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**The Relationship Between Objective Justification
and the
Imputation of Christ's Righteousness**

by
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Sacred Theological Master, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne Indiana, 2022

A THESIS

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To my loving and supportive wife whom God has blessed me with
and to my three daughters: Emilia, Maria and Katrina.

Children are truly a heritage from the Lord.

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Soli Christo Gloria

ABBREVIATIONS

- AC The Augsburg Confession
- AE *Luther's Works: The American Edition*. 82 vols. Eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958–67; Eds. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes, vols. 56–82. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2010–.
- AP Apology of the Augsburg Confession
- BDAG Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Third Revised Edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- BDB Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- FC Formula of Concord
- SD The Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

ABSTRACT

Zimmerman, Aaron, A. "The Relationship Between Objective Justification and the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness." STM thesis, Fort Wayne, Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary, 2022. 160 pp.

The research question of this thesis is the relationship between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification. This question is explored by using the imputation controversy that occurred in the English speaking Reformed and Evangelical circles. The conclusion that is reached from researching this question is that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the core of objective justification. This conclusion is demonstrated in three ways. First, the imputation is the strand that unites Christology, atonement, and justification (Chapters Three and Four). Second, objective justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world (Chapter Five). Third, there are five aspects to the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification: the imputation of righteousness is the same as the forgiveness of sins, the imputation of righteousness in objective justification is by grace and is immediate, the imputation in objective justification is the same as in subjective justification, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is based on personal/relational ontology, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is set in the context of union with Christ (Chapter Six).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Importance of Justification and the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

The doctrine of justification is the heart and soul of Christianity because it is about who Jesus is and what He has done to save sinners. Martin Luther writes in his Galatians commentary, “For if the doctrine of justification is lost, the whole of Christian doctrine is lost.”¹ In commenting on Galatians 2:11 Luther writes concerning justification, “For the issue here is nothing trivial for Paul; it is the principle doctrine if Christianity. . . .”² Lastly, on Galatians 3:13 Luther writes, “As I often warn, therefore, the doctrine of justification must be learned diligently. For in it are included all the other doctrines of our faith; and if it is sound, all the others are sound as well.”³ For Luther justification is not one metaphor or way of describing the Gospel but it is the very heart of the Gospel and Christianity. It not only gives salvation but keeps all the other doctrines pure, defending the church against false teaching and acting as a hermeneutic in rightly understanding other doctrines.

¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, vol. 26 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), 9. Hereafter *Luther's Works* are abbreviated AE.

² AE 26, 106.

³ AE 26, 283.

Martin Luther’s teaching on justification was not hyperbole nor an eccentric teaching of his. Other Lutheran theologians have followed in his train. Martin Chemnitz in his *Loci Theologici* writes, “Indeed, this locus is the pinnacle and chief bulwark of all teaching and of the Christian religion itself; if this is obscured, adulterated, or subverted, it is impossible to retain purity of doctrine in the other loci.”⁴ In his *Examination of the Council of Trent* Chemnitz discusses the salvific and personal importance of justification. “This is the chief topic in the Christian doctrine. For anxious and terrified minds which wrestle with sin and with the wrath of God seek this one haven, how they can have a reconciled and gracious God.”⁵ Johann Gerhard in his *Theological Commonplaces* quotes Luther and Chemnitz on the centrality of justification.⁶

Many theologians in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s past and present have also discussed the centrality of justification as the most important doctrine. C. F. W. Walther in his essay “The Justification of the Sinner by Grace Alone” says, “From all this, it is now evident how all-important the doctrine of justification is. Life and salvation depend on it. Therefore, it must never be taught as a side issue but must be placed in the center of all doctrine and preaching. Whoever does not do this is no

⁴ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Volume II*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 443.

⁵ Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent Part I*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 461.

⁶ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces XIX: On Justification Through Faith*, trans. Richard J. Dinda, ed. Joshua J. Hayes, Heath R. Curtis and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 12.

Lutheran teacher.”⁷ Later in the same essay Walther writes, “This [justification] is the sun; the other doctrines are only the sunbeams that are emitted from it and return to it again. They are all there for the sake of justification; they expand our understanding of justification.”⁸ Francis Pieper in his dogmatics writes, “The doctrine of justification by faith is an important doctrine; in fact, the most important doctrine.”⁹ Robert Preus writes about justification, stating, “It is rather a veritable and overarching principle which explains the theology and structure of Lutheranism.”¹⁰ Lastly, the Concordia Theological Seminary faculty in their response to the *Joint Declaration* writes concerning justification, “Without justification, Lutherans lose the distinctive characteristic of their theology and the reason for their existence.”¹¹ The doctrine of justification is the purpose of God’s revelation of His Word to us, it is what keeps the church pure from heresy, it’s what comforts sinners and it is the heart and center of both Scripture and Lutheran theology. The doctrine of justification is what makes the Lutheran Church unique in comparison to all other church denominations.

⁷ C. F. W. Walther, “The Justification of the Sinner by Grace Alone,” in *All Glory to God* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 83.

⁸ Walther, “The Justification of the Sinner by Grace Alone,” 84.

⁹ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 404.

¹⁰ Robert Preus, *Justification and Rome* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 18.

¹¹ *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: The Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1999), 20. This response was drafted and signed by David P. Scaer, Richard Mueller, Kurt E. Marquardt, William C. Weinrich and Lawrence R. Rast Jr. Hereafter, *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* is abbreviated as JDDJ.

The centrality of justification as the principal doctrine in the Lutheran Church is enshrined in the Lutheran Confessions. Melancthon in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* writes that justification is the chief doctrine and that it shows the glory of Christ who alone saves sinners, it makes the Bible become understood (so it serves a hermeneutical function), and it alone brings comfort to consciences.¹² *The Formula of Concord* references this part of the *Apology* and quotes Martin Luther saying that when justification remains pure the entire church remains pure but when it is lost then no false teaching can be resisted.¹³ Furthermore, both the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Smalcald Articles* are structured with justification of the sinner by Christ's redemption as the central thesis of the confessions (See AC IV and how all the articles following AC IV flow from this article of justification and SA II I which does the same thing structurally for the rest of the *Smalcald Articles*). On a side note, the centrality of justification can not be used to attack the historicity or inerrancy of Scripture. This has happened in recent theological history but to do so is an abuse of the doctrine of justification.¹⁴

¹² Friedrich Bente, W. H. T. Dau, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Concordia Triglotta: Die Symbolischen Bücher Der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Deutsch-Lateinisch Englisch* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 121. Ap IV (II). 2–4. I will be using the *Concordia Triglotta* instead of the Kolb-Wengert translation of the *Book of Concord*. The reason is that the *Concordia Triglotta* uses the official 1580 and 1584 documents for the Confessions whereas the Kolb-Wengert edition tries to use the earliest texts. Since this thesis is primarily dogmatic and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is pledged to the official texts I will be using the *Concordia Triglotta*. See Roland Ziegler, “The New English Translation of *The Book of Concord* (Augsburg/Fortress 2000): Locking the Barn Door After . . . ,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (April 2002), 148–151.

¹³ FC SD III, 6–7 *Concordia Triglotta*, 917 and 919.

¹⁴ David P. Scaer, “Justification: Set Up Where it Ought Not to Be,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly*, 80 no. 3–4 (July/October 2016): 269–285. Scaer discusses how the Seminex theologians along

1.2 The Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to explore this central doctrine of Scripture-Justification. This goal will be reached by investigating the controversy over the imputation of Christ's righteousness in Reformed and Evangelical circles.¹⁵ The hope of this thesis is that by examining the imputation controversy and how it was dealt with, it would shed light on the relationship between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification. My goal is that this thesis will help make the Lutheran doctrine of justification better understood especially in regards to how the imputation of Christ's righteousness relates to the distinction between objective and subjective justification.

In order to accomplish this purpose, I will explore the controversies in the English speaking Evangelical and Reformed circles concerning the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The imputation controversy was started in a roundabout way with the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)* between Roman Catholic theologians and Lutheran theologians of the Lutheran World Federation. The Lutheran Church Missouri—Synod responded to the document with a booklet critiquing JDDJ.¹⁶ So did a group of traditional Evangelical and Reformed theologians in a document titled “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration” which was published in

with some Lutheran theologians today have used justification to attack the historical reliability of Scripture such as Christ's incarnation and resurrection.

¹⁵ I am using the term “Evangelical” to refer to Protestants in the English speaking world who are Arminian in theology and “Reformed” to refer to those theologians who are Calvinist in theology.

¹⁶ *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: The Commission on Theology and Church Relations, 1999).

Christianity Today.¹⁷ This document was criticized by Robert Gundry who denied the imputation of Christ's righteousness in several issues of *Books and Culture*. Robert Gundry's criticism of the imputation of Christ's righteousness was the spark that ignited the imputation controversy in Evangelical and Reformed circles.¹⁸

What is interesting about the debate is that many of the same passages in the controversy over the imputation of Christ's righteousness are also used to support objective justification in the Lutheran Churches which teach both the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification. The controversy in the Reformed and Evangelical churches over the imputation of Christ's righteousness can be useful to shed light on the relationship between objective justification and the imputation.

1.3 Status of the Controversy Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

In the debate over the imputation of Christ's righteousness, three positions on the doctrine emerged: the "Traditional Reformed View," the "Progressive Reformed View," and the "New Perspective on Paul."¹⁹ All three views see justification as being a forensic

¹⁷ "The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration," *Christianity Today* 43 no. 7 (June, 1999): <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/june14/53.0.html>.

¹⁸ Robert Gundry, "Why I Didn't Endorse 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration' . . . even though I wasn't asked to," *Books and Culture* 7, (January/February 2001): 6–9.

¹⁹ See *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011). The five views in this book are the "Traditional Reformed View," "Progressive Reformed View," "New Perspective View," "Deification View" and "Roman Catholic View." The first three views are the most pertinent to the thesis and these theological categories have been adopted for the sake of helping classify viewpoints in the controversy. This is not to say that these groups are necessarily theologically monolithic. There are differences among the theologians in each group. What unites each group in distinction from the others is described in this section of the thesis (1.3).

and legal action of God. The Traditional Reformed View is held by theologians such as John Piper, D. A. Carson, Brian Vickers, and Michael Horton. These theologians follow in the Traditional Reformed historical trajectory provided by John Calvin, John Owen and Charles Hodge in their defense of the imputation of Christ's righteousness by basing the imputation of Christ's righteousness on union with Christ.²⁰

The Progressive Reformed View is held by those who argue against the New Perspective yet also deny the Traditional Reformed View of Christ's righteousness being imputed to the believer. The theologians in this camp are Robert Gundry, Mark Seifrid and Michael Bird. Gundry argued that there is no text in Scripture that explicitly says that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer.²¹ The heart of Gundry's argument is that faith is not instrumental and faith itself is what is counted as righteousness.²² Of the theologians in this group, the thesis will focus on Robert Gundry and Mark Seifrid.²³

The last view is the New Perspective on Paul which includes theologians such as James Dunn and N. T. Wright. Wright is the most well-known and vocal critic of the

²⁰ See John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ Should we Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 50, 62–63, 84–85; John Piper, *The Future of Justification A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 165 and Michael Horton, "Traditional Reformed View," in *Justification Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011), 85.

²¹ Robert H. Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," in *Justification What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 18.

²² Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," 24–25.

²³ It is important to note that Mark Seifrid may have changed his views on the imputation of Christ's righteousness since he has recently joined The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and is no longer teaching at an evangelical seminary but at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

imputation of Christ's righteousness in this camp. Wright argues that the concept of imputation does not conceptually fit with justification being a legal or forensic declaration by God. He also argues that "righteousness" is not a substance that a judge gives to the defendant but is a status that is declared. The doctrine that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer makes no sense in a law-court setting in his estimation.²⁴

1.4 Justification and Imputation in Current Lutheran Theology

This thesis will rely primarily on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions as it examines the imputation controversy in Reformed and Evangelical circles. I will also be using many Evangelical and Reformed theologians and documents to help defend the imputation of Christ's righteousness and examine the relationship between the imputation and objective justification. Why use so many Reformed and Evangelical sources?

First, the Lutherans have been strangely missing in the imputation controversy. In the book *Justification: Five Views* there was no Lutheran view presented. Why is that? It is possible that the Lutheran view is assumed to be the same as the Traditional Reformed view. Second, many current Lutheran theological works do not discuss the imputation of Christ's righteousness or if they do, the imputation controversy is not discussed.²⁵

²⁴ N. T. Wright *Justification God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2009), 69 and "New Perspective on Paul," in *Justification in Perspective*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 252–253.

²⁵ For example David P. Scaer's book *Christology* does not discuss the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. Jack D. Kilcrease's book *The Self-Donation of God* does discuss the

It is important to note at this juncture that Robert Preus in *Justification and Rome* does spend more time on the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This book was written during the dialogues between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians on justification and before the imputation controversy that broke out in the Reformed and Evangelical circles. What Preus writes concerning the issues between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches are also the same issues between the Traditional Reformed view and the Progressive Reformed view and the New Perspective on Paul. Preus writes that the Council of Trent repudiated the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Rather it was God's righteousness that makes a person righteous and not Christ's righteousness.²⁶ Furthermore, the Council of Trent following the scholastic theology of Bonaventure had no category or concept of Christ's active righteousness.²⁷ Interestingly, this is the same position in the Progressive Reformed and New Perspective views. Theologians in both of these camps deny Christ's active righteousness and that Christ's righteousness is imputed. Rather it is God's righteousness that makes a person righteous as will be discussed later in this thesis. As can be seen from the scarcity of engagement in the imputation controversy and the above examples of where Lutherans

imputation of Christ's righteousness but it does not address the imputation controversy (pages 249–250, 258). The new dogmatics *Confessing the Gospel A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* briefly discusses the imputation of Christ's righteousness but does not talk about the imputation controversy (424–425, 440–441, 495, 570). Neither does Andrew Das' *Galatians* commentary nor Michael Middendorf's *Romans 1–8* commentary.

²⁶ Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 64–65.

²⁷ Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 66.

have engaged the topic there is a paucity of current Lutheran theological material on the imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification. There needs to be a rebuilding of a strong Lutheran defense of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and how it relates to objective and subjective justification. Hopefully, this thesis will help in that endeavor.

1.5 The Central Question of the Thesis

The central question of the thesis is the relationship between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification. The conclusion reached from researching this question is that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the core of objective justification. The thesis accomplishes this goal by exploring the imputation controversy in Reformed and Evangelical circles.

Chapter Two is a brief historical analysis on the doctrine of justification in Lutheran and traditional Reformed (Calvinist not Arminian) theology. The imputation of Christ's righteousness as the core of objective justification will be demonstrated in three ways following chapter two. First, chapters three and four will argue that the doctrine of the imputation is the strand that unites Christology, atonement and justification. Second, chapter five will argue that objective justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world. Last, chapter six will submit five things concerning the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification. First, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is the same as the forgiveness of sins. Second, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is by grace and is immediate. Third, the imputation in subjective and objective justification is the same

imputation. Fourth, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is based on personal/relational ontology. Lastly, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is set in the context of union with Christ.

Chapter Seven is the summary and conclusion of the research question: what is the relationship between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification? It summarizes the findings that has lead to the conclusion of this thesis that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the core of objective justification.

CHAPTER TWO

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION IN LUTHERAN AND REFORMED THEOLOGY

2.1 Introduction to Chapter Two

This chapter is a cursory treatment of the history of justification in Lutheran and traditional Reformed theology. Martin Luther and his mature theology of justification is treated. Then the theology of the *Book of Concord* followed by the theological tradition of Lutheran Orthodoxy from the 16–17th centuries will be discussed. Lastly, what the Missouri Synod and Synodical Conference taught on justification will be summarized. After the history of Lutheran thought, John Calvin and traditional Reformed theology on justification will be briefly surveyed. The chapter will conclude with a comparison between the history of Lutheran and traditional Reformed theology on justification.

2.2 Martin Luther and Justification

There has been much research concerning Luther's theological development and when he reached his mature teaching on justification. Uuras Saarnivaara argues that we should take what Luther wrote in the prefaces to his Latin writings seriously and not dismiss it.¹ Saarnivaara argues that Luther reached his mature theology on justification in

¹ See Martin Luther, *Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings 1545*, in *Luther's Works* vol. 34, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 327–338.

1518.² Saarnivaara, relying on Luther’s testimony and other writings, argues that Luther had two stages of development on the doctrine of justification. First, before his breakthrough in 1518 Luther knew that a person was saved not by works but by faith in Christ. Second, in 1518 Luther discovered that the true meaning of the phrase “the righteousness of God” in Romans 1:17 is the righteousness which is given or imputed to a sinner and not a righteousness demanded from the sinner.³

Saarnivaara lists six points to Luther’s mature theology on justification. First, a sinner is justified because Christ earns righteousness for him. Second, the sinner is justified by an imputation of this righteousness of Christ to him. Therefore, the sinner is wholly passive in justification and receives an external or alien righteousness. Third, the sinner receives Christ’s righteousness by faith. Fourth, justification is not a gradual process but occurs in a moment. Fifth, justification and sanctification are distinct from each other (Luther equates justification with forgiveness). Lastly, the doctrine of justification can only be kept pure by the right distinction between Law and Gospel.⁴

From the above six point summary it is clear that Luther held a forensic view of justification. Recently some scholars have tried to argue that Luther held to a view of

² Uuras Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel New Light Upon Luther’s Way from Medieval Catholicism to Evangelical Faith* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 101. McGrath argues for a similar date arguing that Luther’s theology on justification had reached its maturity by 1519. Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 222. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the Tower Experience the various other dates scholars give for when Luther reached his mature theology on justification.

³ Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 46.

⁴ Saarnivaara, *Luther Discovers the Gospel*, 9–12.

justification as being an “all-embracing process,” based upon “. . . the believer’s *actual participation in the divine life* through union with Christ.”⁵ These views of Luther generally have come out of the Finnish Luther School that tried to combine Luther’s doctrine of justification with the doctrine of theosis by arguing that Luther bases justification and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness on Christ dwelling in the believer. This school of interpretation also tends to argue that Luther’s doctrine of justification differs from *The Formula of Concord* and later Lutheran Orthodoxy.⁶ However, as the six points above show, Luther did distinguish between justification and sanctification, it was not a process and it is based on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Timo Laato has also written an article critiquing the Finnish Luther School. Laato shows that Luther did believe in the union of Christ with the believer but that is not the foundation for justification. The Finnish School has made the mistake of prioritizing the indwelling of Christ over the grace of God in imputing Christ’s righteousness. This results in ignoring or minimizing the actual salvation-history of Christ and is a repeat of the errors of Trent and Andreas Osiander.⁷

Before moving to the *Book of Concord* on justification, it is important to note that Luther was influenced in his theological development by Desiderius Erasmus and Philip

⁵ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 225 and 233.

⁶ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 234–235.

⁷ Timo Laato “The Stumbling Block of the Finnish Lutheran School,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 72 no. 4 (October, 2008): 331, 336–338, 342–344.

Melanchthon. Erasmus' 1516 translation of the New Testament helped build the understanding of justification being a forensic declaration rather than an inward transformation. Erasmus in this translation used the Latin word *imputare* instead of *reputare* for translating the Greek verb λογίζομαι in Romans 4:3.⁸ Lowell Green explains the significance of Erasmus' switch in Latin verbs.

The terms *imputare* and *reputare* had often been confused before Erasmus. Strictly speaking, "repute" means to ascribe to an individual his intrinsic qualities (an "analytic" usage). Applied to justification, *reputare* would base a favorable judgment upon meritorious qualities within the individual, while *imputare* would point to a merit from without (the later *justitia passive*).⁹

Erasmus then influenced Melanchthon who made justification by imputation the central point in his theology.¹⁰ Erasmus provided the philological foundation and Melanchthon formulated the theology of the imputation which in turn influenced Luther helping him make his Reformation breakthrough on justification.¹¹ This same doctrine of justification was then carried forward by *The Book of Concord* and later Lutheran Orthodoxy.

⁸ McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 239.

⁹ Lowell Green, "The Influence of Erasmus upon Melanchthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification," *Church History* 43, no. 2 (June 1974): 185.

¹⁰ Lowell Green, "The Influence of Erasmus upon Melanchthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification," 191.

¹¹ Lowell Green, "The Influence of Erasmus upon Melanchthon, Luther and the Formula of Concord in the Doctrine of Justification," 198.

2.3 The Book of Concord and Justification

The Book of Concord, as Luther, has a forensic rather than transformative view of justification. The *Apology* says “And ‘to be justified’ means this: not to make a righteous man out of a wicked man but to use forensically ‘to pronounce righteous.’”¹² The *Formula of Concord Solid Declaration* agrees with the *Apology* that the verb “to justify” is to be understood in a forensic rather than transformative sense.¹³ The Lutheran Confessions have a clear definition that “to justify” or “justification” is a declaration of the sinner being innocent/forgiven in a forensic or Law based setting.¹⁴ This means that the Christian is still a sinner, but Christ covers all his sins by His obedience to the Law and death on the cross.¹⁵ Also it is significant in the above quotes to see that the imputation or reckoning of Christ’s righteousness is the heart of the doctrine of justification.

¹² My translation. “Et iustificari significant hic non ex impio iustum effici, sed usu forensi iustum pronuntiarum.” AP III. 131. Friedrich Bente, W. H. T. Dau, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Concordia Triglotta: Die Symbolischen Bücher Der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Deutsch-Lateinisch Englisch* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 190.

¹³ FC SD III. 17. *Concordia Triglotta*, 921.

¹⁴ The assertion that the *Apology* (Ap IV, 72, 78, 117) teaches in addition a transformative view of justification is effectively countered by Robert Preus. Preus writes that Melancthon in these passages is simply saying that the declaration of forgiven/righteous in justification is not “legal fiction” but actually effects a legal reality. A sinner who is declared righteous is righteous in God’s sight despite the fact he still inherently has sin. Therefore, the verb “to justify” can be understood “to make righteous” not in the sense of transformation but to be made righteous by a legal declaration. Robert Preus, “Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification,” in *Doctrine is Life Essays on Justification and the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Klemet I. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 110–111.

¹⁵ FC SD III. 22 *Concordia Triglotta*, 923.

The basis for God's declaring the sinner forgiven is the righteousness that Christ has earned. Christ's righteousness which He has earned for sinners is His perfect obedience to the Law and His death and resurrection according to both of His natures (later this will be called Christ's active and passive righteousness).¹⁶ The righteousness that Christ has earned is received by faith. Faith is an instrument whereby the sinner receives the forgiveness of sins.¹⁷ Therefore, faith justifies not because it is a good work but because it trusts in the promise of the Gospel of Christ's merits.¹⁸ The Confessors consider the imputation of Christ's righteousness to be the same as the non-imputation of sin and the forgiveness of sin.¹⁹

The forgiveness of sins or the righteousness of Christ is delivered through the Gospel and the sacraments.²⁰ The means of grace then are part of the doctrine of justification. Therefore there is a distinction between justification and sanctification. Justification comes first which is then followed by sanctification.²¹ Also, the mystical union (the indwelling of the Triune God) is separate from justification and follows it.²²

¹⁶ FC SD III. 14, 55 *Concordia Triglotta*, 919 and 935.

¹⁷ FC SD III. 31 *Concordia Triglotta*, 925.

¹⁸ FC SD III. 13 *Concordia Triglotta*, 919.

¹⁹ FC SD III. 58 *Concordia Triglotta*, 937.

²⁰ FC SD III. 10, 16 *Concordia Triglotta*, 919 and 921.

²¹ FC SD III. 18 *Concordia Triglotta*, 921.

²² FC SD III. 54 *Concordia Triglotta*, 935.

This will be an important distinction later in the thesis. Lastly, the Confessors make another distinction in regards to being righteous before God. There is a righteousness that is by the Law and a righteousness that comes from the Gospel which is Christ's righteousness imputed to the sinner by faith.²³ The distinction between the righteousness of the Law and the righteousness of the Gospel is especially important in understanding the "righteousness of God" that will be discussed in chapter three.

2.4 Lutheran Orthodoxy in the 16–17th Centuries and Justification

After *The Formula of Concord*, the Orthodox Lutheran Dogmaticians of the 16–17th centuries were unanimous in confessing that justification is a legal declaration whereby Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner.²⁴ Thus, in justification the sinner receives an alien righteousness (i.e. Christ's) which is different than an inherent righteousness or a righteousness from sanctification. The basis of this legal declaration is the perfect life Christ lived in the stead of the sinner and His sacrificial death on the cross to bear the sins of the world.²⁵ The dogmaticians therefore taught a two-fold obedience

²³ FC SD III. 57 and Ap IV (II). 47 *Concordia Triglotta*, 935 and 133.

²⁴ For example see: Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent Part I*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 467 and *Loci Theologici Volume II*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 528; Leonard Hutter, *Compend of Lutheran Theology A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982), 98–99; Nicholas Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, trans. Paul Edward Gottheil (Nuremberg: U. E. Sebald, 1847), 137; Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces XIX On Justification Through Faith*, trans. Richard J. Dinda and ed. Joshua J. Hayes, Heath R. Curtis and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 13–18 and John Andrew Quenstedt in Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 5th ed., trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1876), 441.

²⁵ John Andrew Quenstedt writes, "In Romans 4:25 the Apostle joins the payment of punishment rendered for us through the death of Christ, as cause, with justification, i.e. the remission of sins acquired in

of Christ: an active obedience where Christ fulfills the Law in our stead and a passive obedience in dying on the cross.²⁶ The Lutheran dogmaticians continued to teach, following Luther's exegetical lead, that the "righteousness of God" is a saving righteousness instead of a punitive righteousness. Johann Gerhard writes how the phrase "the righteousness of God" is the righteousness by which God justifies or imputes righteousness to the sinner.²⁷ Faith then is instrumental. It simply receives and is the hand which grasps the righteousness that has been earned by Christ's perfect life and death.²⁸ Thus there is a symmetry to the doctrine of imputation. Christians are imputed

Christ's resurrection, as effect. Paul is not dealing with renewal here—something he discusses at length in chapter 6—but he is discussing the imputation of righteousness . . ." in Robert Preus, *Justification As Taught By Post-Reformation Lutheran Theologians* (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982), 7. See also Chemnitz, *Loci II*, 481, 529; Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 141 and Gerhard, *On Justification Through Faith*, 17 on the distinction between the sinner's own righteousness by sanctification or inherent righteousness and the alien righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner.

²⁶ "We respond from Scripture that the entire obedience of Christ, both active and passive, of His life as well as His death, come together for this merit. Although many passages of Scripture attribute the work of justification to Christ's shedding of blood and death, this must not be understood exclusively as if Christ's holy life is thereby excluded from the work of redemption." Gerhard, *On Justification Through Faith*, 92.

²⁷ "Also 'the righteousness of God' is used for the goodness and mercy of God by which He absolves the sins of those who believe in Christ, receives them into His favor, etc. This is commonly called 'the evangelical righteousness of God' (Rom. 1:17), 'imputed righteousness' (Rom. 4:3), 'the righteousness of life' (Rom. 5:18). The term is used in this way whenever the discussion in Scripture concerns justification and the righteousness of God." Gerhard, *On Justification Through Faith*, 36.

²⁸ See for example Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Volume II*, 530; Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 144 and Gerhard, *On Justification Through Faith*, 110.

with Christ's righteousness through faith and Christ is imputed with the sin of the world.²⁹

It is also significant to note that the later Lutheran dogmaticians taught that Adam's sin was imputed to the world. The earlier Lutheran dogmaticians focused on how the doctrine of original sin was composed of three parts: a lack of original righteousness, concupiscence which is an inclination towards sin, and guilt.³⁰ Johann Gerhard in his *Theological Commonplace: On Sin and Free Choice* discusses how Adam represented the whole human in his Fall and that original sin is propagated by natural or carnal generation.³¹ Gerhard does allow an imputation of Adam's sin but that imputation is based on the natural propagation of original sin.³² For Gerhard and the earlier Lutheran dogmaticians the priority was placed on original sin being inherited with the imputation of Adam's sin following it. The later Lutheran dogmaticians would reverse this priority

²⁹See Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 139 and Abraham Calov, "Thoughts on Objective Justification Part II Selections from *Biblia Illustrata* Romans 3:23–24; 4:25; 5:18–19," trans. Souksamay K. Phetsanghane, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 111, No. 4 (Fall 2014), 259.

³⁰Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Volume I*, 282–283 and Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces On Original Sin On Actual Sins On Free Choice*, trans. Richard J. Dinda and ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes and Heath R. Curtis (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 43–46.

³¹Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces On Sin and Free Choice*, 29, 31, 35–36, 65. Martin Chemnitz also focuses on how original sin is passed down through our parents through natural generation in his *Loci Theologici Volume I*, 284–287.

³²Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces On Justification Through Faith*, 26 and 46. Martin Chemnitz also includes the imputation of Adam's sin in his discussion of original sin. He writes that it is not enough to say that Adam's sin was only imputed. A theologian also has to say that original sin is a corruption passed down which resides in our nature. "(1) Because original righteousness was not only the acceptance but also the uprightness and integrity of all virtues, therefore original sin also is *not only an imputation* or a servitude because of alien guilt without inherent blemish" *Loci Theologici Volume I*, 282, *emphasis mine*.

with the imputation being the foundation to the inheriting of original sin through natural propagation.³³

The later Lutheran Dogmaticians Abraham Calov and John Andrew Quenstedt taught that people are sinners both because they inherit a sinful nature and because Adam's first sin of disobedience is imputed to them. Adam was thus both the seminal head and the moral head of humanity. As seminal head his corrupt nature was passed down to his descendants by natural propagation. As moral head of humanity his actual trespass of eating the forbidden fruit is imputed or counted to all people.³⁴ Adolf Hoenecke, commenting on the Lutheran Dogmaticians, discusses how they taught both a mediate imputation and an immediate imputation. The mediate imputation is how Adam is our physical or seminal head who gives us a sinful nature through natural propagation. The immediate imputation is how Adam as the moral head of humanity has his first sin imputed by God to all of mankind directly. Hoenecke says that the dogmaticians based the mediate imputation upon the immediate imputation.³⁵

³³ Heinrich Schmid comments that the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin was not fully developed until later in Lutheran theology. *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 263.

³⁴ John Andrew Quenstedt writes, "Not only our first parents were the subject of the first sin, but also all their posterity to be propagated by natural generation. For Adam and Eve were substitutes for the whole human race, inasmuch as they ought to be regarded as both the *natural* (i.e., seminal) and also the *moral* source of the human race, namely, of the entire progeny in nature and grace. . . That is to say, we have been made sinners through the sin of Adam, not by mere interpretation, nor even by limitation, but by the imputation of real guilt, and the propagation of natural depravity, and the participation of an actual crime." Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 261.

³⁵ Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatic*, vol. 3, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 400.

Lastly, the Lutheran Dogmaticians saw justification of the sinner as one act. In other words, being declared righteous and being forgiven are the same act.³⁶ The exception to this last point includes David Hollaz and John William Baier who divided the essence of justification into two parts. Hollaz and Baier separated justification into the imputation of Christ's righteousness and forgiveness.³⁷ The effect of turning the essence of justification into two parts was to create two objects of faith with faith becoming one of those objects (according to Baier and Hollaz, a sinner must first grasp Christ's righteousness and after believing in Christ's righteousness he is forgiven).³⁸ Furthermore, Baier deviated from previous Lutheran theologians who held faith to be a passive instrument of receiving Christ's righteousness by making faith become a condition or "moving cause" for justification. In other words, faith moves God to give forgiveness to the sinner after he has apprehended Christ's righteousness. This makes justification become *propter fidem* instead of *propter Christum* as the previous Lutheran theologians taught.³⁹

³⁶See Hutter, *Compend of Lutheran Theology*, 99; Hunnius, *Epitome Credendorum*, 138; Johann Gerhard in Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 333–334 and Johann Quenstedt in Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology*, 444.

³⁷See David Hollaz in Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology*, 445 and John William Baier in Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 326.

³⁸Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 539–540.

³⁹Robert Preus, "Perennial Problems in the Doctrine of Justification," in *Doctrine is Life The Essays of Robert D. Preus on Justification and the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Klemet I. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 114–115.

The traditional teaching of the Missouri Synod (as well as the Wisconsin Synod and Evangelical Lutheran Synod) on justification follows the history of teaching from the majority of Orthodox Lutheran dogmaticians. Some theologians in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have criticized Hollaz and Baier for separating the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and the forgiveness of sins. Rather than being two separate acts both the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness are the same one divine act.⁴⁰

The tradition of the dogmaticians of Lutheran Orthodoxy on the mystical union is generally that the mystical union follows after justification. John Andrew Quenstedt defines the mystical union as the indwelling of the Triune God in the believer according to His substance and mediated through the Gospel and sacraments.⁴¹ Quenstedt writes that the mystical union along with regeneration and justification all take place simultaneously yet logically the mystical union comes after justification and regeneration.⁴²

⁴⁰ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:537–538 and Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics Volume III*, 331.

⁴¹ John Andrew Quenstedt: “The mystical union is the real and most intimate conjunction of the substance of the Sacred Trinity and the God-man Christ with the substance of believers, effected by God himself through the Gospel, the Sacraments, and faith by which, through a special approximation of his essence, and by a gracious operation, he is in them, just as also believers are in him; that, by a mutual and reciprocal immanence they may partake of his vivifying power and all his mercies, become assured of the grace of God and eternal salvation, and preserve unity in the faith and love with all the other members of his mystical body.” Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 498.

