which refer to those who have been grafted into Christ by faith.

Repeatedly in his commentary, Gerhard points to Christ’s death as that which made satisfaction for the entire human race. But, significantly, he never makes a similar assertion about the resurrection of Christ being (or causing or declaring or manifesting) the justification of the entire human race. **It was Walther, and later Pieper, who popularized that saying within the Lutheran Church.**

CALOV AND ROMANS 4:25

Since it was Calov whom Pieper directly quoted in *Christian Dogmatics* as affirming the “clear teaching” of Romans 4:25 that “all men are regarded as righteous before God’s divine tribunal,” we will consider also his words in context. Since his commentary on this verse is not available elsewhere in English, it will be reproduced here in full, though we will limit our comments to the more relevant portions.

He could have said, “...who both died and rose again so that He might justify or free us from sins.” But since he loves to employ contrasts, he combined sins with death, since they are the death of the soul. And he combined the obtaining of righteousness with resurrection, since righteousness is the resurrection of the soul. He wondrously brings us away from sins and leads us to righteousness, for we see that Christ was not afraid to die as a testimony to His teaching against sins and calling us to righteousness. And He was raised by God so that the ultimate authority might be established for that teaching. See 1 Pet. 1:3.

To summarize this first section, Calov sees the death and resurrection of Christ, first of all, as a *martyrium* or testimony to His teaching. Christ died and rose again as the ultimate Martyr, sealing His teaching with His blood and confirming His truthfulness by His resurrection.

But this understanding of Christ’s death and resurrection as *martyrium* is not the only teaching, or even the main teaching Calov sees in Romans 4:25. He goes on to explain:

In what way did Christ die *for the sake of our sins*? The death of Christ is not viewed only as a *martyrium* or testimony to His teaching, sealed with His death, but as a satisfaction for sins, as Grotius himself pointed out against Socinus in the defense of the Catholic faith *de Satisfactione Christi*, and as pointed out extensively by us in *Socinismo Profligato*. Nor is it only the bravery of Christ that brings us away from sin and leads us to righteousness in that He was not afraid to die for the sake of the testimony of His teaching against sins and calling us to righteousness. It wouldn’t have been necessary for the only-begotten Son of God Himself to undergo death in order

to accomplish that, for such things have been witnessed in the case of many martyrs who were certainly not afraid to die as a testimony to their teaching. But the very death of Christ was a payment and ransom price for our sins, because they were laid upon Him; sins were the meritorious cause of His death. "Christ was delivered over to death for us, so that one might die for all" (2 Cor. 5:15). Nor is this referring to the bringing away from sins, but to the expiation of our sins made by the death of Christ, that is, the satisfaction furnished for our sins, which is the meritorious cause of our justification, not only a "cause that motivates us morally" to stop sinning.

Calov refers to the death of Christ as "a satisfaction for sins," as the "payment and ransom price for our sins," as that which made the "expiation of our sins," the "satisfaction furnished for our sins," and "the meritorious cause of our justification." He also refers in this section to sins as the "meritorious cause of His death."

It may be helpful to discuss briefly what is meant by "meritorious cause."

The meritorious cause of something is the reason why something **deserves** to happen. It is the thing that **merits** or **earns** something for someone, whether good or bad. For example, the meritorious cause of a murderer's execution is the crime he committed. That is the thing that earns for him a death sentence, the reason why he deserves to die. In fact, the moment he commits the murder, he **deserves** to die, even before the authorities find out about it, even before his trial date is set, even before he enters the courtroom where the judge will examine the evidence. He has earned death for himself. For his deed of murder, he deserves to die, even if he is later, for some reason, acquitted.

Calov says that our sins were "laid upon" Christ, that is, imputed to Christ, and so became the "meritorious cause of His death," that is, the reason why He "deserved" to die. Our sins, imputed to Christ, made Him "worthy" of death, according to God's gracious will to count or impute sins to "Him who knew no sin," (2 Cor. 5:21) in order to save us sinners.

