

The Doctrine of Justification in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: By Works or by Faith. (Tertium Non Datur.)

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ROMANS 5:1-11

We now continue to follow Paul's justification argument through chapter 5. In this chapter, he proceeds to point out to the Roman Christians the great blessings that now belong to them and to all who have been justified by faith. To accomplish this, he spends the first eleven verses explaining the grace of God toward believers (1) pre-conversion, (2) in conversion, and (3) post-conversion. The chart below lines up the parallel verb phrases, adjectives, and prepositional phrases in Romans 4:25 – 5:11 in relation to conversion, as viewed from the perspective of St. Paul and the saints in Rome to whom he was writing:

PRE-CONVERSION (AORIST)	CONVERSION (AORIST)	POST-CONVERSION	
		(PRESENT)	(FUTURE)
παρεδόθη (4:25) ἡγέρθη (4:25) ἀσθενῶν ἀπέθανε (5:6) ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανε (5:8) ἁμαρτωλῶν ἐχθροὶ	δικαιωθέντες ἐκ πίστεως (5:1) δικαιωθέντες ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ (5:9) κατηλλάγημεν διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ (5:10) καταλαγνέστες (5:10) τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἐλάβομεν (5:11)	εἰρήνην ἔχομεν (5:1) καυχώμεθα (5:2) καυχώμεθα (5:3) κατεργάζεται (5:3) οὐ καταισχύνει (5:4) καυχώμενοι (5:11)	σωθησόμεθα (5:9) σωθησόμεθα (5:10)
	(ALL PERFECT FORMS)		
	προσαγωγὴν ἐσχίκαμεν (5:2) ἐν ᾗ ἐστήκαμεν (5:2) ἐκκέχυται (5:5)		

To summarize Paul's argument in this section: He begins by stating the premise in vv. 1-5, namely, that we who have been justified by faith now have all the things we were lacking before we were justified: "peace with God" (Rom 5:1), "access to this grace" (Rom. 5:2); the "hope of God's glory"

(Rom. 5:2); the usefulness of tribulations even in this life (Rom. 5:3-4). He goes on to prove this premise in vv. 6-11 with an argument from the greater to the lesser, pointing out, first, God's grace shown to us unconverted, ungodly, weak, unrighteous sinners in the death of Christ. Second, he highlights God's grace in bringing us ungodly sinners to faith, converting us, and thus justifying us and reconciling us with God through the blood of Christ (that is, the death of Christ), the merit of which has been applied to us by the Holy Spirit, through the Means of Grace, through faith. Third, he takes his readers all the way up to the Last Day, proving that God will most certainly save them from wrath (Rom. 5:9-10) by virtue of the fact that God already did the "hardest," most remarkable things in loving the ungodly, dying for the ungodly, and turning His ungodly enemies into His dear children.

v. 1

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,

The aorist passive participle in Δικαιωθέντες points to a justifying act in the past from the perspective of Paul's writing. The participle modifies the pronoun "we" that is implied in the main verb ἔχομεν. Since there is no indication of any change in who the "we" are, we must conclude that it is the same "we" that Paul was just discussing in the preceding verses, namely, we "who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." In other words, "we believers in Christ, who was delivered up for our sins and raised for our justification." This is confirmed again as Paul adds the means by which "we" have been justified, namely, "by faith." Since faith is expressly mentioned here as the instrument of justification, it is clear that Paul is referring to the time when he and the Roman Christians were brought to faith in Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit in the Means of Grace. Simply put, he is referring to the time of their Baptism and conversion as the time at which they were justified. This is entirely consistent with the rest of Paul's teaching. Cf. Eph. 2:4-9, Col. 2:11-13, Rom. 6:3-4.

The results of this justification by faith (post-conversion) are enumerated in this and the following verses. We—that is, those who have been justified by faith—have peace (present-tense verb) with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, into whom we have been grafted by faith (cf. Rom. 11:16-24). This is in stark contrast to our pre-conversion state: "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked (LXX: τοῖς ἀσεβέσιν, the ungodly)" (Is. 48:22). "And the way of peace they have not known" (Rom. 3:17). Indeed, when Paul describes the strict requirements under works-righteousness, he makes "peace" an utterly unattainable goal (cf. Rom. 2:8-10). But now, those who are righteous by faith have already attained this peace as a free gift.

v. 2

δι' οὗ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχίκαμεν τῇ πίστει εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην ἐν ᾗ ἐστήκαμεν, καὶ καυχώμεθα
ἐπ' ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ.

through whom also we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand, and we boast
in hope of the glory of God.

Through Christ—into whom we have now been grafted by faith—we "have gained" access. "Have gained" is the perfect active indicative ἐσχίκαμεν from the verb ἔχω, "to have." The perfect tense in Greek indicates a past action whose effects continue into the present. Therefore, in the chart

above, I have the perfect tense verbs overlapping the *Conversion* and the *Post-Conversion* columns. Luther translates here with a simple present, “haben—we have.”

What we have is “access” or “entrance.” How we have it is “by faith.” The Mediator of this access is Christ. What we have access to is “this grace in which we now stand.” “We stand” (ἐστήκαμεν) is another perfect tense verb, referring to action in the past whose effects continue into the present. Not only is it parallel to “we have gained” in form, but also in poetic rhyme.

“We boast in hope” in the present tense, but our present hope is set on the glory of God to be revealed in the future. Whereas in Rom. 3:27 St. Paul excluded (by the law of faith) the possibility of any “boasting” under the law, he now begins to speak of a “boast” that believers have. This boast is not in our works, but in the hope that has freely been given to us, by faith, for Christ’s sake, namely, the hope of attaining the glory of God. Whereas in Rom. 3:23 St. Paul declared that all “fall short of the glory of God” under works-righteousness, he now speaks of the certainty of obtaining the glory of God under faith-righteousness. Luther translates: “der Hoffnung der zukünftigen Herrlichkeit die Gott geben soll – the hope of the future glory that God shall give.”

v. 3-4

Οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν, εἰδότες ὅτι ἡ θλίψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται, ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ δοκιμὴν, ἡ δὲ δοκιμὴ ἐλπίδα.

Not only this, but we also boast in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience, ⁴ and patience approval, and approval hope.

Again, whereas no one had any boast whatsoever under works-righteousness, under faith-righteousness, believers even boast in tribulations, knowing that they do not come from an angry God for the purpose of punishing the wicked (since believers are no longer counted among the wicked), but rather, that they are employed by a God of grace for the purpose of training and exercising His dear children to help us reach our glorious goal.

v. 5

Ἡ δὲ ἐλπίς οὐ καταισχύνει, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκέχυται ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν διὰ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου τοῦ δοθέντος ἡμῖν.

And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Paul stresses the certain victory of hope (post-conversion) as having its basis in the love of God that was first poured out in our hearts at the time of conversion, when the Holy Spirit was given. “Poured out” is in the perfect tense, indicating that the love of God wasn’t simply poured out in the past (as if it were a thing), but still extends to His children. The giving of the Holy Spirit, however, Paul puts in the aorist tense (aorist participle), indicating the specific out-pouring of the Holy Spirit in connection with Holy Baptism and conversion (cf. Acts 2:38, Eph. 1:13). The pronouns “our” and “us” are not referring to all people in the world, but to those who had received the promised Holy Spirit, that is, Paul and the saints in Rome, and by extension, all who believe and have been baptized.

v. 6

Ἦτι γὰρ Χριστός, ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν, κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανε.

For Christ, *although* we were still weak, died at the right time for us ungodly people.

There has been no expansion of the subject from the previous verses to this one. “We” still refers to Paul and the Roman Christians.¹ The Ἦτι (“still”) in this verse seems to belong with the genitive absolute clause that follows, ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν, “although we were still weak.” There is no “although” in the Greek. One must determine what (if any) shade of meaning to attach to the circumstantial participle ὄντων, recognizing that it may contain various shades of meaning at once. It could be taken in a temporal sense: “when we were weak.” Or in a concessive sense: “although we were weak.” Or in a causal sense: “because we were weak.” It could be translated very simply as attendant circumstance: “we being weak.” I favor the concessive sense here, because Paul is highlighting our former weakness as something that would, under normal circumstances, prevent anyone from showing such great love to us. And yet, in spite of our weakness, Christ did indeed stoop down to favor such unfavorable sinners. But the clause can also be understood well enough in a temporal or causal sense. Luther’s “da wir noch schwach waren” can cover both of these senses at once.

Christ died (aorist) ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν, “for ungodly ones.” Luther here adds the word “uns” – “died for **us** ungodly ones,” an explanatory addition drawn from the protasis (“we being weak”) and also from v. 8 where Paul uses almost the exact same words: “Christ died ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν – for us.” Paul’s words here make clear that our faith did not in any way motivate Christ to die for us. On the contrary, he died for the ungodly, for those who had no faith by which they might be counted righteous before God.