⁴² John Andrew Quenstedt: “Yet, according to our mode of conceiving them, justification and regeneration are prior in order to the mystical union.” Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 496. However, Hollaz places the mystical union first before justification because he

2.5 Objective Justification in the Early History the Missouri Synod

The early Missouri Synod continued the traditional Lutheran Orthodox theology of justification with one major clarification which was the distinction between objective and subjective justification. Objective justification is how in Christ's resurrection the Father has declared the entire world to be justified or forgiven. The means of grace offer the forgiveness or righteousness which Christ has earned and when a person believes in Christ, he or she receives the earned righteousness and forgiveness through the gift of faith. The personal believing in Christ and receiving His righteousness is called subjective justification. Interestingly, the terms "objective justification" and "subjective justification" were not frequently used by C. F. W. Walther and the early Missouri Synod theologians. Instead of "objective justification" they preferred to use the expressions "general justification" or "universal justification."⁴³ The reason for the different terms is that "objective" and "subjective" justification were originally more philosophical and abstract.⁴⁴ The term "objective justification" gained prominence in the Missouri Synod over time most likely to combat both Pietism and Schleiermacher's theology with their excessive "subjectivism."⁴⁵

considers faith to be the same as the mystical union and faith is a prerequisite to justification. Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 497.

⁴³ E Reim, "A History of the Term 'Objective Justification,' An Essay Prepared for the Milwaukee City Conference, Wisconsin Synod" *Quartalschrift* 52, no. 2 (April, 1955), 82.

⁴⁴ Reim, 84.

⁴⁵ Reim, 87, 91.

Two important theologians in early history of the Missouri Synod were C. F. W. Walther and George Stoeckhardt. Walther was the founder of the Missouri Synod and taught objective justification consistently throughout his ministry. There is no discernable development in Walther's position on objective justification, nor are there any differences between Walther and the other early Missouri Synod theologians on the doctrine of objective justification.⁴⁶ For Walther, objective justification was tied to two important doctrinal points. First, whatever Christ did He did not do them for His own person but for the entire world.⁴⁷ Second, Christ's resurrection was the acceptance of His sacrifice by the Father and an absolution of the entire world.⁴⁸ Thus, the entire world is "in Christ" as Jesus is the representative or substitute for sinners. While the language of "in Christ" is often thought of in terms of faith and the mystical union this phrase can apply to unbelievers in respect to Christ's universal atonement and objective justification. Stoeckhardt writes the same thing in his article "General Justification" where he states,

⁴⁶ Tom G. A. Hardt, "Justification and Easter A Study in Subjective and Objective Justification in Lutheran Theology," in *A Lively Legacy: Essays in Honor of Robert Preus*, ed. Kurt E. Marquardt, John R. Stephenson and Bjarne W. Tiegen (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1985), 61.

⁴⁷ "We see that Christ not only *died* but also *rose* again for us. In His resurrection, as in His death on the cross, we must consider Christ as the substitute and surety for all men. And, mark this well, this is the key, to the secret of the boundless, great comfort that lies in His resurrection." C. F. W. Walther, *Gospel Sermons* vol. 1, trans. Donald E. Heck (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 230. See also, C. F. W. Walther, "The Reconciliation and Redemption of the Human Race," in *All Glory to God* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 66.

⁴⁸ "... since the resurrection of Christ is the Father's declaration before the whole world and to the whole world that it is now justified before Him, in order that it might believe that it is redeemed and reconciled." Walther, "The Justification of the Sinner by Grace Alone," 87. See also how Walther consistently ties objective justification to Easter. Christ's resurrection is the Father's absolution of the world and is what gives the means of grace the power to forgive sins. Hardt, "Justification and Easter," 64.

“Nevertheless, in Christ the righteousness of life has already come for all men.”⁴⁹ In the essay read for the first Synodical Conference meeting the essayist states, “Therefore the expression that in Christ the justification of the whole world has already happened not only contains nothing dangerous, but is also quite biblical.”⁵⁰ The proof passages for the doctrine of objective justification which Walther and others consistently cited were Romans 5:18–19 and 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.

There are three important clarifications concerning the doctrine of objective justification. First, there is a difference between the work of the atonement and objective justification. A. L. Graebner, another early Missouri Synod theologian writes that the work of the atonement or Christ’s redemptive work was a sacrificial act of God whereas the justification which Christ has earned for the world is a judicial act of God, a legal declaration that the world is truly forgiven and Christ’s sacrifice was sufficient to pay for all sins.⁵¹ Second, this objective justification was not done for the world “in the abstract” but was done for each individual person before faith.⁵² Thus, objective justification is not

⁴⁹ George Stoeckhardt, “General Justification,” in *Selected Articles on Objective Justification*, ed. Robert Preus (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1984), 144.

⁵⁰ *Justification—Objective and Subjective: A Translation*, trans. Kurt Marquardt (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982), 20.

⁵¹ “From all this it appears that this objective justification of the world is by no means identical with the work of redemption. The redemption of the world was a sacrificial work; the justification of the world is a judicial act” A. L. Graebner, “Soteriology,” *Theological Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (October 1901), 196.

⁵² “If it be asked whether one can say that the totality of mankind indeed is absolved, but not individuals, it must be answered: God is reconciled through Christ with all and with every individual.” *Justification—Objective and Subjective: A Translation*, 11.

a “potential” justification but an actual justification of the world.⁵³ Third, this objective justification does include the damned in hell but they are not subjectively justified.⁵⁴

Having made these clarifications, the two most common objections made against objective justification are that it teaches universalism and that it is the same doctrine as the false theology of Samuel Huber. First, Walther explicitly condemns universalism.⁵⁵ Objective justification would be universalism only if subjective justification (which is by faith alone) were denied which no Missouri Synod theologian ever did. Second, Tom Hardt in his article “Justification and Easter: A Study in Subjective and Objective Justification in Lutheran Theology” shows that there was a significant difference between the theology of Huber and Walther. Samuel Huber did teach a universal justification which was condemned by all the Lutheran theologians of the Orthodox era, but that was because his doctrine of universal justification was based on the simplicity of God and an attempt to harmonize God’s Law and Gospel. Huber believed that the simplicity of God required that God has universally justified everyone and that God’s wrath was removed

⁵³ “Paul testifies clearly and plainly here that all men who were condemned through Adam’s sin have been justified through Christ and that precisely because Christ fulfilled all righteousness and rendered obedience all men are actually justified, not potentially” Stoeckhardt, “General Justification,” 141–142.

⁵⁴ “In Christ all are redeemed, in Christ all are reconciled, in Christ all have their salvation earned, in Christ they are already saved. Therefore, the damned in hell will someday have to say: ‘I didn’t go to hell because I wasn’t redeemed, for God in Christ gave me all that was necessary for salvation. I didn’t go to hell because I was such a great sinner, for my sins were washed away through Christ. But I was rejected because I refused to accept this salvation from God’s hand, because I refused to believe.” Walther, “The Reconciliation of the Human Race,” 67. For Scripture passages that teach this see 1 Corinthians 8:11; Romans 14:15 and 2 Peter 2:1.

⁵⁵ Walther, “The Justification of the Sinner by Grace Alone,” 90–91.

but God's wrath returns if a person rejects the universal justification. For Walther God's wrath and objective justification are two present realities for the unbeliever. Huber's simplistic three stage view of wrath then justification then wrath again for the unbeliever was because he could not stand the tension created by the coexistence of Law and Gospel.⁵⁶ Nor was Huber a universalist. He simply did not believe in an individual justification that was distinct from the universal justification as Walther did with his distinction between objective and subjective justification. Thus, Huber taught in his view of universal justification that God had "conferred" or "applied" the forgiveness of Christ to all people.⁵⁷ Something which the theologians of the Missouri Synod did not teach. Rather the language of "applied" and "conferred" was reserved for subjective justification.

Hardt shows that there are three differences between Walther and the Missouri Synod's doctrine and that of Huber. Walther, on the basis of John 3:36, agreed with Huber's opponents that unbelievers are still under God's wrath and that there is not a second judgment that takes away the first universal justification. Second, Huber combined the atonement and justification into one whereas Walther and the Missouri Synod distinguished between them without dividing them. Third, in Huber's theology the means of grace do not actually give out righteousness or forgiveness but simply point to an existing forgiveness and justification. For Walther and the Missouri Synod the

⁵⁶ Hardt, "Justification and Easter," 59–60.

⁵⁷ Hardt, "Justification and Easter," 58.

means of grace did have power and did confer righteousness and forgiveness. The means of grace are able to do this because they are simply a repetition of the verdict the Father gave on Easter by raising the Son.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Walther knew of the errors of Huber and rejected them in his edited version of Baier's *Compendium Theologiae Positivae*.⁵⁹ The Missouri Synod theologians explicitly condemned Huber's idea that the universal justification Christ has earned was an "impartation" or "conferral" of righteousness. Such language was reserved for subjective justification through the means of grace.⁶⁰

What is the exact relationship of objective justification and subjective justification in the Missouri Synod theology? First, objective and subjective justification are not two judicial acts but one judicial act. This was the mistake that Professor Stellhorn of the Ohio Synod had made when trying to use the distinction between objective and subjective justification to illustrate one of his points in the election controversy against Walther and the Missouri Synod.⁶¹ Subjective justification is a real act, but it is a

⁵⁸ Hardt, "Justification and Easter," 66–67.

⁵⁹ Hardt, "Justification and Easter," 67.

⁶⁰ *Justification—Objective and Subjective: A Translation*, 21.

⁶¹ "That is absolutely not true, that if through faith I have appropriated for myself objective justification, a *new* act is added. The act has occurred. Through faith, I already have righteousness. God need not then afterward nor in particular ascribe it to me." Walther, "Proceedings of the General Pastoral Conference of the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States on the Doctrine of Election" in *Predestination*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 87.

repetition of objective justification.⁶² Another way of phrasing this distinction is that God sees man in two ways. When He looks at a person in regards to Christ's forgiveness having been earned, His wrath is taken away. But when He looks at a person who has not appropriated or received this forgiveness, God's wrath remains on him.⁶³ Therefore, there is a two-fold side to justification which as George Stoeckhardt says cannot be "systematized."⁶⁴ To try to systematize objective and subjective justification would lead to a harmonization of Law and Gospel which is impossible this side of eternity.

What was the importance to Walther and the rest of Missouri Synod in articulating justification as having two sides to it? The reason had to do with keeping faith from becoming a condition to justification. If faith were a condition to justification, then faith and justification become works of man instead of God.⁶⁵ For Walther and the Missouri Synod the overarching concern was to keep salvation as purely God's work and not the sinner's in any part. This was an issue in their historical context. Various groups did teach that faith was a condition and/or work that basically completed a person's justification. Objective justification was meant to keep faith as solely instrumental and

⁶² "I admit, naturally, that every day God forgives the sins of Christians; but that is not a new decree but the same as what happened previously." Walther, "Proceedings of the General Pastoral Conference of the Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States on the Doctrine of Election," 88.

⁶³ "Speaking according to the acquisition of salvation, He is wroth with no man any longer, but speaking according to the appropriation He is wroth with everyone who is not in Christ." *Justification—Objective and Subjective: A Translation*, 10.

⁶⁴ Stoeckhardt, "General Justification," 144.

⁶⁵ "Unbelief is the cause of damnation, but faith is not the cause of salvation." Walther, "The Justification of the Sinner by Grace Alone," 94.

never causal in justification, a concern which Walther *et al.* inherited from Martin Luther, *The Book of Concord* and the era of Lutheran Orthodoxy.⁶⁶

2.6 The Calvinist Reformation and Reformed Orthodoxy in the 16–17th Centuries

The Calvinist or Reformed tradition is not as uniform as the Lutheran tradition. There are differences among the various Reformed theologians concerning the structure of the doctrine of justification. Since the imputation controversy has taken place primarily in the English-speaking Reformed circles, the thesis will focus on that tradition of Reformed theology looking at the points of similarity among the Reformed theologians rather than differences.

John Calvin is in a way the father of traditional Reformed theology whose writings are still studied and have had a huge influence in traditional Reformed theology. Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (the 1559 edition) defines justification as a legal action whereby the sinner is acquitted or declared innocent by Christ's righteousness being imputed to a person through faith.⁶⁷ Calvin writes that it is not faith itself which justifies but God alone who justifies. Faith is simply an instrument whereby a person receives Christ's righteousness.⁶⁸ Furthermore, Christ's righteousness is defined

⁶⁶ Walther, "The Justification of the Sinner by Grace Alone," 93–94, 89–90.

⁶⁷ "To justify, therefore, is nothing else than to acquit from the charge of guilt, as if innocence were proved. Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), III. 39. III XI. 3.

⁶⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 43. III. XI. 7.

as both His obedience to God's Law (active obedience) and His suffering and death (passive obedience).⁶⁹ Most important for the thesis is that Calvin makes the mystical union (the indwelling of Christ) the foundation to justification.⁷⁰ Reformed theologians after Calvin will follow in his footsteps by placing justification in a structure of union with Christ with some modifications. Lastly, Calvin defined justification to be synonymous with the forgiveness of sins.⁷¹ This is the same as the Lutheran understanding but later Reformed theologians would divide justification and the forgiveness of sins into two parts.

One of the most influential traditional Reformed confessions is *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. This confession was produced in England in 1647. It was the official confession of the Presbyterian Church that comes out of traditional Reformed theology.⁷² Following Calvin's theological trajectory *The Westminster Confession of Faith* defines justification as a forensic action where a person is imputed Christ's righteousness through faith. Faith itself does not justify but merely receives Christ's righteousness which is both His obedience to God's Law and the merits of His suffering.

⁶⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 44. III. XI. 9.

⁷⁰ "When the Lord, therefore, admits him to union, he is said to justify him, because he can neither receive him into favour, nor unite him to himself, without changing his condition from that of a sinner into that of a righteous man." Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 57. III. XI. 21.

⁷¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, III. 57. III. XI. 21.

⁷² "The Westminster Standards" in *The Book of Confessions The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church* (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 118–119.

The Westminster Confession does make a distinction in justification between the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness thus making two parts to justification.⁷³ Lastly, it is important to note that in traditional Reformed theology there is a strong theme of covenant theology.⁷⁴ The placing of justification in a covenant theology structure is important because the traditional Reformed discuss how Christ is the federal head of the church or elect.

The next two major Reformed theologians are John Owen and Charles Hodge. Both theologians had a profound influence on traditional Reformed theologians in the English-speaking world and their works are still used by traditional Reformed theologians defending the imputation of Christ's righteousness. John Owen was a Calvinist Puritan theologian who lived from 1618–1683. He was nicknamed “the Calvin of England” and has been considered by traditional Reformed theologians to be one of the greatest defenders of Calvinism in England.⁷⁵ Owen wrote *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained*,

⁷³ “1. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous. . . .” “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *The Book of Confessions The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church*, (Louisville: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 135. This thesis is not able, due to space limitations, to discuss covenant theology and its relation to justification in Traditional Reformed in detail.

⁷⁴ See “The Westminster Confession of Faith” 128–129. Also see Michael Horton’s historical discussion on how the covenant theology with its distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace came out of the distinction between Law and Gospel. Michael Horton, *New Studies in Dogmatics Justification*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 298–299.

⁷⁵ Michael A. G. Haykin, “Being John Owen,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 20, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 13–14.

Confirmed, & Vindicated (1677) as a defense of the traditional Reformed doctrine of justification against Richard Baxter. This book is considered Owen's mature views of justification and one of the best defenses of justification.⁷⁶

First, Owen like Calvin and *The Westminster Confession* defines justification as a forensic declaration to be righteous or not guilty.⁷⁷ He writes that the mechanism of justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness (both His active and passive obedience) which is received by faith.⁷⁸ Owen makes the distinction between the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness even clearer in his writings, and like Calvin he bases justification on the mystical union.⁷⁹ The believer is able to receive Christ's righteousness through the mystical union because Christ is the federal head of the elect. Christ as federal head, or Federalism, means that in the covenant of redemption Christ never did anything as a private person but everything He did was in the place or as surety for the elect.⁸⁰ Therefore, Jesus in His life and death represented all the elect and earned for them righteousness to be received by the mystical union or faith in Him.

⁷⁶ Stephen G. Myers, "God, Owen, and Justification: The Role of God's Nature in John Owen's Doctrine of Justification," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 8 no. 2 (2016): 71.

⁷⁷ John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith Through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ, Explained, Confirmed & Vindicated* (London: 1677), 172.

⁷⁸ Owen, 295 and 147–150.

⁷⁹ Owen, 246, 249–250 and 293.

⁸⁰ Owen, 257–258, 260–261, 267–268 and 272.

Charles Hodge was a professor at Princeton Seminary who published a three volume Calvinist dogmatics, titled *Systemic Theology* in 1872–1873. Hodge follows the traditional Reformed theology in defining justification as forensic, an imputation of Christ’s righteousness which includes both the active and passive obedience of Christ, and that faith is instrumental and not a cause of justification.⁸¹ Hodge argued that justification cannot be “mere pardon” because that conflicts with justification being based on Christ’s union with the church.⁸² Thus, Hodge also sees justification as consisting of two parts: the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and the forgiveness of sin. Lastly, Hodge also places justification in a covenant framework with Christ being the federal head on behalf of believers.⁸³

2.7 Conclusion to Chapter Two and Comparison of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches on Justification

There are several points of similarity between Lutheran theology and traditional Reformed theology. First, both theological traditions define justification as a legal or forensic action by God. Second, both see justification as consisting of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness which would include both His active and passive obedience. Third, both groups make a distinction between justification and sanctification, or to say it

⁸¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* vol. 3 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 118–119 and 170–171.