Likewise, says Calov, that very satisfaction furnished for our sins by the death of Christ is the "meritorious cause of our justification." Christ's death for our sins is the thing that has earned an acquittal from the divine Judge for all sinners. Nothing else in all creation **earns** the justification of the sinner—not our works, not our suffering, not our faith. Only the "satisfaction furnished for our sins by the death of Christ."

But the meritorious cause—earning something—does not *ipso facto* cause the thing to happen. The fact that a murderer has earned the death penalty for himself with his crime does not, by itself, cause his execution to occur. The police have a role. The law has a role. The judge has a role. The hangman has a role, as does the hangman's noose. If any of these is lacking, then the murderer will not actually be condemned and executed, in spite of the fact that the meritorious cause of his death was present.

Similarly, Calov's words in no way imply that the divine tribunal has already convened and adjourned, or that a verdict of justification upon all men has already been rendered. Just as the meritorious cause of a murderer's death sentence—that is, the crime he committed—may not result in an actual death sentence from the judge (or in a trial at all, if he is not apprehended), so also the meritorious cause of our justification—that is, Christ's innocent death in the place of all

men—has not resulted in the actual justification of all men. As Jesus says, “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Nevertheless, nothing can change the fact that Christ’s death earned the justification of all sinners, so that anyone and everyone who enters God’s courtroom believing in Christ is actually declared by God to be righteous. The moment Christ died, He earned this gift for us all. This is what is meant by “meritorious cause.”

In what way was Christ raised “for the sake of our righteousness”?

Again, the Apostle does not say that Christ was raised by God so that authority might be established for His teaching, which could have been sufficiently established for it by miracles and by the testimony from heaven, if the Jews had not been so hardened. But διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν, for the sake of our righteousness. And if the only-begotten Son of God was delivered over to death and raised from death only for the sake of confirming His teaching by the testimony of His death and by the miracle of the resurrection so that others might be set free from sin and death by His teaching, the same surely could have been accomplished by the death and resurrection of other martyrs, even as some of the early believers were raised and appeared to many, as St. Matthew testifies in 27:53. Why, then, would it have been necessary for the Son of God Himself—God, who is blessed forever and ever—to be delivered over to death and raised for this reason?

As above, concerning the death of Christ, Calov points out here that the *martyrium* given by the resurrection of Christ was great, but he explains that there is much more to Christ’s resurrection than a testimony to His authority and power. What is the chief significance of Christ’s death and resurrection? He goes on to explain:

No, the Apostle teaches something far different, that the death of Christ surely took place, not only because of our sins, not merely for the sake of confirming the teaching of Christ which brings us away from sins, but on account of what our sins had deserved, for the words διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν infer the meritorious cause of the death of Christ, that He was delivered over, that, by divine counsel and decree, He sustained the penalty of our sins in such a way that He might free us from them.

As noted above, Calov emphasizes our sins as that which earned death for us. Christ willingly took these upon Himself and suffered what we had earned and deserved with our sins, and thus He earned freedom for all sinners.

This is amply taught in Isaiah 53, that we have been reconciled to God and are justified by the death of Christ, and thus, just as the death of Christ was the motivating cause or reason for declaring to us the remission of sins, justification and salvation, so we are not justified before God nor do we obtain salvation in any other way but by laying hold of the satisfaction of the death of Christ. This is the goal of the apostolic teaching and instruction in this chapter. This is why he describes faith as he does, which is imputed to us for righteousness, that it is placed in God, who raised Jesus from the dead, just as He was delivered over on account of our sins.

Calov has written thus far about the death of Christ as that which merited justification. Now he begins to describe the application of what Christ merited as he explains the “how” of justification, namely, “by laying hold of the satisfaction of the death of Christ,” by which he

means, “faith.” Calov uses exclusive language here: “...so that we are not justified before God...in any other way but” by faith. He links together the remission of sins, justification and salvation as those gifts which have been earned by Christ and are received only by faith, which is “imputed to us for righteousness.”

Notice also what Calov says faith lays hold of: not the fact that all men have already been justified and declared righteous by God, as claimed by Pieper and Walther, but by laying hold of “the satisfaction of the death of Christ.” The object of faith is not presented as the Easter Absolution. Faith, he says, is “placed in God, who raised Jesus from the dead...,” paraphrasing the apostle in Romans 4:24.