Here the apostle is taking his readers back to their pre-conversion state, when they still had the status of ungodly sinners and were living in hostility toward God. Writing when he does around AD 58, he could very vividly take (most of) his readers back about 28 years to the time of the crucifixion, at which time he was still a self-righteous Pharisee, trying to earn his own righteousness before God. He readily admits that he was, at that time, a weak, ungodly man, as were his readers before they were brought to faith. At the time when Christ gave His life for them, they were still “weak” (Rom. 5:6, 8:3), “living according to the flesh” (Rom. 8:5), “carnally minded” (Rom. 8: 6), at “enmity” with God (Rom. 8:7), unable to please God (Rom. 8:8). At the time when Christ died for them, they were still “children of wrath, just as the others” (Eph. 2:3). Paul will go on to demonstrate the significance of this tremendous demonstration of love in the following verses.

v. 7

Μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται, ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τάχα τις καὶ τολμᾷ ἀποθανεῖν.

Now, hardly for a righteous *person* will someone die, though perhaps someone will dare to die for a good *person*.

Paul illustrates for his readers how absolutely unique the love of God is, and how far beyond human love. He draws on his readers’ every-day experience, pointing out how rare it is for someone to give up his life willingly, even for a righteous person or a good person, although there are certainly examples of good men dying to save their families or friends, or of good women dying to save their

¹ In the words of Johann Gerhard, Paul is speaking “cum renatis de renatis,” that is, “with the reborn about the reborn.”

children. The Greek doesn't have the word "person" in either case, but simply, "for righteous, for good." Luther takes this to refer, not to good people, but to "a just cause, a good cause": "um des Rechtes, um etwas Gutes." This is certainly possible. But since both verse 6 and verse 8 use the phrase with regard to people ("for ungodly *people*," "for us"), I think it best to interpret the parallel phrase in this verse in a parallel way.

v. 8

Συνίστησι δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ Θεός, ὅτι ἔτι ἀμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ὑμῶν, Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανε.

But God displays His love toward us in that, *although* we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God "displays" (συνίστησιν) His love toward us. This word literally means "stands / causes to stand together," and has a variety of nuanced meanings. Paul uses it here as he did in Rom. 3:5: "our unrighteousness demonstrates (συνίστησιν) the righteousness of God." Our unrighteousness "puts God's righteousness on display," it highlights or emphasizes it. So here, God puts His love toward us on display. He shines a bright spotlight on it, because it is so far beyond what human love is capable of.

The unique nature of God's love is demonstrated in Christ's death for us "although we were still sinners." This phrase, ἔτι ἀμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν, is another genitive absolute, directly parallel with ἔτι ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν. The ἔτι in both cases makes it clear that this was a former state in which Paul and his readers once were, but now are in no longer. Even then (pre-conversion) when they still were not clothed by faith in the righteousness of Christ, God loved them.

The love of God, then, extends even to those who are not children of God, so that Christ died, not only for His friends (that is, those who already believed in Him), but also for His enemies. More than that, Christ died even for those who would never believe in Him, as John 3:16-17 makes clear. God loved "the world" and gave His only-begotten Son so that all men through Him might be saved. The fact that not all men are saved (by believing in the Son) does not change the fact that God loved all men enough to give His Son (into death) for them. Indeed, this very truth puts God's love on display all the more.

Nevertheless, God has not justified all those whom He has loved. This entire section speaks of the special blessings that belong to the justified.

v. 9

Πολλῷ οὖν μᾶλλον, δικαιωθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ, σωθησόμεθα δι' αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς.

Much more, then, having now been justified by His blood, shall we be saved through Him from wrath.

The phrase "δικαιωθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ - having now been justified by His blood" is directly parallel with 5:1, "Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως - having been justified by faith." The νῦν ("now") emphasizes the state in which Paul and the Roman Christians "now" are, namely, those who have been justified.

Proponents of "Objective Justification" will sometimes try to make v. 9 parallel with v. 8 instead, equating "Christ died for us" with "having now been justified by His blood." They take this "justified by His blood" as the "Objective Justification" of all men apart from faith, by virtue of Christ's death, while interpreting 5:1, "justified by faith" as "Subjective Justification." They think they have

caught Paul referring to two separate justification events, even though Paul nowhere indicates that he is using the same word and the same grammar in the same section to refer to different events.

Part of their error stems from trying to make the phrase ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ into a temporal phrase expressing the *immediate cause* of justification (that is, a justification without the means of grace and without faith), placing “our justification” (that is, the justification of all men) at the moment of Jesus’ death (or resurrection). The phrase, however, does not denote the time of justification, but the meritorious cause of our justification. Indeed, sinners are justified by virtue of the blood of Christ. And sinners are justified by faith. In Titus 3, Paul says that “we have been justified by grace - δικαιωθέντες τῇ ἐκείνου χάριτι.” But these are not three separate justifying acts of God, nor are there two or three different groups of people who are justified (i.e., all people justified by the blood of Christ, all people justified by grace, but believers only justified by faith). Rather, the grace of God, the blood (that is, the entire merit) of Christ and faith are all essential elements of justification. God’s grace is that alone which moved Him to justify us. “His blood” is that alone which earned our justification and was applied to us through the Means of Grace. Faith alone is the instrument that lays hold of the blood of Christ held out to us in the Means of Grace and appeals to it alone before God’s judgment, whereby we are justified.

So in Romans 5, Paul can say that we have been “justified by the blood of Christ,” and “justified by faith,” referring in both cases to the same forensic verdict declared by God in connection with the very same event, namely, our conversion.

This is further confirmed by the apostle’s argument in this verse from the greater to the lesser. God has already done two truly great things for believers in Christ: He gave His Son into death for them when they were still sinners and “children of wrath” (pre-conversion), and then took those godless, hostile sinners and brought them to faith and justified them (conversion), thus adopting them as His children and bringing them into His kingdom. These are the truly remarkable things God has already done for believers. If all that is true, then “much more now,” Paul says, shall we be saved through Him from wrath. If that’s how God treated us before we were made His children (the “greater” argument), how much more will He do for us now that we have been made His children (the “lesser” argument)? The really unbelievable thing has already happened! The rest is “easy.” This is similar to the greater-to-lesser argument Paul makes in Rom. 8:32.

Thus Paul brings full circle the argument he began in Rom. 1:18, when he first started speaking of the wrath of God that is being revealed. Those who seek to be justified by works are already experiencing this wrath, and are also “treasuring up for themselves wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’” (Rom. 2:5-6). But those who have been justified by faith shall certainly be saved from this wrath.

This is yet another argument against turning this verse into the “Objective Justification” of all men. Paul clearly says that “we” who have now been justified by the blood of Christ “shall be saved through Him from wrath.” If the word “justified” in this verse truly refers to “Objective Justification,” then Paul has just made the claim that all those who have been “objectively justified,” that is, the whole world of sinners, shall be eternally saved (i.e., saved from wrath). Even proponents of “Objective Justification” usually do not teach that all men will be eternally saved. But they have no grammatical basis for changing Paul’s argument, especially when his main point is that “our justification in His blood” is positive proof of our eternal salvation.

v. 10

Εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ Θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ Υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, πολλῶ μᾶλλον
καταλλαγέντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ.

For if, being enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life.

ἐχθροὶ ὄντες is the fourth parallel to our pre-conversion state: weak (5:6), ungodly (5:6), sinners (5:8), and now enemies. “We were reconciled” is an aorist passive indicative, parallel to both instances of “having been justified” in this section. The word “reconcile” indicates a change in relationship between two parties from hostility to friendship. It is both parallel to justification and at the same time includes more than justification. Justification refers specifically to the forensic verdict pronounced on believers in Christ. Reconciliation includes the more intimate restoration of a relationship. Kittel says this about reconciliation:

In the NT it is only Paul who uses the word of the relation between God and man, and καταλλάσσειν is used only of God, καταλλαγήναι only of man. God reconciles us or the world to Himself in 2 C. 5:18 f. He is not reconciled. Nor does He reconcile Himself to us or to the world. On the other hand, we are reconciled to God in R. 5:10, or reconcile ourselves to Him in 2 C. 5:20. Thus God and man are not on equal terms in relation to reconciliation. Reconciliation is not reciprocal in the sense that both equally become friends where they were enemies. The supremacy of God over man is maintained in every respect.