⁸² Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 3:125–127.

⁸³ “The ground of justification is the righteousness of Christ, active and passive, *i.e.*, including his perfect obedience to the law as a covenant, and his enduring the penalty of the law in our stead and on our behalf.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:118.

in another way, between the alien righteousness of Christ and the inherent righteousness of the believer. Fourth, both groups see faith as being instrumental, meaning that it only receives the righteousness that Christ has already earned.

However, there are points of dissimilarity. First, the traditional Reformed divided justification into two parts: forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Lutheran theology on the other hand taught that the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness are synonymous. Second, traditional Reformed theology bases justification upon union with Christ. However, some traditional Reformed theologians have a different meaning for "union with Christ" in justification. For some of the later Reformed theologians, the concept of union with Christ is not the mystical union but rather a federal or headship union.⁸⁴ The last difference is that traditional Reformed theology places justification in a covenant theology structure. The traditional Reformed have a stronger concept of Federalism or representative union although the concept is not lacking in Lutheran theology and is integral to the doctrine of objective justification.

⁸⁴ See Chapter Six, Section 6.6 "Justification and Union with Christ"

CHAPTER THREE

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, JUSTIFICATION AND ATONEMENT

3.1 Introduction to Chapter Three

This chapter deals with three foundational concepts to objective justification and the imputation of Christ's righteousness. The first and most important is the concept of the righteousness of God. The first section lays the foundation for how all mankind is unrighteous before a righteous God. It does so by first discussing the history of how the words "righteous" and "righteousness" have been interpreted in relation to the concept of God being righteous. Then it examines the Biblical data in both the Old and New Testament on God's righteousness followed by an examination on how Paul uses the phrase "the righteousness of God" in Romans since this phrase is crucial to the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This section ends with a dogmatic evaluation of the importance of correctly understanding the concept of "the righteousness of God" in Scripture and in the doctrine of justification.

The second section covers how the verb "to justify" is a forensic declaration and does not mean a transformation or inner change of the sinner. This section first looks at the exegetical arguments of Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard for a forensic meaning of the doctrine. Then it examines more current exegetical resources dealing with the verb

“to justify” and closes with a dogmatic evaluation of the forensic meaning of the term in relation to objective justification and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

The third section will cover the doctrine of Christ’s universal atonement. It will examine how Scripture describes Christ’s atonement in two distinct but overlapping concepts of redemption and sacrifice. This section closes with a dogmatic evaluation of the relation of universal atonement to objective justification and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.

3.2 God’s Righteousness in Scripture, Christology and Justification

3.2.1. A Brief History of the Exegetical Interpretation of the Concept of “the Righteousness of God”

There is a three-fold discussion on what the theological concept of “righteousness/righteous” means in Scripture. Where a theologian lands on these debates has serious consequences on how he sees the doctrine of justification. One debate is over whether “righteousness” should be understood in a legal sense of “concurrence with a standard norm” or if it should be understood more as a relational term. A second debate is whether “righteousness” in Scripture is “consistently salvific, at least as it relates to God” or if in regards to God it contains also a punitive or retributive side.¹ The third

¹ See B. Johnson, “קִדְשׁ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. XII, trans. Douglas W. Stott, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 243 and Mark A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 415 for their discussion on these two exegetical debates on what “the righteousness of God” means in Scripture as a whole.

debate is over whether the “righteousness of God” in the doctrine of justification and in Paul’s writings is an attribute of God, an activity of God or a gift of God.²

The following discussion on the exegetical history of interpreting the “righteousness of God” in Scripture is a summary from B. Johnson’s article entry on קִדְּוָה in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Mark Siefrid’s article “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” and the book *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness* by Brian Vickers. These three authors help sort through the exegetical history which has led up to the imputation controversy and how exegetes in the past have helped to contribute to it. This section (3.2.1) and the next (3.2.2) will explore the first debates concerning what “the righteousness of God” means in Scripture. The next third section (3.2.3) will explore the third debate which is what the “righteousness of God” means in the doctrine of justification and in Paul’s writings.

Ludwig Diestel conducted the first modern study on the word “righteousness” in the Hebrew and concluded that God is righteous not in punishing sin but in saving people. He fell solely upon righteousness being salvific rather than punitive in regards to God.³ Albrecht Ritschl used the work of Diestel in his exegetical treatment of Paul’s writings. Ritschl argued that the idea of God holding a court session and judging people

² See Section 3.2.3 “Romans 1:16–17 and the ‘Righteousness of God’” for a discussion on this third debate.

³ Johnson, “קִדְּוָה,” 244.

was from Greek Hellenistic thought and has nothing to do with the Biblical picture.⁴

Ritschl therefore saw the concept of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to be unnecessary and alien to Paul's thought.⁵

Hermann Cremer furthered Diestel's work, arguing that since God's righteousness is salvific it is also relational and not according to an outside norm. In other words, the relationship itself becomes the norm. In Cremer's view righteousness is acting in accordance to the relationship and not according to some sort of outside legal norm.⁶ Yet Cremer also reacted against Ritschl's extreme views on justification. Cremer argued contra Ritschl that there is a punitive righteousness in God and that salvation comes only through judgment. The punishment of evil was necessary for God to righteously save. Furthermore, the idea of God judging is an integral part of Scripture and goes along with how God rules the universe.⁷

Gerhard von Rad, another influential Old Testament exegete, argued that righteousness is "to be understood as a gift rather than a punishment" and that there is no concept of a punitive or retributive righteousness of God in the Old Testament.⁸ This

⁴ Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 416–417.

⁵ Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 45.

⁶ Johnson, "קדף," 244.

⁷ Seifrid, "Righteousness Language," 417.

⁸ Johnson, "קדף," 245.

trajectory of understanding God's righteousness as being relational and salvific was taken over into the New Perspective of Paul by E. P. Sanders. Sanders described God's righteousness as His "covenantal faithfulness." In this framework of understanding God's righteousness, there is little to no room for God's righteousness being punitive or forensic.⁹ Thus, James D. G. Dunn can write, "It should be equally evident why God's *righteousness* could be understood as God's *faithfulness* to his people."¹⁰ Dunn sees God's righteousness in purely relational and salvific terms. Elsewhere he writes, "God's righteousness was the fulfillment of the obligation that God had taken upon himself in making the covenant with Israel. It included or overlapped with the concept of God's faithfulness to his covenant-determining promise . . . It was *saving* righteousness, not judgmental righteousness."¹¹ N. T. Wright argues in a similar vein. Wright does not see God's righteousness as a relational concept per se but rather as an attribute of God which causes God to be faithful to His covenantal promise of saving His people. For Wright, righteousness is an attribute of God which means "covenantal fidelity."¹² The point of similarity between Dunn and Wright is that they both see God's righteousness primarily

⁹ Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 57.

¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 342.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, "New Perspective View," in *Justification Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby, Paul Rhodes Eddy and Steven E. Eenderlein (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 182.

¹² Wright, "New Perspectives on Paul," 250.

if not solely in salvific terms.¹³ Dunn focuses on the relational side of God's righteousness whereas Wright also has a relational view of God's righteousness (i.e. God is faithful to His relationship of covenant) but likes to emphasize that this is also an attribute of God. The New Perspective ends up then seeing God's righteousness to be only salvific with no punitive side to it. Thus, God's righteousness to them in justification is not something which is imputed but is an activity of God solely in saving His people.

While the New Perspective follows the idea of God's righteousness being salvific rather than punitive and according to a relationship rather than to a norm, there has been another group that has emerged from this exegetical tradition. Ernst Käsemann saw "the righteousness of God" in Scripture to be an activity or a power.¹⁴ Käsemann influenced Peter Stuhlmacher who defined "the righteousness of God" as an eschatological activity of God in saving the world through Christ. Stuhlmacher agrees with the traditional Reformation view of "the righteousness of God" to be a gift, but he expands it to include also God's activity and power. Justification is still forensic with the legal basis found in Christ's death and resurrection. Yet the focus is on how this is an eschatological inbreaking of God's righteousness which can save sinners.¹⁵ The problem with this

¹³ However, Dunn does recognize that sometimes God's righteousness can be punitive. See James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary Romans 1–8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 42.

¹⁴ Vickers, *Jesus Blood and Righteousness*, 50–51.

¹⁵ Vickers, *Jesus Blood and Righteousness*, 52–53.

approach is that the imputation of Christ's righteousness becomes an unnecessary concept along with the distinction between justification and sanctification.¹⁶

These exegetical debates have had profound influence on the Progressive Reformed view¹⁷ of "the righteousness of God" and the doctrine of justification. Robert Gundry sees "the righteousness of God" as both an attribute of God and an activity of God by which God through Christ liberates us from the mastery of sin.¹⁸ While Gundry still sees justification as a forensic action, there is no need for the concept of Christ's righteousness being imputed.¹⁹ Mark Seifrid like Stuhlmacher sees "the righteousness of God" as an activity and as a gift.²⁰ Justification is a forensic activity, but the imputation of Christ's righteousness is not necessary and hurts the doctrine of sanctification because it creates in his view an artificial separation between the two.²¹

How one defines the concept "the righteousness of God" and what the words "righteous" and "righteousness" mean in Scripture has a significant impact on how one

¹⁶ "Stuhlmacher makes it clear that in his understanding, the traditional view of imputation becomes rather obsolete. There is no inherent difference in Paul between imputed and effective righteousness." Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 54.

¹⁷ For the term "Progressive Reformed view" see Chapter One Section 1.3 "Status of the Controversy Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness."

¹⁸ Gundry, "Why I Didn't Endorse 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,'" 7.

¹⁹ Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," 44–45.

²⁰ Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness Paul's Theology of Justification* New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 46–47.

²¹ Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness*, 174–175.

understands justification. Therefore, a good amount of time will be spent looking at the concept of “righteousness” and God’s righteousness in the Old Testament because this will determine how “the righteousness of God” is understood in the New Testament and in Paul’s writings. After the exegetical work on what “the righteousness of God” means the section will conclude with a dogmatic evaluation of this key concept in Scripture.

3.2.2 The Righteousness of God in Scripture

In Hebrew there is a masculine noun for “righteousness” (קִדְּוָה) and a feminine noun for “righteousness” (קִדְּוָה). There is also the adjective “righteous” (קָדוֹשׁ).²² In Greek the noun for “righteousness” is δικαιοσύνη and the adjective “righteous” is δίκαιος. There are three interrelated questions regarding these words from the above exegetical history on how to interpret the “righteousness of God” in Scripture. First, is God’s righteousness according to a relationship (the covenant) or a standard? Second, is God’s righteousness salvific or punitive or both? Third, is the “righteousness of God” in justification an attribute, activity or gift/status of God?

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* gives eight uses of the words קִדְּוָה, קָדוֹשׁ and קִדְּוָה. First of all, these words can mean, in the abstract, conformity to a norm. Second, they can be used as a description of God (“as just and righteous, the standard being his own will and nature as the supreme being”). Third, when used in regards to man, God’s characteristic of righteousness becomes a standard for how man

²² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 841–843. Hereafter abbreviated BDB.

lives. Fourth, they can be used for God showing His righteousness in situations of punishing sin. Fifth, they can be used in situations of God showing His righteousness in saving His people from their enemies. Sixth, they can be used in situations such as Psalm 51 where David asks for justification or forgiveness. Seventh, they can be used to describe believers and the Messiah as being righteous. Last they can be used to describe good works such as almsgiving.²³ From the above eight-fold usage of the terms righteous/righteousness, it is clear that righteousness “. . . refers to an ethical, moral standard and of course in the OT that standard is the nature and will of God.”²⁴ Furthermore, “the righteousness of God” is an attribute of God, an activity of God where He both punishes and saves and is a gift given to the believer.

In the New Testament the adjective δίκαιος has a five-fold use. It can be used in reference to God. “. . . God is called δίκαιος in the sense of a righteousness which both judges and saves.”²⁵ The adjective can be used as a Messianic title, “The Righteous One” who in our place does God’s will as contained in the Law.²⁶ It can also be used to describe men who do God’s will, or it can describe the Christian “. . . as one who truly

²³ Harold G. Stigers, “דָּקָא,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 754.

²⁴ Stigers, “דָּקָא,” 752.

²⁵ Gottlob Schrenk, “δικη,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. II, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 188. See 1 John 1:9 and Rev. 16:5.

²⁶ Schrenk, “δικη,” 188–189. See Acts 3:14; 7:52; 1 John 2:1; 2:29; 3:7; 1 Pet. 3:18.

fulfils the Law or the divine will.”²⁷ Lastly, it is used to describe the one who is declared righteous by faith.²⁸ This five-fold use of the adjective δίκαιος presupposes a norm that is being fulfilled either by a person or fulfilled by someone else but then is counted to another. The noun δικαιοσύνη can mean “the just judgment of God” and a “revelation of retributive justice by Christ.”²⁹ It can also refer to how man conducts himself in regard to God. “δικαιοσύνη is almost always used in the NT for the right conduct of man which follows the will of God and is pleasing to Him, for rectitude of life before God, for uprightness before His judgment.”³⁰ Schrenk goes on to discuss Paul’s unique usage of the noun, but that discussion will be saved for the next section. Therefore, both the noun δικαιοσύνη and the adjective δίκαιος have the same meaning as their Old Testament counterparts as conformity to a norm rather than faithfulness to a relationship. Also, “righteousness” and being “righteous” are a status that God gives as well as attributes and actions of God in both saving and punishing. Having looked at the lexical data let us examine each of the three questions of what “the righteousness of God” means in detail.

First, is God’s righteousness according to a standard or a relationship? The concept of righteousness being a standard rather than a relational concept (i.e. fidelity to a relationship/covenant) makes the most sense of how the nouns and adjective are used for

²⁷ Schrenk, “δίκη,” 189–190. For an example of the former see Rom. 5:7 and for an example of the latter see Matt. 23:35; Luke 1:6, Acts 10:22.

²⁸ Schrenk, “δίκη,” 190–191. See Rom. 1:17.

²⁹ Schrenk, “δίκη,” 198. See Acts 17:31, Rev. 19:11.

³⁰ Schrenk, “δίκη,” 198.

several reasons. First, in Leviticus 19:36 the masculine noun (קִדְּקָה) is used for the command that the Israelites were to have a “righteous” measurement of weight. The concept of a standard or norm is clear whereas a relational view does not fit. Secondly, the masculine noun, the feminine noun, and the adjective are all frequently paired with the Hebrew word for “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט) which points in the direction that righteousness is a norm rather than a relationship.³¹ Lastly, these three words for righteousness are often contrasted to “evil” related words (רָשָׁע), and the righteous man is contrasted with the “wicked man” who does evil or lawless deeds.³² In summary, righteousness/righteous is a concept that entails an outside norm which is God’s will as expressed in the Law. This makes the most sense as Mark Seifrid points out since “. . . it is nearly impossible to imagine how demands can be entirely internal to a relationship.”³³

The larger context of Scripture also shows that God’s righteousness is a larger concept than just His covenantal faithfulness. To equate God’s righteousness solely to His covenantal faithfulness would be to restrict the meaning of righteousness and invert

³¹ For the masculine noun being paired with מִשְׁפָּט see Job 8:3; Ps. 50:6; 89:14; Isa. 26:9. For the adjective being paired with מִשְׁפָּט or the verb “to judge” see 1 Kings 8:32; 2 Kings 10:9 Ps. 119:11. For the feminine noun being paired with מִשְׁפָּט see Ps. 33:5; 36:6; 99:4; 103:6; Isa. 5:16; 59:9, 14.

³² For רָשָׁע related words see BDB, 957–958. For קִדְּקָה being contrasted with (רָשָׁע) see Deut. 9:4; Job 35:8; Prov. 11:5; 13:6; 15:9; 16:12. For קִדְּקָה being contrasted with (רָשָׁע) see Ps. 45:7; Prov. 25:5; Eccles. 3:16; Isa. 26:9, 10. For צְדִיקָה being contrasted with (רָשָׁע) see Exod. 9:27; Deut. 25:1; 2 Sam. 4:11; Ps. 1:5-6; 11:5; 38:17-18; 34:15-21; 37:12-39; 64:10; 68:2-3; 75:10; 125:3; Prov. 2:20; 3:33; 4:18; 10:3, 6, 7, 11; Isa. 3:10; 5:23; Ezek. 3:20, 21; 13:22; Hab. 1:4.