For His resurrection from the dead is the infallible proof of the complete satisfaction and expiation of our sins and of the reconciliation with God made through the death of Christ. If this reconciliation had not been made, then God would never have raised this Mediator and Bondsman of ours, who gave Himself as a ransom (1 Tim. 2:4), from the dead so that He might communicate and distribute His righteousness to us, that is, our justification.

Pieper’s objective reconciliation/justification teaches that Christ’s resurrection from the dead leaves “all men being regarded as righteous before God’s divine tribunal.” But that is not Calov’s claim. He speaks of the resurrection of Christ as proof of the complete satisfaction and expiation of our sins and of the reconciliation with God made through the death of Christ. One frequently finds the Lutheran Fathers speaking of a reconciliation that was made through the death of Christ, which they treat as synonymous with the satisfaction that was made through the death of Christ, which we by no means dispute. What they do not do is take this to the next step, to imply that “God no longer looks upon sinful man with wrath,” or that “the whole world has been justified” or “declared righteous before God’s divine tribunal.”

None of Calov’s phrases here can be construed to teach that all people in heaven, in hell, and on earth have been absolved by God, declared righteous and reconciled with God, especially when that which is necessary for “our justification,” as Calov says, has not taken place for all people in heaven, in hell, and on earth, namely, the communication and distribution of the righteousness of Christ.

What does Christ’s resurrection from the dead have to do with the communication and distribution of His righteousness? Calov says that Christ was raised from the dead “so that He might communicate and distribute His righteousness to us.” This is a key purpose of Christ’s resurrection and a chief emphasis of both Calov and Gerhard. Whereas objective justification teaches that Christ’s resurrection **was** God’s declaration that all men are righteous in His sight, Calov taught that Christ’s resurrection was for the purpose of the living Christ communicating and distributing His righteousness to us, which is done through the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, with our justification being, not an act of God that occurred at the time of Christ’s resurrection, but as the very goal and purpose of Christ’s death and resurrection, namely, that all men should be justified by faith in the crucified and risen Righteous One.

Therefore, it does not at all mean that Christ was raised on account of our justification in the same way as He was delivered over by God to death on account of our sins. For this death of Christ is established as the meritorious cause of the expiation of our sins, even as our sins were the meritorious cause of the death of Christ, because by the merit of our sins He was delivered over into death in our place, so that by the merit of His death we might be freed from sin and its penalty, death.

We observe here that Calov speaks again of the “meritorious cause” of Christ’s death, namely, our sins, which earned death for Christ, which He willingly suffered. And he speaks again of the “meritorious cause” of the expiation of our sins, namely, the death of Christ, which earned for us freedom from sin and death, which we are to lay hold of by faith.

But, of course, it cannot be said concerning the resurrection of Christ that Christ merited righteousness for us by His resurrection; His exclamation from the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30), also confirmed that the earning of righteousness was finished at the time of His death.

Teachers in the WELS will point to John 19:30 as a declaration of objective justification. “It is finished!”, that is, “all sinners have now been justified!” But Calov does not allow for this. What he says is that “the earning of righteousness was finished at the time of His death,” with which we certainly agree; righteousness was earned for all men “at the time of His death.” But Calov does not say or imply that the justification of the world happened, either at the time of Christ’s death, or at the time of His resurrection.

Therefore, Scripture speaks differently concerning the death of Christ than it does concerning His resurrection. For it says that Christ suffered and died both for our sake and on our behalf¹⁵. However, He rose again, not on our behalf, but only for our sake.

The argument is often made by teachers of objective justification that, just as Christ suffered and died in our stead, so He was justified on our behalf or in our stead. Consider these conclusions that form part of the Doctrinal Proceedings of the 1860 Convention of The German Evangelical-Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States:¹⁶

Here now the following emerging question enjoined itself in the synod: the phrase is always pronounced and is known by us: Through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God has absolved the whole world, i.e. loosed from sins; if according to this the world is already long since absolved and loosed from sins, what then is absolution or preaching of the Gospel in the Church? Is it also an unmooring, or merely a proclamation of unmooring that has already happened?