καταλλάσσειν denotes a transformation or renewal of the state between God and man, and therewith of man's own state. In 2 C. 5:18 it is introduced as the basis of the most comprehensive renewal possible for man, namely, that he has become a new creature, that old things have passed away and that all things have become new. In R. 5:10, too, it denotes an incisive change. We are no longer ἐχθροί, ἄσεβεις, ἄσθενεῖς (v. 6), ἁμαρτωλοί (v. 8), but the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (v. 5). There is a change, not merely in the disposition of man or his legal relationship to God, but in the total state of his life. On the other hand, it cannot be maintained that there has been any change of mind on the part of God, since His gracious will had been revealed long before in the OT.²

Kittel is right in describing reconciliation as including the renewal of “man's own state,” so that those who have been reconciled to God no longer have the status of “weak, ungodly, sinner, enemy,” but instead, as those who have been reconciled to God, they have peace with God and access to His grace, and have the sure hope of being saved on the Last Day. God took His enemies and, through the meritorious death of Christ, through the ministry of reconciliation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:18), made them His children and heirs of eternal life.

Thus we place the phrases “κατηλλάγημεν- we were reconciled,” “καταλλαγέντες - having been reconciled,” “δικαιωθέντες ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ - having been justified by His blood,” and “Δικαιωθέντες ἐκ πίστεως - having been justified by faith” as parallel phrases, all describing the grace of God as it was applied to Paul and the Roman Christians through the Means of Grace at the time of their conversion. As the Apology puts it, “Therefore it is manifest that, since justification is reconciliation for Christ's sake, we are justified by faith, because it is very certain that by faith alone the remission of sins is received” (Ap: art. iii, par. 37).

² Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 255.

The phrase “through the death of Christ” is parallel to “by His blood” in v. 9, again expressing, not the time of our reconciliation, but the meritorious cause of the reconciliation that took place between God and us when we were converted. In conversion, God takes people who are hostile to Him and still condemned as sinners and brings them to faith in Him who died for them, thus reconciling them to Himself and justifying them.

The second half of 5:10 is entirely parallel to the second half of 5:9 as Paul reiterates his argument from the greater to the lesser. If God, in converting us, has already done the most remarkable thing (putting His Son to death for His enemies and changing His enemies into His dear children), then He will surely do the “easier” thing as well, namely, saving us, His dear children, from wrath on the Last Day. Those who were reconciled to God through the death of Christ are the same ones who will be eternally saved. The teaching of “Objective Reconciliation” is not taught by the apostle.

And yet this verse in particular is used by proponents of “Objective Justification” to support their teaching.³ We cite Pieper at length⁴:

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.

Notice the shift in Pieper’s language. In one sentence he goes from asserting that all men have been reconciled with God to asserting that God is the one who is reconciled. The object of reconciliation in Scripture, as Kittel pointed out, is always man, never God. Pieper continues:

The reconciliation is an accomplished fact, just like the creation of the world. Rom. 5:10: “We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.” When Christ died, God became reconciled.

Again the shift in language from “we were reconciled to God” to “God became reconciled.” Scripture nowhere asserts the latter. Also to be noted is the shift away from the context of Romans 5, where Paul’s “we” consistently refers to “we who believe.” But Pieper, as will become clear below, asserts that all men, believers and unbelievers, were reconciled to God at the moment Christ died.

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.”)

³ Even Lenski, who never fully embraced “Objective Justification,” views it as a “universal reconciliation.” “Even all the damned in hell were thus reconciled to God.” (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1936), 353.)

⁴ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, electronic ed., vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 347–350.

We have already dealt with Pieper's / Walther's misuse of Rom. 4:25 and his unfounded conclusions based on that verse. With regard to Romans 5, Pieper is correct in recognizing Paul's use of reconciliation and justification as parallel in these verses (as well as "forgiving sins" and "not imputing trespasses" from Rom. 4). But he ignores the connection with the other parallel phrase in this section, namely, "having been justified **by faith**" (cf. chart above). He then takes two passages that do not specifically mention faith (Rom. 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:19) and assumes, therefore, that faith is not the instrument of justification/reconciliation in those instances, in spite of the context and in spite of everything Paul has taught thus far in all of his epistles. Then he hijacks the language from a passage that most clearly indicates faith as the one and only instrument of justification (Rom. 4:6-8) and applies it to his theory of justification/reconciliation without faith, thus proving universal justification without faith by using a passage that absolutely requires faith. His faulty logic should be evident to all.

Pieper's argument contradicts the argument of St. Paul in Romans 5:10. If, as Pieper asserts, the reconciliation of which Paul speaks in Rom. 5:10 only took place in the heart of God, with no effect on him and the Roman Christians, then Paul has no basis for asserting that they and he "will be saved" as a result of that reconciliation in the heart of God, because all people were supposedly reconciled to God in that heart-reconciliation, and yet not all people "will be saved."

In addition, Pieper's claim that the word "to reconcile" in Rom. 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:19 is being used in a different sense than it is in the surrounding verses, namely, that Rom. 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:19 refer to a supposed reconciliation accomplished only in the heart of God, is completely unfounded.

The words "reconciliation" (καταλλαγὴ) and "to reconcile" (καταλλάσσω) occur in Scripture only in Romans and 2 Corinthians. The following table contains all the uses of this word family in the New Testament:

Rom 5:10	εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες <u>κατηλλάγημεν</u> τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, πολλῶ μᾶλλον <u>καταλλαγέντες</u> σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ	For if when we were enemies <u>we were</u> <u>reconciled</u> to God through the death of His Son, much more, <u>having been</u> <u>reconciled</u> , we shall be saved by His life.
Rom 5:11	οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δι' οὗ νῦν τὴν <u>καταλλαγὴν</u> ἐλάβομεν.	And not only <i>that</i> , but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the <u>reconciliation</u> .
Rom 11:15	εἰ γὰρ ἡ ἀποβολὴ αὐτῶν <u>καταλλαγὴ</u> κόσμου, τίς ἡ πρόσλημις εἰ μὴ ζωὴ ἐκ νεκρῶν;	For if their being cast away is <u>the</u> <u>reconciling</u> of the world, what <i>will</i> their acceptance <i>be</i> but life from the dead?
1 Cor 7:11	— ἐὰν δὲ καὶ χωρισθῇ, μενέτω ἄγαμος ἢ τῷ ἀνδρὶ <u>καταλλαγῇτω</u> , — καὶ ἄνδρα γυναῖκα μὴ ἀφιέναι.	But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or <u>be reconciled</u> to <i>her</i> husband. And a husband is not to divorce <i>his</i> wife.

2 Cor 5:18	τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ <u>καταλλάξαντος</u> ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς <u>καταλλαγῆς</u> ,	Now all things <i>are</i> of God, who <u>has</u> <u>reconciled</u> us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry <u>of</u> <u>reconciliation</u> ,
2 Cor 5:19	ὥς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον <u>καταλλάσσων</u> ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς <u>καταλλαγῆς</u> .	that is, that God was in Christ <u>reconciling</u> the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word <u>of</u> <u>reconciliation</u> .
2 Cor 5:20	Ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι' ἡμῶν· δεόμεθα ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, <u>καταλλάγητε</u> τῷ θεῷ.	Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore <i>you</i> on Christ's behalf, <u>be reconciled</u> to God.

We have already discussed the instances from Romans 5. The phrase “reconciliation of the world” in Rom. 11:15 is enlightening. Paul had just said in Rom. 11:12, speaking of unbelieving Israel, “Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!” He is clearly speaking of something that Israel lost, on the one hand, and that the Gentiles (that is, the rest of the world) gained, on the other, referring to the “world” and the “Gentiles” as parallel. Paul’s argument makes no sense if he is saying that God’s rejection (ἀποβολή) of the Jews is (or “was” or “results in”) the reconciling of those very same Jews (together with all the rest of mankind). Paul’s use of the word “world” in Rom. 11:15 is clearly referring to the rest of the world, and even then, his reference is not to every last man, woman and child who has ever lived, but to all those Gentiles who had been brought to faith in Christ as a result of the apostles taking the Gospel to the Gentiles after the Jews rejected it. Note: Paul clearly places the rejection of the Jews as a factor that leads to the reconciliation of the world. But Paul is speaking of the rejection of the Jews as the result of their stubborn refusal to believe the Gospel when it was preached to them by Paul himself (and his contemporaries – cf. Acts 13:44-46), and therefore, several years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. **Therefore, in no way can Paul be referring to a supposed reconciliation of the world in the heart of God at the time of the crucifixion.**

Paul’s use of “to reconcile” in 2 Corinthians is likewise a reference to believers in Christ as those whom God has reconciled to Himself. In 2 Cor. 5:18, Paul says that God “has reconciled us” to Himself and has given “us” the ministry of reconciliation. But if “us” refers to “all people in the whole world,” then God has also given the ministry of reconciliation to the whole world, which is absurd. God gave that ministry to the apostles, to whom the “us” is restricted in 2 Cor. 5:18.

In 2 Cor. 5:20, Paul pleads as an ambassador for Christ that his readers (and anyone to whom he preaches) “be reconciled” to God, clearly not referring to an already-accomplished reconciliation that had taken place of all men in the heart of God, but to the reconciliation that is brought when sinners are brought to faith in Christ, and thus brought into Christ, the Reconciler.