³³ Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” 419.

the relationship between the two concepts.³⁴ God's righteousness being a larger concept than covenantal faithfulness is seen by how "righteous/righteousness" language is more often used with creation language in Scripture rather than with covenant language. Scripture does not speak of "acting righteously" or "righteously" in regards to the covenant but rather one "keeps," "remembers," "breaks," "profanes," etc. the covenant.³⁵ Rather, ". . . righteousness language is often found in parallel with terms for rectitude or in opposition to terms for evil . . ." and in connection to God's ruling and judging the nations.³⁶ This is important because it means that God's righteousness is a universal reality that applies not just to Israel who is in a covenantal relationship to God but to all of creation. This universality of God's righteousness sets the stage for the universality of God's Law, His atonement and objective justification. To summarize, righteousness is a larger concept than a relationship or "covenantal faithfulness."³⁷ Rather, righteous/righteousness language entails conformity to a standard which is God's will or His Law for all people everywhere and in every era of history. This helps us answer the

³⁴ ". . . it becomes clear that to speak of 'righteousness' as 'covenant faithfulness' is to invert the actual semantic relation between the terms." Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 423.

³⁵ Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 424.

³⁶ Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 424.

³⁷ A good formula to remember this is: "All 'covenant keeping' is righteous behavior, but not all righteous behavior is 'covenant keeping.'" Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 424.

next question of whether God's righteousness is to be understood as a salvific righteousness or a punitive righteousness or both punitive and salvific.

Mark Seifrid argues that the adjective קִדְּוָה derived from the masculine noun is used to describe God's punitive righteousness in several passages which have been overlooked by exegetes who focus on the feminine noun חֶסֶד (the feminine noun is often used in Scripture to describe God's salvific acts). Due to this neglect of the adjective, Old Testament scholars have discounted a punitive righteousness of God.³⁸ Seifrid locates fifteen places in the Old Testament where God's righteousness is described with the adjective in a punitive or retributive sense. Of these fifteen, six of them exhibit the same pattern: ". . . a guilty party who has suffered divine punishment confesses 'Yahweh is righteous.'" ³⁹ The confession "Yahweh is righteous" uses the adjective קִדְּוָה to describe God. Righteousness then in the Old Testament is primarily forensic or juridical because it entails conformity to a norm. This explains how God can be righteous when inflicting punishment upon sinners such as Pharaoh or the faithless Israelites. Yet, the vast usage of the feminine noun חֶסֶד with God describes His righteousness as being salvific rather than punitive. There is therefore a tension within God's righteousness.

Francis Pieper discusses this tension in his dogmatics in the section on the attributes of God and on God's justice. He writes how there is a two-fold justice of God,

³⁸ Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 415.

³⁹ Seifrid, "Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism," 429. The fifteen passages that he locates are: Ex. 9:27; Ps. 7:10; 7:12; 11:5-7; 50:6; Isa. 1:27; 5:15-16; 10:22; 28:17; Lam. 1:18; 2 Chron. 12:1-6; Neh. 9:33; Dan. 9:7; 9:14, 9:16.

an *iustitia legalis* and an *iustitia evangelica*. The *iustitia legalis* is God’s righteousness revealed from the Law and is seen when God inflicts punishment on law breakers and rewards those who keep the Law. The *iustitia evangelica* is revealed from the Gospel. “It consists in God’s setting aside His *iustitia legalis* (χωρὶς νόμου), declaring the sinner righteous, forgiving his sin by grace for the sake of Christ’s righteousness. . . .”⁴⁰ How is this tension in God’s righteousness resolved? The tension between God’s salvific and punitive righteousness is resolved only in Christ’s substitutionary atonement where He fulfills God’s *iustitia legalis* so that God can salvifically save by giving people the gift of the state of being righteous. Thus, “the righteousness of God” is an attribute of God, an activity of God (God is righteous in both punishing and saving) and it is a gift whereby God justifies a person.

3.2.3 Romans 1:16–17 and the “Righteousness of God”

The third question is what the “righteousness of God” means in Paul’s writings on the doctrine of justification. This has enormous dogmatic implications. We have seen from above that righteousness is according to a norm/standard which is God’s Law and that God is righteous in both punishing and saving (there is a punitive and salvific side to God’s righteousness). This now brings us to what Paul means when he speaks of the “righteousness of God” in regards to justification. Romans 1:16–17 are two pivotal verses in this debate. Commentators generally agree that Romans 1:16–17 is the theme

⁴⁰ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 457–458.

for Paul's Letter to the Romans and crucial for understanding the epistle and Paul's treatment of the doctrine of justification.⁴¹

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who is believing, to the Jew first and to the Greek. ¹⁷For a righteousness from God is being revealed in it from faith to faith, just as it has been written, "The righteous will live by faith."⁴²

Paul states that he is not ashamed of the Gospel for "a righteousness of God" (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ) is revealed in the Gospel. The key phrase is "a righteousness of God." Douglas Moo lists three main interpretations for δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ.

The first line of interpretation is that it is an attribute of God. θεοῦ would be a possessive genitive and translates as "God's righteousness." This righteousness could be punitive or salvific. The Medieval Church saw God's righteousness in this context to be solely punitive. However, this does not fit with the idea of the Gospel being good news. N. T. Wright also follows the possessive genitive interpretation but he takes it solely as the salvific righteousness of God, i.e. God's righteousness as His covenantal faithfulness.⁴³ The second line of interpretation is to take θεοῦ as a genitive of source. It would then mean "a righteousness from God." This is the Traditional Reformed view's

⁴¹ Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 84; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 63; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 58.

⁴² My translation.

⁴³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 70.

interpretation along with the Lutheran interpretation.⁴⁴ God’s righteousness is solely an alien or extrinsic righteousness which is given as a gift and not an internal transformation.⁴⁵ The third main interpretation is to take θεοῦ as a subjective genitive meaning God’s righteousness that He shows. This view takes “the righteousness of God” to be an activity of God whereby He intervenes in order to save His people.⁴⁶ Some adherents of the New Perspective along with those in the Progressive Reformed view will take this third interpretation.

Moo opts for a combination of the second and third interpretations in understanding Romans 1:16–17. Moo combines both source and subjective genitive arguing that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ includes God’s saving activity because in the Psalms and in Isaiah God’s righteousness often is a saving activity.⁴⁷ However, the interpretation of these two verses being about a righteous status given or imputed makes better sense. Especially with Paul’s usage of the phrase elsewhere in Romans and in his other epistles.

First, from a grammatical standpoint taking δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ as God’s activity makes less sense than it being a righteous status given. The phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is the subject of the verb ἀποκαλύπτεται which is in the passive voice. Therefore, the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is not acting but is being acted upon (i.e. being revealed). Obviously, it

⁴⁴ For the term “Traditional Reformed view” see Chapter One Section 1.3 “Status of the Controversy Concerning the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness.”

⁴⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 71.

⁴⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 71.

⁴⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 71.

is God who is acting, but in Romans 1:16–17 God is acting through the Gospel for that is where the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is being shown. The Gospel is what is being active, or is God’s activity not the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ.

Second, Thomas Schreiner who like Moo adopts a combination of views on Romans 1:16–17 presents five arguments that I find compelling for the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ to be a genitive of source and thus a gift of righteousness which Christ has earned and given to an individual by imputation. First, Paul in his writings has δικαιοσύνη paired with faith as something that an individual receives by faith.⁴⁸ This would make sense with Paul’s other epistles such as Galatians. Charles Hodge in his commentary on Romans agrees that Paul’s understanding of δικαιοσύνη fits with a standard or norm which Christ fulfills on behalf of sinners and is then a gift given to them.

Now, nothing is more clearly taught in the Scriptures than that no one in himself is righteous in the sight of God (see [Rom.] 3:20, 23). It is no less clearly taught that no one can make himself righteous; that is, he cannot attain the righteousness which the law demands and which is necessary for his acceptance with God. The reason for this is that the law demands perfect obedience, which no one has given or can give. It is therefore clear that by the works of the law no one can be justified before God (3:20; Galatians 2:16). Righteousness is not by the law (Galatians 3:21) or through the law (Galatians 2:21) or by observing the law (Galatians 2:16). Men are not justified by their own righteousness (10:3). And yet righteousness is absolutely necessary for our justification and salvation. The Gospel reveals such a righteousness—a righteousness which is “without the law”; which is not of works; which is “by faith”; a righteousness which is not our own (Philippians 3:9); which is the gift of God (5:17); which is “from God”; which is imputed without observing the law.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Schreiner, *Romans*, 64. The passages he lists are as follows: Rom. 3:21–22; 4:3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 22; 9:30–31; 10:3, 4, 6, 10; Gal. 2:20–21; 3:6, 21–22; 5:5; Phil. 3:9.

⁴⁹ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 30.

Hodge does a good job in showing the overarching thought of Paul on “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη). For Paul, δικαιοσύνη is something that a sinner must have in order to be justified. However, the sinner can never do enough works or keep the Law enough to be righteous before God. Therefore, δικαιοσύνη must come to the sinner in another way which is by or through faith alone. Of the passages cited above, Galatians 2:21 and 3:21 bear this out the clearest. In Galatians 2:21 Paul argues that if δικαιοσύνη could come through the Law then Christ died in vain. Taking δικαιοσύνη here as an activity of God does not make sense. In Galatians 3:21 Paul again says that δικαιοσύνη cannot come through the Law because there has been no Law given that can give life. The parallel between this verse and Romans 1:16–17 is striking. Paul says the Law does not have power to give life yet the Gospel does have power and that the “righteous” person lives not by the Law but by faith because faith is what receives δικαιοσύνη from God.

The second argument that Schreiner gives is how in Paul’s writings δικαιοσύνη is “counted” or imputed to the sinner which means he has a new status before God.⁵⁰ It makes no conceptual sense to say God imputes His saving activity to the sinner. The third argument is that Paul explicitly says that δικαιοσύνη is a gift which is given to a person in Romans 5:17. The fourth argument is how in 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul uses δικαιοσύνη as a genitive of source describing how Christ is the source of the Christian’s righteousness. The semantic parallel between 1 Corinthians 1:30 and Romans 1:17 lends support to Romans 1:17 also being a genitive of source. The fifth argument is how in

⁵⁰ Schreiner, *Romans*, 64. The passages he lists are as follows: Rom. 4:3, 5, 6, 9, 11; Gal. 3:6.

Philippians 3:9 Paul contrasts how he wants to be found in the δικαιοσύνη of Christ and not his own δικαιοσύνη from the Law.⁵¹

Lastly, there are two more arguments that the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is a righteous status earned by Christ and given to the sinner. First, in the parallel passages where Paul uses the phrase “the righteousness of God,” the genitive of source interpretation fits all of them whereas the other two interpretations do not fit all the parallel passages.⁵² Why posit multiple meanings to this phrase when one meaning fits all the contexts? Second, the strongest argument given that δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ is a subjective genitive is how God’s righteousness in the Psalms and Isaiah, using the feminine noun $\eta\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$, is a salvific activity of God. The argument is that Paul is reflecting this particular Old Testament usage of God’s righteousness. However, that is not the only use of the feminine noun $\eta\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in the Old Testament. In Genesis 15:6 it is said that Abraham believed God and it was counted or imputed to him as “righteousness” ($\eta\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$). This is clearly a status being given to Abraham. It makes no sense to say that God’s saving activity is imputed to him. Moreover, Genesis 15:6 is explicitly quoted in Romans 4:3. Therefore, Paul’s use of the phrase of “the righteousness of God” is that His righteousness not as an activity but a status earned by Christ and given through faith.

⁵¹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 64.

⁵² The other parallel passages that use the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ are Rom. 3:5; 3:21–22; 3:25–26; 10:3 (twice); 2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 3:9.

In summary, the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ in Romans 1:16–17 is a status given to an individual because they could not live up to God’s δικαιοσύνη. While it may be possible that elsewhere in Scripture such as the Psalms and Isaiah, the “righteousness of God” is a salvific activity, in the context of justification and in Paul’s letters it is a status is earned by Christ and is given through or by faith as Romans 1:16–17 show. In these two verses which set the theme of the Book of Romans we have the complete doctrine of justification.⁵³

3.2.4 Dogmatic Evaluation of the Concept of Righteous and Righteousness

The three-fold question of what the “righteousness of God” means (from 3.2.1) is now answered. The righteousness of God in the doctrine of justification is the gift of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner. The righteousness of God is both punitive and salvific. God is righteous both when He punishes sinners but also when He saves sinners. The reason why God can be righteous in saving has to do with Christ’s universal atonement which covers sin. Lastly, God’s righteousness is according to a norm or standard (which is His will as revealed in the Law) rather than according to a “relationship.” The “relational” view of God’s righteousness is that God is righteous in being faithful to His covenant. The problem with the “relational” view of God’s righteousness is that it undercuts God’s Law, atonement, justification and the imputation.

⁵³ George Stoeckhardt, *Epistle to the Romans* trans. Erwin W. Koehlinger (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1980), 9.

First, the view that God is righteous by being faithful to His covenant undermines the Biblical concept of God's Law. For example, note this entry in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* written from the perspective of a relational understanding of God's righteousness.

But the law is meaningless outside the relationship, outside the covenant. He who receives Yahweh's election in faith, who places his life under Yahweh's lordship, also follows the law, for the law is God's guidance within the covenantal relationship. For him who lacks such faith, for him who stands outside the relationship, the law is worthless.⁵⁴

With the relational view of God's righteousness, His Law has nothing to say to those outside the relationship or the covenant. However, the point of Scripture defining God's righteousness as a standard which is His Will as revealed in the Law is so that all people (whether in a covenant with God or not) stand under His Law. The Law is not meaningless outside the covenant for the Law will judge all people. This universality of God's righteousness is the foundation to the universality of objective justification and the universal atonement.

Sadly, with God's righteousness being defined only in relational terms not only does the Law suffer but there comes to be no point for substitutionary atonement.

By this emphasis on the covenant, God's righteousness becomes fidelity to promises and there is no eternal justice of God to be satisfied by a substitute.

⁵⁴ E.R. Achtemeier, "Righteousness in the OT," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia Identifying and Explaining All Proper Names and Significant Terms and Subjects in the Holy Scriptures, Including the Apocrypha, with Attention to Archaeological Discoveries and Researches into the Life and Faith of Ancient Times*, Volume IV, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 82.

Indeed, rescue of the covenant people from trouble is both righteousness,⁵⁵ salvation, and victory.

God's righteousness must be according to a standard, His Will as revealed in His Law, and His righteousness must have a punitive side otherwise there is no point in Christ's substitutionary atonement. The relational view of God's righteousness fits well if one has only a *Christus Victor* view of atonement. Yet as the following section will show (3.4) the *Christus Victor* approach to the atonement is not a real atonement. Biblically Christ's atonement is to satisfy God's *iustitia legalis* so that God's righteousness can then be salvific. Objective justification is built upon the work of Christ's atonement. Thus, as God's righteousness and the Law are universal so is the atonement and objective justification.

Like falling dominoes, after the Law and atonement go so does the doctrine of justification. John Piper notes that if God's righteousness is solely salvific and relational the distinction between justification and sanctification is erased.⁵⁶ God's righteousness as a saving activity becomes "liberation" or "freedom" from sin in a transformational sense, i.e. God's righteousness saves me by making me or freeing me from sin. However, the purification or transformation of a believer is a work of sanctification. Thus, the idea of God's righteousness in justification being only an activity of God instead of a gift given

⁵⁵ Stigers, "קִדְּשׁ," 755.

⁵⁶ John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ Should we Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 70–72.

on account of Christ's atonement removes the distinction between justification and sanctification.

Lastly, the imputation of Christ's righteousness will no longer make sense if there is no eternal standard that must be fulfilled.⁵⁷ If God's righteousness is universal and is a standard that the sinner must live up to but is unable, then the doctrine of the imputation of an alien righteousness earned by Christ makes sense. If God's righteousness, however, is solely seen in a relational sense, then the imputation of Christ's righteousness becomes unnecessary. The next two sections discuss the importance of justification as a forensic declaration distinct from sanctification and the universal atonement which Christ effects as the bedrock of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification.

3.3 Justification Is a Forensic Declaration

3.3.1 Introduction to Justification as a Forensic Declaration

While all three parties in the imputation controversy agreed that justification is forensic or legal, not all agree that this forensic action is distinct from renewal or an inner transformation.⁵⁸ Therefore, in this section I will first look at Martin Chemnitz' and Johann Gerhard's exegetical arguments for justification as a forensic declaration followed by modern lexical studies on justification as a forensic declaration. The section will

⁵⁷ John Piper, *The Future of Justification A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 71.

⁵⁸ The three parties are the Traditional Reformed view, the Progressive Reformed view and the New Perspective. See Chapter One Section 1.3 "Status of the Controversy Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness."

conclude with a dogmatic evaluation of the importance of justification being a forensic declaration which is distinct from sanctification or renewal.