Answer: The absolution of the entire world is done in God’s heart in the moment when redemption was done by the Lord Christ, and because the salvation stands accomplished before God even from eternity, then one can say: Absolution was in God’s heart even from eternity. But we do not yet have it....The Gospel is also not a proclamation that we are first redeemed and should be pardoned, but that we already are redeemed and pardoned, and absolution in the Gospel is none other than a reiteration of the actual absolution that has already happened through the resurrection of Jesus

¹⁵ *propter nos et pro nobis*

¹⁶ As cited at <http://steadfastlutherans.org/?p=20109>

Christ from the dead...As surely as Christ has died, and died for all people, so surely God sees all people as dead for the sake of their sins...**On the other hand, Christ is also raised in the stead of all people, thus all people are declared righteous in Christ; for Christ needed to be as the Righteous One for His person not by resurrection, but this has been done for our sake, He died and rose again in their place, and thus all are justified in Christ.**

But Calov (copying Gerhard) makes a vital point here that demolishes the argument that Christ was justified in the place of all men. "For it says that Christ suffered and died both for our sake and on our behalf. However, He rose again, not on our behalf, but only for our sake." Since Calov and Gerhard expressly denied the fundamental tenet of objective justification that Christ was **raised and justified in our place**, it is either truly ignorant or truly disingenuous for its modern-day proponents to continue claiming these Lutheran Fathers as supporters of their doctrine.

Calov now begins the section in which he quotes from Johann Gerhard's Annotations on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, the section on Romans 4:25.

Therefore, although the theologians sometimes speak of the resurrection of Christ as the meritorious cause of our justification, they understand the term "merit" only in a general sense, even as Blessed Gerhard taught in his commentary on this passage in answer to the question, *Does the resurrection of Christ pertain to the merit that has been provided for us?* He replies in this way: The word "merit" is understood either generally as all that pertains to our justification; or specifically as that which Christ has provided for us and which we ourselves were obligated to provide. In the first sense, the resurrection of Christ pertains to merit, because the resurrection of Christ was required for our justification in the ways explained thus far. But with regard to the second sense, it does not pertain to merit, because, although Christ arose for our sake, He did not arise in our place, whereas He suffered and died, not only for our sake, but also in our place.

In which respects Christ's resurrection was required for our justification, Blessed Gerhard explains below.

We notice at the outset that none of the three explanations below describe "our justification" as something that had already happened in God's heart on Good Friday, as the LCMS document above claims. Indeed, the very fact that Christ's resurrection was "required for our justification" demonstrates that **the world was not "already justified in God's heart" when Christ died.**

(1) With respect to *the manifestation and confirmation*, because the resurrection of Christ is the clear testimony that full satisfaction has been made for our sins and that perfect righteousness has been procured. Chrysostom, Homily 9 on Romans: "In the resurrection it was demonstrated that Christ died, not for His own sins, but for our sins. For how could He rise again if He were a sinner? But if He was not a sinner, then He was crucified for the sake of others."

(2) With respect to *the application*. If Christ had remained in death, He would not be the conqueror of death, nor could He apply to us the righteousness that was obtained at such a high price (Rom. 5:10, 8:34).

We have already commented above on Gerhard's words, which Calov here cites. Now we come to the words of Calov cited by Pieper in *Christian Dogmatics*:

(3) With respect to *the actual absolution from sin*. Just as God punished our sins in Christ, which were imposed on Him and imputed to Him as our bondsman, so also, by the very act of raising Him from the dead, He absolved Him from our sins that had been imputed to Him, and consequently He also absolves us in Him. The following passages refer to this: 1 Cor. 15:17, 2 Cor. 5:21, Eph. 2:5, Col. 2:12-13, Phil. 3:8-10, 1 Pet. 1:3.

As we noted above, Gerhard says nothing here about the entire world having been absolved "in Christ." Rather, he speaks of "us" (that is, baptized believers—see especially the passages referenced by Gerhard) as those whom God absolves "in Him."