So in 2 Cor. 5:19, when Paul says that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, he is not referring to a one-time already-accomplished reconciliation-in-the-heart-of-God of everyone who has ever lived, but to the reconciling that took place as God, in Christ, preached the Gospel to the world

and brought men to faith in Him, which ministry of reconciliation Paul and the other apostles were still carrying out. This does not mean that every person who has ever lived in the world was reconciled to God, but that the world was the object of Christ's ministry. In the end, "many were called, but few chosen," because few wanted to be reconciled to God through Christ.

In none of these uses of "to reconcile" in the New Testament does the context permit the interpretation of a heart-of-God-reconciliation that took place at a different time or in a different manner than the reconciling that took place through the ministry of the Word. Nowhere does the Apostle Paul make such a distinction, much less explain such a dualistic and confusing use of the same word in the same sentences.

v. 11

Οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν τῷ Θεῷ διὰ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' οὗ νῦν τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἐλάβομεν.

Not only *this*, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

In the concluding verse in this section, Paul employs one more parallel phrase, "we have received this reconciliation." Pieper wishes to make this phrase into "subjective reconciliation," because he has created a false dichotomy between "being reconciled" and "receiving reconciliation." In the language of Scripture and the Confessions, "to be justified" is the same thing as "to receive justification."⁵ "To be forgiven" is the same thing as "to receive forgiveness" (Acts 10:43, Acts 26:18). Likewise, "to be reconciled" is the same thing as "to receive reconciliation." Paul is not, in this verse, contrasting "we were reconciled" with "we received reconciliation." On the contrary, he is using the phrases synonymously.

The one concept that Paul adds in v. 11 (returning to his initial argument in vv. 3-5) is that, not only do we who have been justified by faith/reconciled with God look forward to a future salvation on the Last Day, but even now we are continually boasting (καυχώμενοι – pres. middle participle) through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary of the reasons why Romans 5:10-11 cannot be used as a basis for "Objective Justification" (or "Objective Reconciliation"):

⁵ Also in Ap.:IV:76: "Vergebung der Sünden erlangen und haben, dasselbe heisst vor Gott gerecht und fromm werden." "To obtain and to have forgiveness of sins—that means to become righteous and pious before God." "By faith alone we receive remission of sins and reconciliation, because reconciliation or justification is a matter promised for Christ's sake, and not for the sake of the Law. Therefore it is received by faith alone" Ap: art. iii, par. 61. "Therefore we must conclude that, being reconciled by faith, we are accounted righteous for Christ's sake, not for the sake of the Law or our works, but that this inchoate fulfilling of the Law pleases on account of faith, and that, on account of faith, there is no imputation of the imperfection of the fulfilling of the Law, even though the sight of our impurity terrifies us" Ap: art. iii, par. 56. "From these statements we hope that it can be sufficiently understood, both what faith is, and that we are compelled to hold that by faith we are justified, reconciled, and regenerated" Ap: art. iii, par. 192. "Accordingly, we conclude that we are justified before God, are reconciled to God and regenerated by faith" Ap: art. iii, par. 265. "Therefore the remission of sins and justification are received only by faith, and not on account of any works, as is evident in the terrors of conscience, because none of our works can be opposed to God's wrath, as Paul clearly says, Rom. 5, 1: Being justified by faith..." Ap: art. iii, par. 74.

- (1) Paul has already defined the “we” throughout this entire section as those “who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom. 4:24) and as those who have “been justified by faith” (Rom. 5:1). It simply cannot be demonstrated that Paul’s discussion extends beyond the scope of believers in Christ.
- (2) Paul uses four verbs in the aorist, 1st person plural, with similar prepositional phrases that are all parallel to the first verb phrase in Rom. 5:1, “having been justified by faith.” “Justified by His blood, reconciled through His death, reconciled, received reconciliation.” Paul nowhere indicates that he is using the same words in the same tenses sometimes to refer to something that took place only in the heart of God not by faith, and sometimes to refer to something that took place outside the heart of God by faith.
- (3) According to the language of Scripture, the act of reconciliation actually brings two parties together. “Objective Reconciliation,” on the other hand, teaches that a virtual reconciliation took place only “in the heart of God,” leaving the supposedly reconciled men of the world still hostile to God.
- (4) The Apostle speaks of his and the Roman Christians’ pre-reconciliation state as “weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies.” He speaks of this as their former state which changed only when they were reconciled to God. But unbelievers, according to clear passages of Scripture, are still “weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies.” Therefore, Paul’s reference to reconciliation involved more than a heart-reconciliation on the part of God, but also the actual change of status given to believers.
- (5) Paul argues that those who have been reconciled to God through Christ will also surely be saved from wrath through Christ. But “Objective Reconciliation” teaches that most of those who have been “objectively” reconciled to God will still suffer wrath on the Last Day unless they are also “subjectively” reconciled, which defeats Paul’s argument entirely.
- (6) “Objective Reconciliation” teaches that “to receive reconciliation” (Rom. 5:11) is “subjective” reconciliation, while “to be reconciled” (Rom. 5:10) refers to “objective” reconciliation. But Scripture and the Confessions use the phrases “to receive reconciliation/justification/remission of sins” and “to be reconciled, to be justified, to have one’s sins remitted” synonymously.
- (7) In Romans 11:15, Paul states “the casting away of the Jews is the reconciliation of the world,” referring to the ministry of the Gospel being taken to the Gentiles. But this “reconciliation of the world” takes place after the Jews rejected the Gospel preached by the apostles. Therefore, the “reconciliation of the world” did not already take place “in the heart of God” prior to or apart from the preaching of the Gospel to the world.

ROMANS 5:12-21

These verses from Romans serve as the primary *sedes doctrinae* for the teaching of Original Sin, and the apostle’s argument for justification is set up in comparison with this doctrine. The final verses of this section are often used as a primary *sedes doctrinae* of “Objective Justification,” especially v. 18.

Indeed, it is the single passage quoted in the WELS *This We Believe* document to establish this fundamental synodical doctrine:

We believe that God has justified all sinners, that is, he has declared them righteous for the sake of Christ. This is the central message of Scripture upon which the very existence of the church depends. It is a message relevant to people of all times and places, of all races and social levels, for "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Romans 5:18). All need forgiveness of sins before God, and Scripture proclaims that all have been justified, for "the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men" (Romans 5:18).

One of the major challenges this section presents is the number of ellipses in the Greek; St. Paul leaves out several verbs and a few nouns. In fact, the key verse (Rom. 5:18) that is used to prove a past-tense justification of all men by those who espouse "Objective Justification" has no verbs whatsoever in the entire sentence. The translation provided in this section employs italics wherever words are suggested to fill the gaps in the Greek.

v. 12

Διὰ τοῦτο, ὥσπερ δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθε, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διήλθεν, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον.

Therefore, just as through one man, sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned—

Here the first member of the comparison—Adam—is mentioned. He is the one man through whom sin entered the world. It is notable in our day and age that the apostle treats Adam as a real historic figure, as the father of the human race, and as the source of the sin and death that now plague his children.

It is clear enough how Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden and brought death upon himself as the threatened consequence of his sin. But how did sin and death spread to his posterity? Some have speculated (and insist on it as irrefutable doctrine) that Adam's sin was imputed, counted, or reckoned to all mankind, apart from the sinful flesh that is passed on by means of heredity.⁶ In other words, all Adam's descendants are said to be charged with the guilt of Adam's sin. But nowhere in Scripture is this stated. This verse simply states that "sin entered the world," and that "death spread to all men," and that "all sinned." It doesn't at all describe *how* it happened that all became sinners and subject to the sentence of death, except by the natural hereditary connection all Adam's descendants have to him. More in the following verses.

⁶ Pieper: "Original sin, which is the sin which is not committed but which is inborn in man since Adam's Fall, embraces two things: a) hereditary guilt (*culpa hereditaria*), the guilt of the one sin of Adam which God imputes to all men; and b) hereditary corruption (*corruptio humanae naturae hereditaria*), which by imputation of Adam's guilt is transmitted to all his descendants through the natural descent from the first fallen pair." (*Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, pp. 398–399).

Also the LCMS Theses on Justification: "10. The one who is justified by God is sinful man, man ungodly (Rom. 3:23; 4:5; Eph. 4:20–24) and guilty (a) because the offense and guilt of Adam, the first man, have been imputed, or reckoned, to all mankind (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12–19) It is contrary to Scripture and the pure Gospel to teach: That God judges all people to be guilty sinners only because of their hereditary corruption and resulting actual sinful thoughts, words, and actions."

v. 13

Ἄχρι γὰρ νόμου ἁμαρτία ἦν ἐν κόσμῳ, ἁμαρτία δὲ οὐκ ἐλλογεῖται, μὴ ὄντος νόμου.