3.3.2 Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard on Justification as a Forensic Declaration

The exegetical arguments of the Lutheran theologians Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard that justification is forensic still carry weight today. Both Chemnitz and Gerhard go back to the Hebrew in the Old Testament in order to understand justification. The verb קָדַשׁ in the Hiphil conjugation “. . . has a forensic meaning and is the same as ‘to absolve someone in a judgment and to declare him just. . . .’” Gerhard notes how none of the Hebrew stems for קָדַשׁ mean “to infuse righteousness.”⁵⁹ Gerhard gives four more additional arguments for the verb “to justify” to be a forensic word. First, in Scripture this verb is used in legal settings (Deut. 25:1; Isa. 5:23; 2 Sam. 15:4; Ps. 82:3; 143:2; Job 9:2–3). Second, the verb “to justify” is contrasted with “to condemn” and “condemnation” which also takes place in a legal setting. This is especially seen in Proverbs 17:15, Romans 5:16 and 8:33–34. Third, the related words used to describe justification are also forensic words. Gerhard lists “judgment” in Psalm 143:2, that there is a “judge” in John 5:27, an “accuser” in John 5:45, a “tribunal” in Romans 14:10, “the Law” in Romans 3:19, etc. Fourth, justification has legal synonyms such as not being condemned or coming into judgment (Ps. 143:2; John 3:18, 5:24), “to impute with

⁵⁹ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces XIX On Justification Through Faith*, trans. Richard J. Dinda and ed. Joshua J. Hayes, Heath R. Curtis and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 479.

righteousness” (Rom. 4:3), to have sins forgiven (Rom. 3:25, Col. 2:13), etc.⁶⁰ The linguistic argument and the four-fold contextual argument for justification being a legal or forensic acquittal has only been confirmed by modern scholarship.

3.3.3 Modern Lexical Studies on Justification as a Forensic Declaration

Most modern scholarship also agrees that the verb “to justify” is a forensic word meaning to declare righteous or acquit. The Brown-Driver-Briggs lexicon entry on the verb קָטַף in the Hiphil defines it as “declare righteous, justify.”⁶¹ Bauer’s Greek lexicon to the New Testament, revised and edited by Frederick Danker, defines the Greek verb δικαίω as “to render a favorable verdict, *vindicate*.” Danker lists how this verb in Paul when used for persons means “be acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous and thereby becoming δίκαιος, receiving the divine gift of δικαιοσύνη through faith in Christ Jesus and apart from νόμος as a basis for evaluation.”⁶² Other lexical works agree such as *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* which states that the verb קָטַף in the Hiphil means “declare righteous, help someone to their right, exonerate.”⁶³ Also, *The*

⁶⁰ Gerhard, *On Justification Through Faith*, 15–18.

⁶¹ BDB, 842.

⁶² Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Third Revised Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 249. Hereafter abbreviated BDAG.

⁶³ Johnson, “קָטַף,” 250.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament regards δικαιόω as used by Paul to be a legal term and not an infusion of righteousness.⁶⁴

While modern scholarship even among Roman Catholic exegetes recognize that the verb “to justify” is legal, some try to argue that it is a legal declaration that includes an inward transformation.⁶⁵ Thomas Schreiner takes this route as was evident in the section on Romans 1:16–17. Schreiner wants “God’s righteousness” in Romans 1:17 to be an activity whereby God both legally changes a person’s status by declaration and also transforms them.⁶⁶ His best argument that “to justify” is more than just forensic and includes transformation is Romans 6:7. He writes, “Nonetheless, as Rom. 6 shows, believers are changed by the grace of God, and this transformation is an essential ingredient in God’s saving work. The use of the verb δικαιούv in Rom. 6:7 demonstrates that God’s declaration of righteousness really frees people from sin.”⁶⁷ There are several things that speak against Schreiner’s interpretation of Romans 6:7. First, this would be the only place where the verb δικαιόω is translated “to free” or “liberate” rather than “to

⁶⁴ Schrenk, “δική,” 215.

⁶⁵ “Roman Catholic scholars who agree that *dikaioo* means ‘declare righteous’ nevertheless often insist that this declaration, being God’s powerful word, must be effectual, and include thereby moral transformation. It is indeed the case that God’s declaration is effectual, but there is nothing about the act that suggests this effect must extend beyond its forensic sphere. So also the criticism that a strictly forensic meaning of *diakioo* makes the action a ‘legal fiction’ is wide of the mark: legal it is, but it is no more fiction than is the release from imprisonment experienced by the pardoned criminal.” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 86–87.

⁶⁶ Schreiner, *Romans*, 65–68.

⁶⁷ Schreiner, *Romans*, 67.

justify.”⁶⁸ Secondly, a forensic translation of this verb does work in Romans 6:7 as John Piper shows in discussing how sin creates guilt from which an individual is absolved.⁶⁹ From the exegetical evidence in the Old Testament, New Testament and especially Paul’s epistles a strict forensic understanding of “to justify” is warranted.

3.3.4 The Dogmatic Evaluation of Justification as a Forensic Declaration

The dogmatic importance of the verb “to justify” as “to declare righteous” is that this definition is essential in understanding the doctrines of Christ’s righteousness being imputed and objective justification. Objective justification is a legal declaration that the world is forgiven. It is not that the world is being transformed. Furthermore, this declaration rests on the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Christ’s righteousness is not something that is indwelling but external to the believer. Michael Horton writes that the Reformation’s understanding of justification rests on three legs: God’s righteousness being two-fold (salvific and punitive), that the verb “to justify” is a forensic declaration

⁶⁸ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, 76–77.

⁶⁹ “But there is another way that sin enslaves, namely, by its guilt. This is less obvious and perhaps more insidious and powerful. I see it implied in the phrase ‘*justified* from sin,’ and I have seen it in people in real life. . . . Sin creates a real guilt that makes a person feel despairing and hopeless. That despair and hopelessness is one of the most powerful bondages to sinning there is. You ask such people if they know that sin’s lure is a lie, and they will, amazingly, agree with you that it is a lie. But they feel hopeless and therefore say, ‘It doesn’t matter, there’s no hope anyway; I am beyond forgiveness.’ This is a very deep bondage to actual sinning rooted in the despair of guilt. I would argue that this kind of bondage is precisely what verse 7 can overcome—and is probably designed to overcome. Justification—legal acquittal from sin and the declaration of our righteousness before God—grounds the possibility of liberation from slavery to sin. In wakening hope for acceptance with God by faith alone, it creates the very possibility and foundation for fighting against the bondage of sin that enslaves us.” Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, 78–79.

and the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness.⁷⁰ A loss of any one of these three components will result in a loss of the doctrine of justification.

3.4 Christ's Universal Atonement

3.4.1 The Basis of God's Declaration of Righteous

God's righteousness as discussed earlier demands that sinners also be righteous. Thus, God is righteous in punishing them, but how can God also be righteous in saving them? The answer is that God imputes to them the righteousness that Christ has earned. Chemnitz in his *Loci Theologici* discusses how God's declaration of "righteous" over the sinner is not a mistake but has its basis in who Christ is and what He has done on behalf of sinners.

Now God does not justify the ungodly by some kind of mistake, as a judge often makes a faulty decision by failure to examine the evidence sufficiently or by wrong thinking; nor through indifference, as if He did not care about the transgression of His law; nor through the wickedness, as if He approved of our iniquity, connived with it, or were in collusion with the impious. A justification of this kind God Himself pronounces to be an abomination, Ex. 23:1; Is. 5:23; Prov. 17:15. God cannot retract the sentence of condemnation revealed in the Law, unless it is perfectly satisfied or fulfilled, Matt. 5:18. Thus righteousness and satisfaction are required where God is to justify . . . therefore a foreign righteousness must intervene—the kind of righteousness which not only with payment of penalties but also with perfect obedience to the divine law made satisfaction in such a way that it could be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Michael S. Horton, "Traditional Reformed View," in *Justification Five Views*, eds. James K. Beilby, Paul Rhodes Eddy and Steven E. Eenderlein (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 98.

⁷¹ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Volume II*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 481.

Since God is perfect He cannot declare somebody to be righteous unless they are so. The foundation of God's declaration is the alien righteousness which Christ earns by his "perfect obedience to the divine law" so that "he could be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world." Thus, Christ's universal atonement is the basis for God's verdict.

Subsequently I will explore three areas regarding Christ's universal atonement. First are the two conceptual language groups used to describe Christ's universal atonement in Scripture (redemption language and sacrificial language). Second is the Christological foundation of the atonement. Lastly is how universal reconciliation is the goal of universal atonement and objective justification. These last two areas will be discussed in the section "Dogmatic Evaluation of Redemption and Sacrificial Concepts in the Atonement" (3.4.4).

3.4.2 Redemption and Related Words Used to Describe the Atonement

There are two main Hebrew verbs used for the word "redeem" in the Old Testament: לָאַל and הִפָּדָה .⁷² The verb לָאַל has three different meanings. It can mean redeem in the sense of a kinsman redeemer, redeem by payment or redeem in the sense of delivering individuals from death or the nation from slavery in Egypt or exile.⁷³ The verb הִפָּדָה means "to ransom" with the thought of payment.⁷⁴ In the New Testament, the Greek

⁷² Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing, 1965), 19.

⁷³ BDB, 145.

⁷⁴ BDB, 804.

verb λυτρόω can mean either “to free by paying a ransom, *redeem*” or “to liberate from an oppressive situation, *set free, rescue, redeem*.”⁷⁵ Leon Morris in his book *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* shows how the word “redemption” when in conjunction with the atonement does not mean deliverance in the sense of liberation by God’s power but more of deliverance in the sense of paying a price.⁷⁶ While Morris goes too far in trying to discount every use of the word “redeem” in the Old and New Testaments having to do with deliverance as freedom from oppressive forces, he is correct that the concept of redemption has to do with paying a price when discussing Christ’s atonement.⁷⁷ This is especially seen in the New Testament and its use of λυτρόω and related words.

The verb λυτρόω is used three times in the New Testament. In Luke 24:21 it means deliverance in the sense of liberation, but in the other two passages in which this verb is used in the New Testament it has the sense of deliverance by paying a price. The other two passages are Titus 2:14 and 1 Peter 1:18–19. Both passages mention a price being paid. In Titus 2:14 the price is Christ “Who gave himself on our behalf” which has the preposition ὑπὲρ indicating substitution.⁷⁸ Christ paid the price of Himself “in order

⁷⁵ BDAG, 606.

⁷⁶ Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 29.

⁷⁷ An example of Morris going too far is how he tries to argue that God in redeeming the Israelites from Egypt had to pay a price in the sense that he had to expend His strength or power to save them. Commenting on Exodus 6:6 and similar passages he says, “. . . in many places the redemption He effects is not regarded as something He preforms with effortless ease.” Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 21.

⁷⁸ ὃς ἔδωκεν ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν Titus 2:14a.

to redeem us.”⁷⁹ In this passage there is a ransom paid which is Christ. There is also a substitute which falls under sacrificial language which will be discussed in the next section. Lastly, earlier in Titus 2 (vs. 11) we are told that Christ who is the “Grace of God” has appeared who brings salvation to all mankind. Christ brings salvation to all mankind by His universal atonement of paying the world’s ransom price. In 1 Peter 1:18–19 the concepts of redeem with a price and sacrificial language are again mixed. Peter writes that the ransom price for us was not gold or silver or any perishable item, but we were redeemed “by means of Christ’s holy blood as a lamb without blemish and without defect.”⁸⁰ The ransom price is Christ’s blood who is the sacrificial lamb in place of sinners. Again, the idea of substitution and paying a price is evident.

The other words that are in the λυτρόω family are λύτρον, ἀντιλύτρον, λύτρωσις, and ἀπολύτρωσις. The noun λύτρον means “price of release and ransom” and is used by Jesus only twice in the New Testament (Matt. 20:28 and Mark 10:45).⁸¹ The two verses are nearly identical, and in both Jesus says that He came to serve not be served and to give his life as a ransom price “on behalf of” (the preposition ἀντι) the “many.”⁸² Again the concepts of substitution and payment instead of liberation are being used to describe

⁷⁹ ἵνα λυτρώσῃται ἡμᾶς Titus 2:14b.

⁸⁰ ἀλλὰ τιμίῳ αἵματι ὡς ἀμνοῦ ἀμώμου καὶ ἀσπίλου Χριστοῦ 1 Peter 1:19.

⁸¹ BDAG, 605.

⁸² ὥσπερ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν. Matthew 20:28. καὶ γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἦλθεν διακονηθῆναι ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν. Mark 10:45.

Christ's universal atonement for the "many" (a Hebraism for "all"). The noun ἀντιλύτρον means the same as λύτρον and is used only once in the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:6).⁸³ In this verse Paul describes Jesus as "giving Himself as a ransom on behalf of (ὕπερ) all."⁸⁴ The themes of redemption by payment with blood, Christ as the substitution and this payment/substitution being made for all people are reoccurring throughout the rest of the λυτρόω related words. The noun λύτρωσις means "ransoming, releasing, redemption" and is used in Hebrews 9:12 to describe Christ's blood as a ransom price in contrast to the blood of the sacrificial animals.⁸⁵ The noun ἀπολύτρωσις is used in the same way as λύτρωσις in most of its occurrences in the New Testament. It occurs ten times in the New Testament as redeem by a ransom price with the price being explicitly mentioned three times (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7 and Heb. 9:15) and the two other times the concept of redemption by price is implicit from the context (Eph. 1:14 and Col. 1:14).⁸⁶

In all the above λυτρόω related words, Christ's atonement is a substitution where He pays the sins of the world off by means of His blood. Three other verbs are used to describe Christ paying with His blood to secure forgiveness for all. The first verb is περιποιέω, and it means "to gain possession of something, *acquire, obtain, gain for*

⁸³ BDAG, 89.

⁸⁴ ὁ δοὺς ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων 1 Timothy 2:6a.

⁸⁵ BDAG, 606.

⁸⁶ Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 42.

oneself. . . .” It is used once to describe Christ’s atonement in Acts 20:28. Paul says that Christ bought the Church with “his own blood” (αἵματος τοῦ ἰδίου). The second verb ἀγοράζω means to “buy” or “purchase.”⁸⁷ It is used twenty-four times in the New Testament, and in six places it is used to describe how Christians are “bought.”⁸⁸ The last verb is ἐξαγοράζω, and it means “to redeem” or “to buy up.” It is used twice in Galatians (3:13 and 4:5) as “a metaph. of Christ freeing men from the dominion of the Mosiac law at the price of his vicarious death.”⁸⁹ These two verses in Galatians show Christ willingly submitting to the Law (both moral and ceremonial) in order to live a perfect life for all sinners who could not live up to the righteous demands of the Law.

At this juncture it is important to make a side note on Christ’s active obedience. Lutheran theologians have used these two passages from Galatians along with Romans 5:19 to teach the distinction between Christ’s active and passive obedience. The active obedience of Christ is His life of submission to the Law in the place of all sinners, even though He is Lord of the Law not needing to live under it.⁹⁰ Christ’s passive obedience is

⁸⁷ BDAG, 14.

⁸⁸ Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 53. The passages are 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 13:17; 14:3, 4. Also see Matt. 13:44, 46 which describe how Christians are bought by Christ.

⁸⁹ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Coded with Strong’s Concordance Numbers* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2012), 220.

⁹⁰ See FC SD III. 15 for how Christ, being God, is not under the Law, and thus He could choose to live under the Law in the place of sinners.

His suffering and death as a Law-breaker in the place of sinners. The dogmatician John Andrew Quenstedt describes the importance of this distinction well.

Christ made atonement for sinful man in a twofold manner: first, by performing a complete and perfect obedience of the Law in our place and in this way fulfilling the Law; second, by taking upon Himself the punishment and curse of the Law which we had merited by our disobedience and willingly suffered all this. The point is that man not only had to be delivered from the wrath of God, the righteous Judge, but he also had to stand before God with a righteousness which he could not acquire except by the obedience of the Law. Therefore, Christ undertook both tasks. He not merely suffered for us, but He also fulfilled the Law in all things, to the end that His fulfilling of the Law and His obedience might be reckoned to us for righteousness.⁹¹

Christ's atonement then has a positive and a negative side. The positive side is His earning of righteousness for sinners. The negative side is His taking the punishment for sin, which appeases God's wrath. In that way, the sinner is both forgiven and righteous before God. Before moving on to the various sacrificial words used to describe the atonement, it is important to note that Christ in paying the ransom price for sinners is paying it not to the Devil or man but to God Himself (Eph. 5:2 and Heb. 9:14). This will make more sense in the next section (3.4.3) which discusses God's wrath in more detail.

3.4.3 Sacrificial Words Used to Describe the Atonement

In the Old Testament atonement is described with the verb כָּפַר which means to "cover over, pacify, make propitiation" and is often translated as "to atone."⁹²

Atonement is also described with nouns derived from the verb כָּפַר. There is the

⁹¹ Quoted in Robert Preus, *Justification As Taught By Post-Reformation Lutheran Theologians* (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982), 5.

⁹² BDB, 497–498.

masculine noun כֶּפֶר which means “the price of a life, ransom.”⁹³ It is used in Exodus 21:30; 30:12 and Numbers 35:31–32 with the idea of a person not forfeiting their life by paying a ransom price. Thus we learn that the concept of redemption as paying a price and the concept of a sacrifice making propitiation overlap beginning in the Old Testament. There is also the noun כַּפֵּרֶת which means “propitiatory, late technical, word from כָּפַר *cover over sin. . .*” and the noun כַּפְּרִים which means “atonement.”⁹⁴ In the New Testament the verb used that corresponds with כָּפַר is ἰλάσκομαι which means either “1. to cause to be favorably inclined or disposed, *propitiate, conciliate*” or “2. to eliminate impediments that alienate the deity, *expiate, wipe out. . .*”⁹⁵ There is a significant debate whether one should understand כָּפַר and ἰλάσκομαι either as “to propitiate” or “to expiate” which will be discussed later on in this section. The New Testament also uses the noun ἰλασμος which means either “propitiation” or “expiation” depending on how one takes the verb ἰλάσκομαι and the adjective ἰλεως which means to be “gracious” or “merciful.”⁹⁶

In the Old Testament the sacrifices atoned for sin either by being a “propitiation” or an “expiation.” In the New Testament Christ is called a “propitiation” or “expiation” (ἰλασμος) in 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5. The verb ἰλάσκομαι is

⁹³ BDB, 497.