But the final nail in the coffin for the Pieper's claim that all men are "regarded as righteous before God's divine tribunal" is in Calov's own qualification of Gerhard's statement:

Nevertheless, the following must be observed here: the manifestation and confirmation of the expiation of sins and the demonstration of victory over death is certainly useful for our faith, but not for the merit of Christ. He makes a definite distinction between the application of the righteousness of Christ and the merit of Christ, and he says that the risen Christ is the efficient cause of the application. But he does not say that the resurrection of Christ is the meritorious cause either of the righteousness of Christ or of its application. **Finally, when he says that in the risen Christ we are absolved¹⁷ from sin, it is admitted to this extent, that since He was absolved from our sins that were imputed to Him, the expiation of our sins is certain, just as certain as our vivification and our blessed resurrection from the dead to blessed life. On account of this certainty that rests on the merit of the death of Christ, confirmed by the resurrection of Christ, we are said to be made alive in Christ and to have been raised with Christ (Eph. 2:5).**

What does Calov think about Gerhard's quote about the "actual absolution from sin"? He thinks it can only be "admitted" to the extent that "the expiation of our sins is certain." Indeed it is! But that is still not objective justification, as defined by Pieper.

Furthermore, Calov says that the expiation of our sins is "just as certain as our vivification and our blessed resurrection from the dead to blessed life." He is not speaking about some sort of vivification of ours and our blessed resurrection from the dead that took place on Easter Sunday. He is speaking about events that only take place **for believers in Christ**. And the result of the merit of the death of Christ is that "we are said to be made alive in Christ and to have been raised with Christ (Eph. 2:5)," which pertains only to believers in Christ. Thus Calov himself states and at once confirms the meaning of Gerhard, that he only has believers in view in this "we are absolved in Him."

Calov concludes his remarks on Romans 4:25:

But these things are not properly included in the meritorious cause of justification. For the resurrection is highlighted only for confirming faith on our part, or for the application through the Gospel of the righteousness obtained for us by Christ, but not meritoriously. Nor should we

¹⁷ Here is where we find Calov's present tense "we are absolved from sin," clearly indicating that neither he nor Gerhard were referring to an absolution that took place at the time of Christ's resurrection. See p. 21 of this essay.

overlook the fact that the Apostle says, “Christ died for the sake of our sins,” but he does not say likewise that He was raised *for the sake of our righteousness*, which is in other places contrasted with sins, but *for the sake of our justification*. **For if Christ had not been raised from the dead, neither could faith, which is invariably needed for justification, have been certain, nor could righteousness have been applied to us by Christ.**

With these concluding words, Calov slams the door on those who would look back to him as a champion of objective justification. He points to the resurrection of Christ, not as the “absolution of the world,” nor as the proof that the world had already been justified, but as that which serves to “confirm our faith” and “apply through the Gospel the righteousness obtained for us by Christ.” He, along with Gerhard, portrays the resurrection of Christ as taking place, not because our justification had already occurred, not as the “absolution pronounced upon all sinners,” but for the purpose of justifying us by faith—*faith qua opus est ad Justificationem ἀμεταπτότως*, “**which is invariably needed for justification.**”

CONCLUSION

Based on the exegesis of Romans 4:25 and on the evidence from Gerhard’s and Calov’s words in context, it should be clear to all that Pieper, following Walther, took a single phrase from Scripture out of context, and a single sentence from those Fathers out of context, and constructed a modified doctrine of justification out of it, turning “our justification” in that verse into a reference to a universal justification of all men that took place in the heart of God the moment He raised Christ from the dead, so that “all mankind is regarded as righteous before God’s divine tribunal.”

For the way he ineptly handled Scripture and the Fathers, Pieper, as a teacher of the Church in general, should be considered suspect. But for the irresponsible way in which he meddled with the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls and influenced generations of Lutherans to put their faith in a non-existent “pre-existing absolution” of all men apart from faith in Christ, imagining all the while that such a belief is historically Lutheran and Scriptural, Pieper, as a teacher of objective justification, should be thoroughly and utterly rejected.

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