For until the Law came, sin was in the world, but sin is not taken into account *where* there is no Law.

Paul begins here a little excursus that lasts through verse 17. He will pick up his initial thought from v. 12 again in v. 18. Luther places vv. 13-17 in parentheses to indicate this. Paul's main point is to contrast Adam's sin and its consequence with Christ's righteousness and its consequence. The excursus provides proof to support his main point.

Paul has just made the assertion that "all sinned." He now offers the proof for that statement. He asserts that "sin was in the world" even before the Law was given by Moses, since the time of Adam. This cannot be denied. Cain demonstrated it clearly. The vast majority of humanity demonstrated that sin was in the world leading up to the days of Noah. But "sin is not taken into account where there is no Law." In other words, while the deeds of men were certainly evil and sinful before the Law came, no one could point to the wicked actions of men and point out why they were sinful, since God had not yet revealed His law to man, except in their own consciences.

By asserting that "sin was in the world," Paul is clearly not referring to an imputation of sin, but to sin as it existed in the world, as it existed in the corrupt image that men had inherited from their first father, Adam, as it existed in the sinful actions that flowed from men's corrupt nature, and as its consequence—death—was experienced by all of Adam's offspring.

"Sin is not taken into account." Paul is talking here about men, not God. Men do not take sin into account where there is no Law, but God certainly does, as Paul makes clear in the next verse.

v. 14

Ἄλλ' ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἁμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῷ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδὰμ, ὅς ἐστι τύπος τοῦ μέλλοντος.

But death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression, who is a type of the coming One.

The ultimate proof of a person's sinfulness is death; only sinners have the curse of death as their wages (cf. Rom. 6:23). Paul's statement that "death reigned from Adam until Moses" is reflected most poignantly in the litany of death recorded in Genesis 5: "...and he died...and he died...and he died, etc." Every one of Adam's descendants up till the time of Moses died (save, perhaps, Enoch), from the God-fearing descendants of Seth to the godless descendants of Cain, even though they did not "sin in the likeness of Adam's transgression." That is, they did not break a commandment of God, as Adam did.

Why did all die? Because all sinned. We ask again, how did they become sinners? The only answer Scripture gives to this question is that Adam's descendants, born in the natural way, inherit a corrupt, sinful nature (cf. Gen. 5:3, Ps. 51:5, John 3:6); sin is propagated from Adam to his descendants by hereditary connection. To assert that God imputed the sin of Adam to his posterity is without Scriptural basis.

v. 15

Ἄλλ' οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα, οὕτω καὶ τὸ χάρισμα. Εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον, πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ δωρεὰ ἐν χάριτι τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐπερίσσευσε.

But the gracious gift is not like the trespass. For if by the trespass of the one, many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift abound to many in the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ.

Ἄλλ' οὐχ ὡς τὸ παράπτωμα, οὕτω καὶ τὸ χάρισμα. Literally, “But not as the trespass, so also the free gift.” Luther: “Aber nicht hält sich's mit der Gabe wie mit der Sünde.” In the previous verse, Paul specifically referred to Adam as a type of the coming One. But the type differs from the antitype in several ways. Paul highlights one aspect of the contrast here.

The gracious gift (χάρισμα) is contrasted with one man's trespass (παράπτωμα). What is the gracious gift? It is the corollary to the one man's trespass, namely, the one Man's righteousness. Paul spells this out in v. 17: “the gift of righteousness.” This righteousness is not an ethereal concept. It is the actual righteousness of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, who came “to fulfill all righteousness” by His active and passive obedience. Christ Himself, who has been made the source of all righteousness, is the gift.

There were dire consequences to the actual trespass of Adam: “By the trespass of the one, many died.” As noted above, the way in which the trespass of the one caused the death of many was by the fact that Adam's sin irreversibly corrupted human nature, so that all who would be born of him (again, in the natural way) would inherit his sinful “image,” thus making them guilty before God and subject to the sentence of death. The sin of one man resulted in the death of many.

But there were also consequences to the righteous life that Christ lived—blessed consequences. His righteousness abounded “much more” as a gracious gift to many. This is not a new revelation from Paul. It is the same thing he described at length in chapter 3: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed...even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe...being justified freely by His grace.”

Now the question: Who are the “many” in this verse? “Many” means “many, not few.” The definite article identifies a specific group, made up of many people. St. Paul identifies “the many” who died in v. 12, and again in v. 18. Death spread “to all men.” Who are “the many” to whom grace abounded? It can either refer to “all men,” as indicated in v. 18. God's grace abounded to all men. Paul says something similar in Titus 2:11: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.” Or it can refer to the many “who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness” (v. 17).

How did God's grace abound to many? Paul's use of the aorist here indicates a reference to something that occurred in the past. He himself explains what this entails: “in the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ.” Christ Himself is God's gift to the world. God's grace abounded in the grace of Christ, who, “for us men and for our salvation,” became Man. Paul refers to this particular grace also in 2 Corinthians 8:9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” The willing humiliation and humble obedience of the God-Man is the grace that abounded to many, because His grace toward mankind moved Him to come into our flesh in order to redeem all men and give eternal life to all men by giving them the gift of His righteousness. Many of Adam's descendants at the time of St. Paul had believed and been baptized, and thus they had received the abundance of the gift.

v. 16

Καὶ οὐχ ὡς δι' ἑνὸς ἁμαρτήσαντος, τὸ δῶρημα· τὸ μὲν γὰρ κρίμα ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς κατάκριμα, τὸ δὲ χάρισμα ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων εἰς δικαίωμα.

And the gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For whereas judgment *followed* one man's trespass for condemnation, the gracious gift *follows* many trespasses for righteousness.

This verse presents a number of challenges in the Greek. Paul's shorthand here (and in v. 18) forces us to rely on the context (both immediate and extended) to supply the necessary thoughts, and there is room for more than one sound translation.

Literally, this verse reads: "And not as through one having trespassed, the gift. For whereas judgment out of one unto condemnation, the gracious gift out of many trespasses unto justification."

Luther translates: "Und nicht ist die Gabe allein über eine Sünde wie durch des einigen Sünders einige Sünde alles Verderben. Denn das Urteil ist kommen aus einer Sünde zur Verdammnis; die Gabe aber hilft auch aus vielen Sünden zur Gerechtigkeit." "And the gift is not only upon one sin, as through the one sin of the one sinner all ruin [resulted]. For the judgment came from one sin for condemnation; but the gift helps also from many sins for righteousness."

KJV: "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification."

NKJV: "And the gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but the free gift *which came* from many offenses *resulted* in justification."

ESV: "And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification."

The first part of the verse, while difficult to translate, remains clear enough: Judgment followed Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. It took place after only trespass was committed, and it was not a hidden judgment that took place in the heart of God. Almost immediately after Adam sinned, God came into the Garden for judgment: "Cursed is the ground because of you...Dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

The judgment of God that took place in Eden was not synonymous with condemnation, but was εἰς κατάκριμα, "unto condemnation," with no verb to connect the thoughts. The preposition εἰς here (as also in Rom. 5:18) indicates goal, purpose or result (actual or intended). It may be translated, "for," or "leading to," or "resulting in." Here are some examples of how Paul uses the preposition in the same sense:

Rom. 1:5 "Through Him we have received grace and apostleship **for obedience to the faith** (εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως) among all nations for His name." Rom. 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God **to salvation** (εἰς σωτηρίαν) for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Rom. 4:5 "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted **for righteousness** (εἰς δικαιοσύνην)." Rom. 5:21 "so that grace might reign through righteousness **to eternal life** (εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον)." Rom. 6:19 "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness **leading to more lawlessness** (εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν), so now present your members as slaves of righteousness **for holiness** (εἰς ἁγιασμόν)." Rom. 10:1 "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel **is that they may be saved** (εἰς σωτηρίαν)." Rom. 10:4 "For Christ is the end of the law **for righteousness** (εἰς δικαιοσύνην) to everyone who believes." Rom. 10:10 "For with the heart one

believes **unto righteousness** (εἰς δικαιοσύνην), and with the mouth confession is made **unto salvation** (εἰς σωτηρίαν).” 2 Cor. 7:10 “For godly sorrow produces repentance **leading to salvation** (εἰς σωτηρίαν).”

As one can readily see from these examples, the εἰς clause is often used by Paul not to indicate an actual result that has already occurred, but rather the goal or the intended result of something (which may or may not occur, depending on the context). So in this verse, “judgment followed one trespass for condemnation,” leading to condemnation. All it took was one sin for judgment to intervene with Adam, and it did, in fact, lead to condemnation, *not in the form of eternal condemnation*, but in the form of death: “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

The second part of this verse presents an additional challenge to interpretation, because the Greek here contains no verbs. Without addressing all the variations in translation, we will note one key difference: some of the translations mentioned above insert a present tense in the final clause (Luther, KJV), while others insert a past tense (NKJV, ESV). In the end, either can be understood within the context of Paul’s argument here and throughout the epistle, and neither necessitates the conclusion of “Objective Justification.”