⁹⁴ BDB, 498.

⁹⁵ BDAG, 473–474.

⁹⁶ BDAG, 474.

used twice in the New Testament. Once in Luke 18:13 when the tax collector prays to God and once in Hebrews 9:5 which describes Jesus as our High Priest who makes “propitiation” or “expiation” for the sins of the people. The adjective ἰλεως is used twice in the New Testament: once in Matthew 16:22 in an idiomatic way and once in Hebrews 8:12 quoting Jeremiah 31:34.⁹⁷ The question is does a sacrifice propitiate sin in the sense that it pacifies God’s wrath and changes God, or does it expiate sin in the sense of removing/covering the barrier of sin between God and man? Both are correct depending on how propitiation is understood. Thus, there is a wrong way and a right way to understand the concept of “propitiation.”

Francis Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* goes with the idea that the atonement or the vicarious satisfaction of Christ is a propitiation which changes God’s heart from hating sinners (i.e. having them under His wrath) to being gracious towards sinners.⁹⁸ This would be the wrong way to understand propitiation. Adolf Hoenecke corrects this type of a conception and shows how it is closer to the pagan idea of “propitiation.”

As Hebrews 2:17 shows, the basic meaning of ἰλάσκεσθαι is to cover the sin before God through a sacrifice. But it does not mean, as Quenstedt retains incorrectly, ‘to make God favorable.’ . . . Greek secular literature, however, has it that way. That is understandable. Paganism only knows a god whose favor must first be won so that he blesses the unworthy man. Christian revelation teaches a God who is already favorably minded in mercy from eternity and does not contrive at a conciliation of the guilt so that he might first be gracious but so that

⁹⁷ Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 144.

⁹⁸ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 344–346.

sin may be covered and his righteousness not be forced to let the merited wrath reign, and so that he may rather let his eternal mercy have free course.⁹⁹

In other words, Christ's atonement is to cover sin not to make God love sinners. God already loved sinners, wanting to save them, and it was for this reason that He sent His Son to expiate sin, not the other way around. The idea that God is a wrathful deity that must have His heart changed is a pagan conception. God's heart has been eternally loving. A second problem with the conception of propitiation as a change of God's heart is that it makes wrath and love opposites which is not Scriptural. It is God's wrath as condemnation and punishment and justification as a declaration of pardon which are opposites.¹⁰⁰ The third and last problem with this view is that God is almost never the object of the verb *כָּפַר* in the Old Testament nor the object of the verb *ἰλάσκομαι* in the New Testament.¹⁰¹ It is always sin or a person who is the direct object of these two verbs which supports the view that these verbs' basic meaning is to expiate sin.

There is a correct way to speak of propitiation. The reason why some theologians want to go with *כָּפַר* and *ἰλάσκομαι* as "to expiate" is that they want to do away with the

⁹⁹ Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatic*, vol. 3, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 181–182.

¹⁰⁰ "The focus here will lie in the connection between wrath and justification. Jesus' death in some sense 'deals with' the problem of human sin and divine wrath, and so effects justification. Insofar as justification is the divine verdict of acceptance and blessing, whereby God does not reckon sins, it is the polar opposite of divine wrath, whereby God does reckon sins in his action of judgment upon them." Simon J. Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by his Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Vol. 2, ed. D. A. Carson Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 168.

¹⁰¹ The only possible exception is Deuteronomy 21:8 in the Old Testament and Luke 18:13 in the New Testament. Both are used in the context of prayer asking God to be "gracious" or "merciful." All other occurrences of the verbs have either sin or a person as their direct object.

concept of God's personal wrath.¹⁰² The idea that God's wrath is an impersonal force or like a law of nature simply does not fit the Scriptural data concerning God's wrath.

There are many passages in Scripture which speak of God's wrath in personal terms.¹⁰³

Romans especially shows that God's wrath and punishment is an activity that He imposes on creation. Simon Gathercole writes concerning the first two chapters of Romans that it “. . . is not merely the power of sin at work independent of God; rather, God ordained that the penalty of sin is death (1:32) and he does in fact bring judgment upon sinners (2:1-11).”¹⁰⁴ In Romans 8:20–23 it is God who subjects creation going back to Genesis 3 and

God ordaining the curse of death.¹⁰⁵ Morris astutely notes that it is because God's wrath

is so personal that His love and mercy towards sinners are also so personal.¹⁰⁶ What is wrath then? It is God's righteous, active and personal judgment upon sin. The opposite of it is not love but justification. The correct way to think of the verbs *כַּפַּר* and *ἱλάσκομαι*, therefore, is expiation of sin so that God's wrath is propitiated, not that there is a change in God but that the punishment which we duly earn is taken away so that God's love and mercy may continue to flow uninterrupted. Propitiation is not bribing God or trying to

¹⁰² John Murray, *The Atonement* (Grand Rapids: The Baker Book House, 1962), 14–15.

¹⁰³ For example, see John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 5:8; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6, Rev. 19:15.

¹⁰⁴ Simon J. Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by his Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Vol. 2, ed. D. A. Carson Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 175.

¹⁰⁵ Gathercole, “Justified by Faith, Justified by His Blood.” 176.

¹⁰⁶ Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 152.

change His heart, as in paganism. Thus, the atonement is both expiation and propitiation. When the atonement is understood in this manner, it shows both the greatness of sin and God's reaction to it on the one hand and God's immense love and mercy in providing a sacrifice and a ransom to escape it on the other hand.¹⁰⁷

3.4.4 Dogmatic Evaluation of Redemption and Sacrificial Concepts in the Atonement

Christ's atonement can be seen from several different angles. One is His active and passive obedience. Another is atonement as redemption language in paying a price and atonement as sacrificial language. What is interesting is how atonement as sacrifice and as ransom price overlap. There are three important points to make regarding the Scriptural data concerning Christ's atonement.

First, in both conceptual fields there is a substitution made for the guilty party. In the above Scripture passages it is Christ who is the substitution for the guilty. It is Christ and His substitutionary work which provides the legal basis for the justification of the sinner. It is important to note that while the word "redemption" in Scripture can mean deliverance in the sense of freedom from the bondage of sin, when it is used with Christ's vicarious atonement it has to do with deliverance from God's wrath by means of a payment which the sinner could not make, i.e. to be a substitute in their place. This is important because while the *Christus Victor* theme of Christ defeating His enemies is a Scriptural teaching but it is not the atonement nor is it a "theory of atonement." There are

¹⁰⁷ Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 210–211.

three reasons for this. First, the *Christus Victor* concept does not deal with what happens when the individual themselves is God's enemy. What does he or she do now? This leads to the second point. The concept of atonement deals with reconciling God to man, whereas *Christus Victor* has to do with Christ freeing His people and destroying His enemies. While a Biblical theme to be sure, it is in a different conceptual scheme than the vicarious atonement of Christ. Thirdly, when the atonement is conceived as primarily *Christus Victor* then so is justification which leads to a merging of sanctification and justification. Sanctification deals with the defeat of the power of sin. Justification deals with the acquittal of sin's guilt. The two are related but distinct just as justification and sanctification are related but distinct.¹⁰⁸

Second, in the above Scripture passages either Christ is generally identified as the sacrifice or the payment for sin or His blood is specifically identified as the propitiation or the price of redemption. This is the Christological foundation to the atonement. Christ was the sacrifice and redemption price because of who He is. Lutheran theology has divided the communication of Christ's attributes into three classes or genera: the *genus idiomaticum* (the communication of appropriation), the *genus maiestaticum* (the

¹⁰⁸ "According to Aulen the atonement is 'the triumph of God over sin, death, and the devil' and primarily the victory over sin. Justification is the atonement brought into the present. If these words mean anything, they imply that justification in reality consists in man's victory in and through Christ over evil, especially over sin. This is the Roman doctrine of justification, which regards justification not as the sinner's being declared righteous but as a transformation from the state of sin to the state of holiness... This theory lays all stress on sanctification and regards the forgiveness of sin as something included in, or following sanctification. It completely ignores the objective justification." Theodore Dierks, *Reconciliation and Justification as taught by Christ and the apostles and as it was confessed in the Christian Church in the first century after the apostles* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1938), 45.

communication of majesty) and the *genus apotelesmaticum* (the communication of official acts).¹⁰⁹ The *genus apotelesmaticum* has to do with Christ's work as being both High Priest and sacrifice for sin. His salvific work as the sinner's substitute is built on the other two genera.¹¹⁰

The *genus idiomaticum*'s purpose is to show that Christ's work of atonement is of infinite value. This genus states that due to the personal union of the two natures in Christ, whatever attribute one nature has essentially is ascribed to the entire person.¹¹¹ The essential attributes of the human nature include the ability to suffer pain, gain knowledge, sleep, eat, etc. The attributes of the divine nature are to be omniscient, omnipotent, etc. It is because Christ is fully human that He was able to take the place of sinners and to suffer and die for them. It is because He was fully God that His death could have infinite value. As Psalm 49:7–8 states, no mere human can pay the ransom price for another human. However, Jesus who is the God-man in one person can.

The *genus maiestaticum* means the two natures in Christ are in such a close communion with each other that the divine nature shares some of its attributes with the human nature. These attributes do not become essential attributes of the human nature. They remain the essential attributes of the divine nature, but they are communicated to the human nature due to the personal union of the natures. This is most significant for the

¹⁰⁹ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:134.

¹¹⁰ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:252.

¹¹¹ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:143.

study on atonement and justification because the divine attribute of having life in oneself is communicated to the human nature. The personal union of Christ's two natures is how Christ's flesh and blood have life in themselves (John 6:53) and how Christ's blood itself can cleanse sin (1 John 1:7). In Leviticus 17:11 atonement for sin is made by blood because the life is in it. In the New Testament only Christ's blood, not animal blood, inherently has life in of itself and atones for sin, because of the communicated attribute of having the power of life (c.f. Hebrews 9:11–14). Sin being an infinite insult to God's righteousness results in infinite guilt and wrath requiring an infinite payment and propitiation. Only the God-man Christ can provide infinite payment by His life-giving blood shed on the cross.¹¹²

Third, and most important for the relationship between atonement and objective justification, is that the universal atonement of Christ is a separate concept from universal or objective justification. Atonement has to do with Christ's sacrificial work whereas justification has to do with a judicial verdict. A. L. Graebner writes, "The redemption of the world was a sacrificial work; the justification of the world is a judicial act."¹¹³ Christ's universal atonement then is His sacrifice on behalf of sins which gives objective justification its foundation. Objective justification is the legal verdict or declaration by the Father in raising the Son that the world's sins are atoned for. That is why Romans 4:25 bases atonement on Christ's death and justification on His resurrection.

¹¹² Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 189.

¹¹³ A. L. Graebner, "Soteriology:" 196.

3.5 Conclusion to Chapter Three

Righteousness means to be in conformity to an outside norm, that norm being God's will for creatures as revealed in His Law. God's righteousness as an attribute of God is two-fold: punitive and salvific. It is punitive because sinners are not able to live up to God's perfect righteousness. God's punitive righteousness is manifested by His wrath against sinners. Since God's righteousness and Law are universal (not restricted to the covenant or relationship to His people) so His wrath is universal. But God's righteousness also has a salvific side which is universal in scope. This tension within God's wrath is resolved by Christ's universal atonement. Christ, the God-man lived the perfect life under the Law while being Lord of the Law for sinners (His active obedience). He also suffered and died for all people (His passive obedience). Christ's atonement then is both redemptive and sacrificial in a substitutionary sense. Christ's atonement expiated the sins of the world and propitiated God in the sense of allowing His love and mercy to flow unimpeded. This earned righteousness is the foundation for God to justify (to declare righteous) the world (objective justification) and the individual sinner through faith (subjective justification) by an imputation of Christ's righteousness. The righteousness that Christ earned is "the righteousness of God" which is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 1:16–17) and imputed to sinners. This brings us to the exegetical foundation of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification which will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IMPUTATION: WHAT UNITES CHRISTOLOGY, ATONEMENT AND JUSTIFICATION

4.1 Introduction to Chapter Four

This chapter builds on the previous one by discussing the dogmatic relationship of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to Christology, atonement, and justification. The purpose of this chapter is to prove the first part of the thesis: that the imputation is the central nerve which connects all three doctrines. S. J. Gathercole in an article published in *Justification and Variegated Nomism* writes that there has been a disconnect between the doctrines of justification and atonement. This artificial separation has caused justification to lose its Christological core.¹ A possible reason for this disconnect is because of the loss of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as seen in both the New Perspective and Progressive Reformed positions. The first section of this chapter shows the connection between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and atonement. The second section discusses the connection between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and justification. This second section is also critical in revealing the role faith plays in justification.

¹ Simon J. Gathercole, "Justified by Faith, Justified by his Blood: The Evidence of Romans 3:21–4:25," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, Vol. 2, ed. D. A. Carson Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 168.

4.2 Imputation and Atonement

The word for “to impute” in Hebrew is חָשַׁב and it means to “think, account.”² There are six variations on this word in the Old Testament. It can be used in the sense of “planning” or “devising. This is the most frequent use. The next most frequent meaning is “to make a judgment.” Related to this is the third use of this word which is “to impute” something. It is used in reference to both God imputing and man imputing something to someone. It is this meaning of the word which is used in justification. For example, how God saw Abraham had faith in the promise and he was counted or imputed righteous. Another two meanings of the word can be “merely running thoughts through the mind” or “to invent.” Lastly, and the least frequent meaning has to do with “accounting” or “bookkeeping.”³ What is interesting is how this word refers to a judgment of the mind (“to reckon” or “impute”) or with counting something to someone as in matters dealing with money (“to count” or “account”).

The Greek verb for “to impute” is λογίζομαι. In non-Biblical Greek the word has two meanings. It can mean used in areas of life dealing with money and buying. Such as “reckoning” or “evaluating” the value of something or the amount of a debt. Secondly, it can mean to “deliberate” or “conclude.” In the Septuagint the word can be used concerning God’s dealings with men. Such as God’s judgment against people, His

² BDB, 362.

³ Leon J. Wood, “חָשַׁב,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 330.

judgment in declaring those who have faith in Him to be righteous, or the imputing of blood in the cultic regulations in Leviticus.⁴

The word “impute” is closely tied to the idea of thinking or rendering a judgment or with keeping accounts or financial records depending on the context. In the previous chapter when looking at the two different word groups used for atonement (redemption related words and sacrificial words) we see that the word “to impute” fits both. In the redemption related words, there has to be a payment made. In the atonement the price paid is Christ’s blood. In the sacrificial word group used to describe atonement there has to be a substitute who takes the place of another. There is a judgment or reckoning made that the sacrifice is the substitute for the sinner. The sacrifice makes the payment the sinner was unable to pay. Thus, the sacrifice is imputed or counted with the sins of the individual and the individual is instead counted or imputed as forgiven or righteous in regards to the debt. The concept of imputation combines these two conceptions and is at the heart of atonement. It also gives the atonement its Christological character since Christ is the sacrifice who pays the debt the sinner could not.

Therefore, denying the imputation of Christ’s righteousness will lead to a denial of the atonement. Brian Vickers writes, “If all ideas of imputation are lost, substitutionary atonement, if not lost, is seriously jeopardized. Substitutionary atonement demands some concept of imputation, even if imputation is restricted only to forgiveness

⁴ H. W. Heidland, “λογίζομαι, λογισμός,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. IV, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 284–286.

of sins.”⁵ The idea of a substitute implies that what they do “counts” for you. Without the counting or imputing of Christ’s righteousness to us and our sin to Him, the concept of the vicarious atonement of Christ is also lost. Johann Gerhard in his *commonplace* on justification makes the same argument against Bellarmine and his charge that the Lutheran teaching of justification is a “legal fiction.” Gerhard writes, “But if it is denied that His righteousness is imputed to us, the chief purpose of the satisfaction offered by Christ thus perishes.”⁶ Gerhard makes this statement in the context of how faith receives Christ’s righteousness and that justification is not by works. Gerhard, like Vickers, makes the point that if faith does not receive the alien righteousness of Christ, what is the point of His atonement on the cross in the stead of the world? Imputation is at the heart of the atonement and unites it to the person and work of Christ.

4.3 Imputation and Justification

The two theological camps that deny Christ’s righteousness being imputed in justification are the New Perspective and the Progressive Reformed. The root problem of both groups is that they have a different view of what the phrase “the righteousness of God” means. For the New Perspective (mainly N. T. Wright), the “righteousness of God” is God’s covenantal faithfulness. Wright finds the concept of righteousness being

⁵ Brian Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness Paul’s Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 219.