“The gracious gift *followed* many trespasses for (or “leading to”) justification.” Or, “The gracious gift *follows* (“helps out of” - Luther) many trespasses for (or “leading to”) righteousness.

If a past sense is correct, then the sense, in context, is that the gracious gift of Christ and His righteousness “followed” after 4,000 years worth of sins “for righteousness,” that is, so that sinners may receive the gift and have the righteousness of Christ applied to them, as had already taken place in thousands of cases when St. Paul wrote his epistle. If the present sense is correct, as Luther translates, then the sense, in context, is that the gracious gift of the righteousness of Christ benefits (“helps”) sinners for righteousness. How? By being applied to them by faith (cf. Rom. 3:21-26) so that they are justified thereby.

v. 17

Εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσε διὰ τοῦ ἑνός, πολλῶ μᾶλλον οἱ τὴν περισσεῖαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες ἐν ζωῇ βασιλεύσουσι διὰ τοῦ ἑνός Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

For if, by the trespass of the one *man*, death reigned through the one *man*, much more will they who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one *Man*, Jesus Christ.

This verse, unlike the preceding and the following, presents no translation difficulties and contains no ellipses, which also makes the doctrine harder to refute. By the sin of Adam, death reigned through Adam. How did death reign through Adam? By means of propagation. Adam’s sin, which leads to condemnation (that is, death), was propagated to his heirs, so that they were born as sinners and as those who therefore deserve the wages of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23). Paul uses an anthropomorphism: Death “reigned” supreme from the time of Adam till the time of Christ. It conquered Adam and every single descendant of Adam. No one ever escaped its ravages.

The subject of the apodosis is οἱ τὴν περισσεῖαν τῆς χάριτος καὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς δικαιοσύνης λαμβάνοντες — the ones receiving (present active participle) the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. In v. 15 St. Paul first mentioned this grace and gift that had abounded in the grace of Jesus Christ. By God’s grace, Christ was given as a gift to mankind, as a Second Adam, who is righteous and also the source of righteousness for “the ones who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of

righteousness.” “To receive...grace and the gift of righteousness” **is the same thing** as “to be justified.” Paul does not say that all men receive this gift, that is, Christ as the source of righteousness. But those who do receive Him “will reign in life through Him.” With the future tense in “will reign,” Paul clearly has in mind the blessed future that the resurrection on the Last Day will inaugurate for believers. This is parallel to Paul’s statements in the first part of this chapter: “Much more, then, having now been justified by His blood, shall we be saved through Him from wrath.”

v. 18

Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτω καὶ δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιοσύματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς.

Consequently, as through the trespass of one *man*, *sin spread* to all men for condemnation, so also through the righteousness of one *Man*, *the gracious gift comes* to all men for justification of life.

Having sufficiently fleshed out his argument concerning the transmission of sin and death from Adam to his physical descendants and the transmission of righteousness and life from Christ to His spiritual descendants, Paul now summarizes and concludes the comparison he began in v. 12.

V. 18 presents all the same challenges to translation that v. 16 presented. As noted above, there are no Greek verbs in this entire sentence, and there are also a few nouns omitted from the Greek.

Literal translation: “Consequently, as through one’s trespass (or “through one trespass”) unto all men unto condemnation, so also through one’s righteousness (or “through one righteousness”) unto all men unto justification of life.”

Luther: wie nun durch eines Sünde die Verdammnis über alle Menschen kommen ist, also ist auch durch eines Gerechtigkeit die Rechtfertigung des Lebens über alle Menschen kommen.

Luther in English: “Now, as through one’s sin, condemnation came (or “has come”) upon all men, so also through one *Man*’s righteousness, justification of life came (or “has come”) upon all men.

KJV: “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”

NKJV: “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”

ESV: “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.”

NIV: “Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people.”

In addition to these translations, we also have a paraphrase of this verse in the Formula of Concord (Solid Declaration: The Righteousness of Faith): “daß durch eines Gerechtigkeit die Rechtfertigung des Glaubens über alle Menschen komme.” “Through the righteousness of One, **justification of faith comes** upon all men.”

Of all the variations in these translations, there are three main points in the protasis where translators disagree. First, should “ἐνὸς” (“one”) in the phrases δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος and δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιοσύματος be translated as an adjective modifying the nouns “trespass” and “righteousness,” or should it be translated as a possessive adjective used as a noun? In other words, “one trespass” or “the trespass of one [man]”? “One righteousness” or “the righteousness of One [Man]”?

Throughout this section, Paul has been using the phrase δι' ἑνὸς to refer to "one man." Only in verse 16 does Paul use a similar ambiguity regarding "from one" and "from many trespasses," and even in that case, it could be translated two different ways: "from one *trespass*" or "from one's trespass;" and "from many trespasses" or "from the trespasses of many." In verse 17, Paul was careful to use grammar that clearly indicated the trespass "of the one." I conclude, therefore, with Luther, the KJV, the NKJV, and (even more importantly from a confessional perspective) the Formula of Concord, that the interpretation should be "one man's trespass" and "one Man's righteousness."

The second difficulty: What is the relationship between "through one man's trespass" and "all men," as indicated by the preposition εἰς? The ellipsis here requires that we follow the apostle's argument throughout this section in order to supply the missing thoughts in English.⁷ The KJV and NKJV supply "judgment came upon/to" all men, clearly reaching back to v.16 where Paul said that "judgment followed one trespass leading to condemnation." But there the apostle used the preposition ἐξ, literally, "judgment *from* one [trespass]." Here in this verse Paul says, "through (δι') the trespass of one." Nor is "judgment" the root source of the subsequent condemnation, but rather sin itself is the root source of the condemnation mentioned in the next phrase. Furthermore, since Paul with his Ἀπὸ οὗν seems to be picking up in v. 18 where he left off in v. 12 (before his excursus supporting his main point), it seems preferable to go back to v. 12, where Paul had put it this way: "as through (δι') one man, sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and in this way death spread to all men, because all sinned." There Paul used the aorist verb "spread" to indicate how sin and death came through Adam to infect all men. So we may justifiably reach back to borrow the subject and verb from that verse: "As through the trespass of one *man*, *sin spread* to all men."

The third difficulty: What is the relationship between "all men" and "condemnation," as also indicated by the preposition εἰς? As noted above, the preposition indicates goal, purpose or result (actual or intended). Sin spread to all men "for condemnation" or "for the purpose of condemnation" or "leading to condemnation" or "resulting in condemnation." What does this mean?

As sin spread from Adam to his descendants ("all men") by inheritance, all men are born in sin, and thus, all men are born subject to God's condemning words, "You will surely die." So the Apostle Paul can look back historically and declare that "*sin spread* to all men for condemnation."

But as Paul will point out in the apodosis, not all men remain under this condemnation, because a divine intervention has occurred; a divinely created escape from condemnation has been opened up by Christ. Indeed, Christ Himself declares in John 3:18: "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." And St. Paul will add in Rom. 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us."

Thus condemnation is the natural result that all men born of Adam must expect and the natural sentence looming over natural man. Sin spread to all men, which naturally leads to condemnation **except in those cases where divine intervention occurs.**

⁷ After wading through these verses, one can certainly perceive the truthfulness of St. Peter's words concerning St. Paul: "as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction." And yet, we recognize at the same time the it was the Holy Spirit's will that we should grapple with Paul's writings. Apparently, He thought it would be good for us to wrestle with the meaning in these verses.

Indeed, it is this very divine intervention that has been the theme of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, beginning especially in 3:21. It has also been his theme in this section and in this verse. Sin spread to all men, with the impending sentence of condemnation hanging over all men. But then God intervened by giving the gracious gift of His Son, who fulfilled all righteousness for sinful mankind. This brings us to the apodosis of v. 18.

“So also through the righteousness of one *Man*.” The word used here for righteousness is δικαίωμα, referring especially to righteousness, not as a quality, but as an actual deed, or in this case, the summation of all the righteous deeds of Christ. Adam sinned once and judgment followed immediately. But it took an entire life of righteousness and humble obedience, even to the death of the cross, for the Second Adam to offer us a solution to our impending condemnation.

How are we to connect the phrase “through the righteousness of one *Man*” and “all men,” as indicated by the preposition εἰς? Just as sin spread to all men through the trespass of Adam, “something” comes or came to all men through the righteousness of Christ, but the apostle does not spell out what it is, expecting that we have been paying close attention to his argument. Drawing, then, from Paul’s language in this section, we suggest “the gracious gift.” “*The gracious gift comes to all men.*” Whether a present tense verb or a past tense verb is supplied (i.e., “comes” or “came”) does not affect the interpretation. The gift of Christ as the source of righteousness for all men “came” from Paul’s perspective to bring righteousness to all men. The same gift “comes” to all men as the Gospel is preached to them, actually bringing Christ to those who hear.

How does this gift come to all men? Not, as in Adam’s case, by hereditary propagation, but, as Paul has laid out extensively in Romans 4, by imputation.

This gift, by the way, already “exists,” since the gift is Christ. Teachers of “Objective Justification” often argue that one cannot receive a gift that doesn’t already exist. But Christ does exist as the source of righteousness for all men. The fact that He is such a source does not, however, mean that all men have already been justified through Him. It means that He is the One through whom all justification comes. That justification itself is not “the gift” that already exists as something that has already occurred is decisively shown by a passage such as Acts 5:31, “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, **to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.**” God exalted Christ in order to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. Teachers of “OJ” assert that forgiveness of sins must already exist in order to be given. And yet, even they do not normally claim that repentance “already exists” before people actually repent.

As in the protasis, so also in the apodosis the phrase “all men” is connected with “justification of life” by the preposition εἰς, and the sense is the same intended result as in the protasis: “*the gracious gift came to all men for justification of life.*” How has the gift come to all men for justification of life? Answer: In that Christ has become the source of righteousness for all men, so that all men might believe in Him and be justified by faith, thus attaining to eternal life. So while the gift came to all men in the Person of Christ in that He became the source of righteousness for all men, and while the intended result for all men is justification of life, the actual result is justification of life only for “those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness,” as Paul had just said in v. 17. In other words, justification of life occurs for believers in Christ, which has been the point of the apostle since the first verse of this chapter—indeed, since Rom. 3:21. This is no different than what the Apostle John says in his Gospel: “God...gave His only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.” In other words, **justification of life** is the same thing as

justification of faith. Only those who believe in Christ are justified, saved from condemnation, and made heirs of eternal life.

Gerhard Kittel says this about the phrase “for justification of life”:

In R. 5:18 (εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς) the reference is again to the actualisation of the divine sentence of justification by the blessing of believers. The attributive ζωῆς tells us that justification and life are correlative, that the content of δικαίωσις is life, that it entails life in the full sense, that life is the eternal result and goal, just as the final end of transgression consists in κατάκριμα. V. 17 and v. 21 show plainly that ζωή must be understood throughout in an eschatological sense. Paul’s use of ζωή elsewhere (R. 6:4; 8:2, 6, 10) shows also that this life begins now in the justified. Nevertheless, the phrase δικαίωσις ζωῆς, like the δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται of v. 19, confirms the view that in Paul justification looks to the consummation in which alone it will attain its τέλος and final establishment.⁸

Thus, as noted above, the Formula of Concord does not hesitate to interpret this verse: “daß durch eines Gerechtfertigkeit die Rechtfertigung des Glaubens über alle Menschen komme – through the righteousness of one Man, justification of faith comes upon all men.” The whole section is worth including here:

Thus it is held and understood to be the same thing, when Paul says that we “are justified through faith” (Rom. 3), or that “faith is accounted to us for righteousness” (Rom. 4); and when he says that “we are justified through the obedience of Christ the Mediator,” or that “through the righteousness of one Man, justification of faith comes upon all men” (Rom. 5). For faith justifies, not because it is such a good work and a handsome virtue, but because it lays hold of and receives the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel. For the merit of Christ must be applied to us through faith and become our own if we are to be justified by it.⁹

Therefore, those who claim this verse for “Objective Justification,” asserting that it was not justification of faith that came upon all men, but a justification apart from faith that came upon all men, are teaching contrary to the Formula of Concord.

Since Luther’s (rather free) translation of this verse has been used by some to “prove” that Luther taught “Objective Justification,” we will let Luther explain how he understood his own translation. In a sermon from 1521 on John 1 for Christmas Day, Luther writes:

Thus here, too, the evangelist did not intend that John or any other human being or any creature should be the light, but that there is only one light which illumines all men and that not a single human being could come upon the earth who could be illumined by anybody else. I do not know how to disagree with this interpretation; for in the same manner also St. Paul writes in Romans 5[:18]: “As through one man’s sin condemnation has come over all men, so through one man’s righteousness justification has come over all men.” Yet not all men are justified through Christ, nevertheless he is the man through whom all justification comes. It is the same here. Even if not all men are illumined, yet this is the light from which alone all illumination comes. The evangelist has freely used this manner of speaking; he did not avoid it even though some would stumble over the fact that he speaks of all men. He thought he would take care of such offense by explaining before and after and by saying that “the darkness has not comprehended it,” and that the world has never recognized him and his own have never accepted him. Such passages should have been strong enough so that nobody could say he had intended to say that all men are

⁸ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 224.

⁹ My translation from the German.

enlightened, but that he alone is the light which enlightens everybody and that, without him, nobody is enlightened. LW:52:71

Luther's arguments concerning John's use of "all men" can be directly applied to Paul's use of the words "all men" in this verse. The apostle has freely used this manner of speaking; he did not avoid it even though some would stumble over the fact that he speaks of all men. He thought he would take care of such offense by explaining before and after and by saying that "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God," and that baptism is the means by which men are united to Christ and His righteousness. Such passages should have been strong enough so that nobody could say he had intended to say that all men are justified, but that Christ alone is the Just One who justifies everybody and that, without Him, nobody is justified (as he had already said quite clearly in Rom. 3:26).

Pieper makes many claims based on this verse. He claims it as the basis both for "original guilt" (which he defines differently than the Apology does) and for "objective justification":

Original sin, which is the sin which is not committed but which is inborn in man since Adam's Fall, embraces two things: a) hereditary guilt (*culpa hereditaria*), the guilt of the one sin of Adam which God imputes to all men; and b) hereditary corruption (*corruptio humanae naturae hereditaria*), which by imputation of Adam's guilt is transmitted to all his descendants through the natural descent from the first fallen pair. The Scripture proof for the original guilt is Rom. 5:18: "By the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation," and v. 19: "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners."

As to the justice of this action of God, we must bear in mind the further fact that Scripture parallels the imputation of the sin of Adam and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to all men. Rom. 5:18–19: "Therefore as by the offense of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous." Those who reject the imputation of Adam's sin as an injustice are compelled, if they would be consistent, to declare the imputation of Christ's righteousness to be an injustice and to reject it; thus they take their stand outside the pale of Christianity.¹⁰

Note that Pieper actually differs wildly from the Apology in his definition of "original guilt." To Pieper, original guilt is "the guilt of the one sin of Adam which God imputes to all men." But the Apology does not define original guilt as the guilt of Adam imputed to all. Instead, the Apology says that "original guilt" is "to be without the fear of God, to be without faith," and it defines original sin as "the absence of original righteousness," and further describes it as "the not being able to believe God, the not being able to fear and love God; and, likewise: the having concupiscence, which seeks carnal things contrary to God's Word." The Apology describes original sin, not as Pieper's "*culpa hereditaria*," but only as the hereditary corruption of human nature: "It is further taught that since the Fall of Adam all men who are naturally born are conceived and born in sin, i.e., that they all, from their mother's womb, are full of evil desire and inclination, and can have by nature no true fear of God, no true faith in God." Nothing at all is said here of imputation of the guilt of another, but only of the guilt that all people have by nature on account of the diseased nature they inherited from Adam.

After claiming Rom. 5:18 as the *sedes doctrinae* for original guilt, Pieper then goes on to make Rom. 5:18 the *sedes doctrinae* of "the righteousness of Christ imputed to all men," paying no attention either to the Greek words used (or not used) in this verse, or to the grammar, or to the context. He then

¹⁰ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, electronic ed., vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 538–539.

declares those who reject his teaching of the imputation of Adam's sin and the universal imputation of Christ's righteousness to be "outside the pale of Christianity." The arrogance is astonishing.

This brings us to an important hermeneutical point that has been tragically ignored by Pieper and other proponents of "Objective Justification." The clear passages of Scripture must be used to explain the unclear passages. Given the fact that the apostle doesn't use a single verb in Rom. 5:18, and given the fact that various verbs in various tenses have been suggested for this verse, it clearly is not one of the "clear" passages of Scripture. To use Rom. 5:18 as a *sedes doctrinae* for "Objective Justification"—or for any doctrine!—is hermeneutically unjustifiable.

Pieper quotes Rom. 5:18 in another place:

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; 4:25.¹¹

Pieper abuses Rom. 5:18 by taking into account neither the Greek words that are (and are not) present, nor the grammar, nor the context. This "justification in the heart of God" is a matter of his own invention, as is the "objective reconciliation" which we have already covered.

The other claims of "Objective Justification" in this verse are equally untenable. Siegbert Becker's (WELS) claims are perhaps the most bizarre:

The righteous act (a collective singular) of Christ results in acquittal for all men. But it does not result in life for all men. The verdict of acquittal pronounced for Jesus' sake on all men results in life only if the verdict of pardon is accepted in faith. All that the genitive ζῶνς tells us that there is some kind of relationship between the acquittal and life. What that relationship is must be made clear by the context, in this case all the passages of the Bible that speak of faith as the means by which we lay hold of God's forgiveness, and conversion, by which we come to that faith, as a resurrection to new spiritual and eternal life. (Becker, p.8).

Here Becker wants to take the phrase "resulting in justification of life" and split it in two, so that justification (or as he puts it, "acquittal") was indeed pronounced upon all men, while life does not come upon all men, since life is given "only if the verdict of pardon is accepted in faith." He claims to get this from the context. I wish he would also draw his doctrine of justification from the context. Grammatically, one cannot separate "justification" (the object of the preposition) from "of life" (the genitive phrase modifying "justification") so that one is present and the other absent. Nor can one ignore the context of the Epistle to the Romans, or of the surrounding verses in particular, in which

¹¹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, electronic ed., vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), 398–399.

those who have been justified are nowhere split into two groups (i.e., justified but still unbelieving and dead in sin vs. justified and alive by faith). On the contrary, Paul everywhere uses the fact of justification as the proof of life and salvation on the Last Day. What kind of proof is it if there will also be justified people perishing eternally?

The LCMS Theses on Justification use Rom. 5:18 as a proof passage in the following section:

20. God has accepted the vicarious offering and sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, in whom therefore God is propitiated and reconciled with all sinners, so that for Christ's sake God's wrath against all sinners has been and remains stilled, and Satan, sin, death, and hell have been and are conquered. (Rom. 5:18; Col. 2:14-15; 1 Thess. 1:10; Heb. 7:27, 10:12; 1 John 2:2; AC III, 3; Ap XXIV, 22-24; FC SD XI, 28)

There does not appear to be anything specific linking the above text to Rom. 5:18. But to assert that “God’s wrath against all sinners has been and remains stilled” is in direct contradiction of any number of clear passages (cf. Eph. 2:3; Rom. 1:18, 2:5, 2:8, 3:5, 9:22, 12:19, 13:4-5; and especially the direct words of Jesus in John 3:36, “and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but **the wrath of God abides on him.**”)

v. 19

Ὡςπερ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτω καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man, many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one *Man*, many will be made righteous.

The conjunction γὰρ is significant in this verse. It indicates that Paul is explaining what he just asserted in the previous verse. Just as Paul had spoken of Adam’s trespass and Christ’s righteousness, so now he speaks of Adam’s disobedience and Christ’s obedience. But in this verse, the apostle himself supplies the verbs for us, and the verbs are revealing.

First, it should be noted that he returns to the use of “many” instead of “all.” He could speak of all men as those who sinned and to whom death spread (5:12); he could speak of all men as those to whom Adam’s sin spread so that they should be condemned, and he could speak of all men as those to whom the gracious gift comes/came so that they should be justified and live eternally (5:18). But when Paul speaks of those who are actually justified (and will be established as righteous on the Last Day), he no longer speaks of “all,” but of “many.”

Very simply, “many” still means “many, not few.” It can include all men (which would certainly be “many”), but the meaning remains “many,” and the scope of “the many” must be deduced from the context. In Rom. 4:17-18 Paul speaks of Abraham as the father of “many nations,” that is, the father of believers in many nations, not the father of unbelievers in all nations. In Rom. 8:29, Paul speaks of the elect as the “many brethren” among whom Christ is the firstborn. And with the article, Paul speaks of believers in Rom. 12:5 and says that “we, being many (οἱ πολλοί), are one body in Christ.” He uses the same phrase referring to baptized, communicant believers in 1 Cor. 10:17: “For we, though many (οἱ πολλοί), are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” In 2 Cor. 2:17 Paul of the many as a limited group of insincere preachers: “For we are not, as so many (οἱ πολλοί), peddling the word of God.”

So when Paul says in v. 19 that “through the disobedience of the one man, many were made sinners,” we ask, whom does Paul include in this group of many who sinned? Answer: “all sinned”

(5:12). And when he says that “many will be made righteous,” we ask, whom does he include in this group of many? He includes “those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness” (5:17), or more remotely, “us who believe” (Rom. 4:24) and “all who believe” (Rom. 3:22).

With the future tense of the verb “will be made,” the apostle points to the ultimate verdict on the Last Day, just as he has been doing throughout this chapter (5:9, 5:10, 5:17), confirming once again the sure hope believers have of receiving God’s glory (cf. 5:2).

Those who point to this verse as proving “Objective Justification” by claiming that “the many (that is, all people)” who sinned is the same “the many (that is, all people)” who were made righteous at the resurrection of Christ have a grammatical problem. The future tense in this verse cannot in any way permit a one-time past-tense justification of all people. If it refers to the Last Day (as the context suggest), then it is obviously not a reference to the “Easter Absolution.” Those who want to split up verses 18 and 19, making v. 18 a reference to “objective justification” and v. 19 a reference to “subjective justification” have no grammatical or contextual basis for drawing such a conclusion.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, we also have a paraphrase of this verse in the Formula of Concord: “daß wir durch des einigen Mittlers Christi Gehorsam gerecht werden.” “We are justified (lit. “we become righteous”) through the obedience of the one Mediator, Christ.” The Formula of Concord made it clear that this means the same thing as “we are justified by faith,” and it also made it clear that this verse is referring to the same justification as v. 18. That alone should keep those who call themselves confessional Lutherans from asserting a justification not by faith from this or the previous verse.

v. 20

Νόμος δὲ παρεισῆλθεν ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα. Οὐδὲ ἐπλεόνασεν ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν ἡ χάρις,

Now, the Law came along in order that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace richly abounded,

The Law “came along” some 2,500 years after Adam’s trespass. Paul has already stated that sin was in the world during all this time, the evidence of which was death’s reign of terror over mankind. As he said above, “sin is not taken into account where there is no law.” So the law was given, not to make men “better,” not to make them “sin less,” but so that the trespass “might increase” in this sense, that all men might take into account just how great their trespasses were, just how widespread sin had become, and just how deserving they were of the death that reigned over them, even as Paul had said back in 3:20, “through the Law is the knowledge of sin.”

But as men took into account their many trespasses revealed by the Law, the grace of God “richly abounded,” so that it more than outweighed all the trespasses of men.

v. 21

ἵνα ὥσπερ ἐβασίλευσεν ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ θανάτῳ, οὕτως καὶ ἡ χάρις βασιλεύσῃ διὰ δικαιοσύνης εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν.

so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul now concludes this section and this chapter with a grand summary of what came before. Death reigned Adam. But grace reigns through Jesus Christ our Lord. How does it reign? By saving

sinner through faith in Jesus, thus rescuing them from death and eternal condemnation, justifying them and granting unto them eternal life.

Summary of the reasons why Romans 5:18-19 cannot be used as a basis for “Objective Justification” (or “Objective Reconciliation”):

- (1) The complete lack of verbs and the lack of key nouns in the Greek of Rom. 5:18 makes any assertion of a past-tense justification of all men based on this verse spurious and hermeneutically unjustifiable.
- (2) The verbs that are present in the immediately surrounding verses (Rom. 5:17, Rom. 5:19) indicate, not a past-tense justification of all men, but a future-tense justification and reigning in life of “many...who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness.”
- (3) The text of Rom. 5:18 does not say that all men have already been justified. It says, literally, “through the righteousness of one, to all men, for justification of life.” These words simply do not say that all men were justified or declared righteous. Rather, they place justification of life as a goal and end result of the giving of the gift of righteousness. Paul already indicated in Rom. 3:22 and in Rom. 5:17 that only those who receive this gift by faith are justified thereby.
- (4) The phrase “justification of life” cannot grammatically be divided so that “justification” already resulted for all men while “life” did not. If Rom. 5:18 teaches an “objective justification” of all men, then it also must teach an “objective vivification” of all men. But to speak of all men as having been declared “alive” in the heart of God even while they are “dead in sins and trespasses” (Eph. 2:1) prior to conversion is an unscriptural absurdity.
- (5) The transmission of righteousness from Christ to sinners has been conclusively established by the apostle in Romans 3 and 4 (and elsewhere) as occurring by imputation, with faith being the instrument of justification and, indeed, with faith being “that thing which God declares to be righteousness” (Ap: art. iv, par. 89). Nowhere in these verses does Paul indicate that he is discussing a different act of “justification-not-by-faith” that occurred only in the heart of God.
- (6) The Formula of Concord cites these two verses as teaching, not a justification-of-all-men-not-by-faith that already took place in the heart of God, but as teaching that “justification of faith comes upon all men,” and that the words of Rom. 5:18 and 19 mean “the same thing” as “when Paul says that we ‘are justified through faith.’”