⁶ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces XIX On Justification Through Faith*, trans. Richard J. Dinda and ed. Joshua J. Hayes, Heath R. Curtis and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 86.

imputed to another as illogical. For the Progressive Reformed the “righteousness of God” is God’s salvific activity (Robert Gundry, Mark Seifrid). Neither group sees faith as being instrumental nor righteousness as a status. In the previous chapter the phrase “the righteousness of God” in regards to the doctrine of justification was shown to be a status given. In this section, the exegetical and dogmatic arguments for an imputation of Christ’s righteousness through faith in the doctrine of justification will be examined in contrast to the New Perspective and the Progressive Reformed. The last part of this section will then discuss the Orthodox Lutheran position on the imputation and justification through faith in Christ.

4.3.1 The New Perspective and N. T. Wright on the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness

While there are differences in the New Perspective on Paul, N. T. Wright is the best known exegete of this movement. Wright sees justification to be forensic but with only a judge, plaintiff, and defendant. There is no mediator between the defendant and the judge in Wright’s framework.⁷ Furthermore, Wright disavows any kind of an imputation of righteousness to the defendant.

If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom. For the judge to be righteous does not mean that the court has found in his favor. For the plaintiff or defendant to be righteous does not mean that he or she has judged

⁷ N. T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 97.

properly or impartially. To imagine the defendant somehow receiving the judge's righteousness is simply a category mistake. That is not how language works.

Michael Horton gives a good response to Wright's exegetical attack on the imputation of Christ's righteousness. First, there seems to be a misunderstanding on Wright's part on what the imputation really means. The traditional Reformed and Lutheran view of the imputation of Christ's righteousness has never been that righteousness is a "substance" or a "commodity" given from Christ to sinners but a legal status of being declared righteous because of Christ's sacrificial life and death.⁹ Secondly, Wright's judicial framework for justification is missing Christ as the mediator between the judge and the defendant. As was seen in the previous chapter, Christ has earned the status of being forgiven (nonimputation of sins) and of being innocent (righteous) by His death and resurrection. This is the ground for justification as will be shown later in this thesis.¹⁰ Wright's conception of justification removes the doctrine of imputation and in so doing causes justification to lose its Christological center. Lastly, Romans 5:12–21 shows that there is both an imputation of Adam's sin and an imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world. Both Adam and Christ are heads of mankind and their one action impacts the legal status the world has before God. This will be discussed later in this thesis.¹¹

⁸ Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said*, 98.

⁹ Michael S. Horton, "Traditional Reformed View," in *Justification Five Views*, eds. James K. Beilby, Paul Rhodes Eddy and Steven E. Eenderlein (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 93.

¹⁰ Michael Horton, "Traditional Reformed View," 94.

¹¹ Michael Horton, "Traditional Reformed View," 95.

4.3.2 The Progressive Reformed on the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

Robert Gundry in his chapter "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness" writes that faith is a gift from God and faith and works are antithetical. Paul rejects the Jewish tradition of Abraham's faith as a work. Gundry argues that Paul combated this Jewish tradition by not having faith be an instrument which apprehends Christ's righteousness but by having faith itself be righteousness. Faith and righteousness are identical. Gundry writes that there is a positive and negative side to justification. The negative side is God not counting our sins and the positive side is faith being counted as righteousness.¹² Gundry gives the following summary on his view of God's righteousness in relation to Christ and faith.

The righteousness is God's, not Christ's, because God not Christ, is the one who according to the next chapter [Romans 4] counts faith as righteousness. In that God set forth Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice, the righteousness of God is a punitive action. But in that as a result he counts faith as righteousness, his righteousness is a salvific action.¹³

In Gundry's view Christ's sacrifice takes care of God's punishing righteousness allowing God to forgive sin and count faith itself as righteousness. Therefore, the righteousness that the sinner has is neither Christ's righteousness nor God's righteousness but the act of

¹² Robert H. Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," in *Justification What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 24–25.

¹³ Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," 39.

faith.¹⁴ Gundry ends his argument against the imputation of Christ's righteousness by stating that there are no explicit passages which say that Christ has earned a righteousness which is imputed to sinners.¹⁵

D. A. Carson gives the fullest exegetical defense of Christ's righteousness being imputed and faith as an instrument contra Robert Gundry and the Progressive Reformed position. He gives three basic arguments against Gundry: that there are two types of imputation, that the definition of justification itself goes against faith as righteousness and that righteousness is counted to the individual, not faith counted as righteousness.

Carson's first argument is that there are two types of imputation as Romans 4:4–5 shows. First, Romans 4:4–5 quotes Genesis 15:6 to prove that Abraham believed God's promise and it was counted to him for righteousness. Carson notes that the Jewish exegesis of Paul's day interpreted Genesis 15:6 through Genesis 22 in order to show that Abraham was justified on account of his own merit. Carson writes that if Paul meant what Gundry does about faith itself being the righteousness which is counted, then his readers would not have been moved by Paul's argument that a person is justified by faith alone and not faith plus works even if faith is only a gift.¹⁶ Second, Romans 4:4–5 shows

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation," in *Justification What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2004), 55.

¹⁵ Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," 42–43.

¹⁶ Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation," 57.

that there are two types of imputation, a distinction which Gundry ignores.¹⁷ The two types of imputation are merited and unmerited. Paul writes that Abraham's faith is counted for righteousness is due to God's grace and thus unmerited.¹⁸ In other words, the Hebrew verb חשב is used in two ways. Brian Vickers goes through various Old Testament passages showing these two types of imputing or counting something.

In the first, something is reckoned (Dumbrell uses "impute") to a person or thing when in reality the facts argue to the contrary. If this is the sense in Genesis 15:6, then God 'reckons' Abraham's faith as righteousness; faith counts for something else, namely righteousness. In the second category, something is reckoned to a person or thing and the facts argue that the "something" is indeed true. Thus the "something" is reckoned appropriately. For Abraham, this would mean that his faith is reckoned for righteousness because it *really* is the case.¹⁹

As Paul says in Romans 4:4–5 Abraham's faith being counted as righteousness fits the first category because it is counted according to God's grace (κατὰ χάριν). Thus, Abraham's faith is not righteousness itself but is being used as a placeholder for an external or alien righteousness that is being counted to him. Furthermore, Paul says that Abraham was ἄσεβῆ "ungodly" when he was counted as being righteous in Genesis 15:6.

In other words, it is not enough to say that for Paul, Abraham's faith is not a righteous "act" but it *is* a genuinely righteous stance, a covenant faithfulness, which God then *rightly* or *justly* counts to Abraham as righteousness. That does not make sense of the "meriting"/"not meriting" contrast implicit in the wages analogy [of Romans 4:4–5]. More importantly, it does not bear in mind Paul's own powerful conclusion: it is the *wicked* person to whom the Lord imputes

¹⁷ See how Gundry lumps together all uses of the verb "to impute" making no distinction between the two usages. Robert Gundry, "The Nonimputation of Christ's Righteousness," 19–20.

¹⁸ Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation," 60.

¹⁹ Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 81.

righteousness. In the context, that label is applied to Abraham no less than to anyone else.²⁰

The twin facts that Paul says Abraham is “ungodly” or “wicked” when he is counted righteous and that the imputation is according to God’s grace (thus in the “unmerited category”) shows that the righteousness in this passage is not based on anything inherent in Abraham nor in anything that he has done but is solely outside of him and is a status that is given to him through faith.²¹

The second exegetical argument that Carson uses to prove that there is an external righteousness given to Abraham through faith is how Paul defines justification in Romans 4:5–6. Carson shows that there is a parallel between verse 5 and verse 6. In verse 5 God is the actor who acts in justifying the subject who is the ungodly. In verse 6 God again is the actor who acts by imputing righteousness (λογίζεται δικαιοσύνην) to the subject of those apart from works. We see in this parallel to be justified is to be counted righteous by definition. Justification then includes not only pardon or remission of sins but also a positive righteous status given by God which comes through faith as verses 5-6 show.²²

The third exegetical argument is righteousness itself is imputed and faith is only instrumental in usage. Carson first of all shows that Paul can say two things about faith and righteousness. Paul in Romans 4:3 and 9 will say that God counts faith to Abraham

²⁰ Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” 60.

²¹ Martin Chemnitz makes the same exegetical argument in his *Loci Theologici Volume II*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 529.

²² Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” 61.

as righteousness, but in Romans 4:6 and 11 he says that God directly counts righteousness to sinners. Carson notes that even though Gundry wants these two phrases to mean the same thing they do not.²³ The reason for this difference is that faith is counted for righteousness only because it has an object in which it trusts (i.e. God's promises) and God then gives the status of being righteous to the individual, making faith thus instrumental. That is why throughout Paul's writings he consistently speaks of sinners being justified "by" or "through" faith using the grammatical constructions of faith in the dative (dative of means) or pairing it with the prepositions ἐκ or δία.²⁴ The object which faith trusts in is mentioned in Romans 4:5, 17 and 24. The pairing of faith with an object in which it trusts also shows that faith is instrumental in usage and is not itself the righteousness which God imputes.²⁵

Adolf Hoenecke makes a similar exegetical argument for the instrumentality of faith by showing that faith always has an object in which it trusts.

The position of Scripture assigns to faith in this connection is this. It says that faith that justifies is faith in Christ (Ro 3:22; 10:4; Gal 2:16). Further it says that faith and receiving Christ are one and the same (Jn 1:12; 17:8). It states that faith in Christ justifies as faith in the one who is the end of the law (Ro 10:4), that Christ himself is made our righteousness (1 Co 1:30), and that we have righteousness through faith in Christ because there is atonement in his blood (Ro 3:25). It says that faith purifies us (Ac 15:9), but then it says that the blood of Christ purifies us (1 Jn 1:7). From all these Scripture passages it is clear that faith does not justify in and of itself but for the sake of the object it grasps, i.e., for the sake of Christ and his merit. Thus that faith is counted for righteousness (Ro 4:3,

²³ Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation," 63.

²⁴ Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation." 65.

²⁵ Carson, "The Vindication of Imputation," 67.

5, 9, 13) means that Christ grasped by faith is counted for righteousness as particularly Galatians 3:22 clearly shows. Thus in justification faith comes into consideration not as a praiseworthy virtue, not as a meritorious quality, not as a genuine basis, but only as the receiving and appropriating means.²⁶

Hoenecke's argument is similar to Carson's. Hoenecke shows that faith always has an object in which it trusts faith and thus faith is a means or instrument by which a person is counted righteous. Hoenecke adds to the argument by pointing out how the words "faith" and "receiving" are synonymous and how Scripture says both faith "purifies" and Christ's blood "purifies." Faith is trust that Christ has earned forgiveness and righteousness which the believer simply receives. This is how faith is synonymous with receiving. Also, faith and Christ's blood can both purify not because faith itself is meritorious but because it apprehends or receives Christ's blood. The blood of Christ is what actually purifies sinners.

Lastly, what of Gundry's criticism that nowhere in Scripture does it say explicitly that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer? There are three exegetical responses to Gundry. First, Romans 5:12–21 clearly shows that just as Adam's sin is imputed to the world so is Christ's righteousness. This passage will be discussed later in this thesis.²⁷ Secondly, the backdrop of Romans 4 is Romans 3:21–26. So even though in

²⁶ Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatic*, vol. 3, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 361–362.

²⁷ "Although the term [to impute] does not appear in Romans 5, the idea is evident throughout Paul's comparison and contrast between Adam and Christ. Under Adam's headship, the whole race is guilty and corrupt; under Christ's headship, many are justified and made alive. These passages unmistakably teach that the righteousness by which the believer stands worthy before God's judgment is *alien*: that is, belonging properly to someone else. It is Christ's righteousness imputed, not the believer's

Romans 4 there is no explicit mentioning of Christ's righteousness as the righteousness which is imputed, it is hard to see how Paul's readers would have come to any other conclusion considering Christ's sacrificial work on behalf of sinners in Romans 3:21–26.²⁸ Lastly, 1 Corinthians 1:30 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 clearly state that Christ has become righteousness for sinners.²⁹

4.4 Conclusion to Chapter Four

The imputation is the central nerve uniting Christology, atonement and justification. In justification, the righteousness of Christ is not a substance but a status given. This status given is earned by Christ's perfect life and death. Faith in the doctrine of justification is instrumental. It merely receives the righteousness of Christ. Faith itself is not counted as righteousness. This was the first point of the central thesis in that the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world is the core of objective justification. The next chapter deals with the exegetical foundation of objective justification in Scripture and when the imputation of Christ's righteousness takes place.

inherent righteousness—even if produced by the gracious work of the Spirit.” Horton, “Traditional Reformed View,” 99.

²⁸ Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 109.

²⁹ 2 Corinthians 5 is dealt with later in this thesis. Carson responds to Gundry's criticism of using 1 Corinthians 1:30 to support the imputation of Christ's righteousness by arguing that Christ became righteousness, sanctification and redemption for us in different ways. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” 77.

CHAPTER FIVE

OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION AND THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO THE WORLD

5.1 Introduction to Chapter Five

This chapter deals with the exegetical foundation to objective justification. In doing so it unpacks the second point of the central thesis: objective justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world. The first section looks at objective justification in Romans 3:21–26 and 4:25. This section shows that the universal atonement Christ earns for the world is distinct from objective justification and is the legal foundation for objective justification. The second section looks at Romans 5:12–21 and shows how there is a symmetry in the doctrine of objective justification. Just as Adam's sin is imputed to the entire world so Christ's righteousness is imputed to the whole world. The last section is on 2 Corinthians 5:16–21. It looks at how in Paul's writings the words "justification" and "reconciliation" are used as synonyms. This section analyzes how Paul teaches that God is reconciled to the whole world by not imputing the world's sins against it. The reason for God's non-imputation of sins is because Christ has become righteousness for us by Him acting as the representative or head of mankind. Romans 5:12–21 and 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 both exegetically demonstrate that objective justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world because Jesus in His life and death represent the world as the second or new Adam.

5.2 Romans 3:21–26 and Romans 4:25 on Universal Atonement and Objective Justification

Romans 3:21–26 and 4:25 tie Christ’s universal atonement for the world to His objective justification of the world. In Romans 3:21–26 “the righteousness of God” is the alien righteousness which He imputes to believers through faith. This righteousness is not an attribute of God nor an activity of God as discussed earlier. It is the righteousness which is “made known” in the Gospel (Romans 1:16–17). The necessity for subjective justification and its basis is given in verses 23–24—all people are sinners. πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ- “For all have sinned and falling short of the glory of God.” The subject of verse 24 is the same as the subject of verse 23 (“all”) and can be translated as follows: δικαιούμενοι δωρεὰν τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ- [and all] “are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The participle δικαιούμενοι is present tense because it is a gnomic present denoting a general truth.¹ The participle is modifying πάντες from verse 23. Therefore, all have sinned and fallen short and are justified. While verses 21–22 are about subjective justification, verse 23 is about objective justification. The basis of subjective justification, the reason why faith is not a work, is because Christ has already earned justification for all sinners. Paul then goes on to link objective justification to Christ’s universal atonement. In verse 24 Paul says that the justification earned for all is due to the ἀπολυτρώσεως “redemption” which is in Christ

¹ Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1982), 8–9.

(see 3.4.2 for a discussion on ἀπολύτρωσις). Paul explains redemption as atonement in Christ’s blood in verse 25 as ἱλαστήριον . . . ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι “an atonement in/through his blood” (see 3.4.3 for a discussion on ἱλαστήριον). The legal basis for objective justification is Christ’s universal atonement which is then received through faith διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως as verse 25 also says.

Romans 4:25 makes it clear that objective justification rests on Christ’s universal atonement. The verse says, ὃς παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν καὶ ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν and is translated “who [Christ] was handed over on account of our trespasses and was raised on account of our justification.” There is a parallelism in this verse. The first διὰ is translated as causal by most exegetes (“on account of” or “because”) and so should the second διὰ to keep the parallelism.² In the second half of the verse, it says that Jesus “was raised on account of our justification.” The word “justification” is translated from δικαίωσις which means “justification, vindication, acquittal.”³ The only other place in the New Testament that this word is used is in Romans 5:18 which is about objective justification as well. The noun δικαίωσις can be translated as “justification” because in Greek abstract concepts can be formed by adding the suffix -σις.⁴

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 243–244.

³ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature Third Revised Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 250. Hereafter abbreviated BDAG.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 341.

Romans 3:21–26 and 4:25 show that objective justification rests on Christ’s universal atonement. A. L. Graebner writes that universal atonement was the payment for our debt and Christ’s resurrection was the proclamation that the debt of the world has been paid and that all are justified by Christ.⁵ Without Christ’s resurrection the world would never know for sure if the debt had been truly paid off or not. As Paul writes, without the resurrection we would still be in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17). From these passages the basis for the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the world (objective justification) is the universal atonement of the world.

5.3 Romans 5:12–21 and the Imputation of Adam’s Sin and the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness to the World

Romans 5:12–21 is the “high point” of Paul’s epistle to the Romans.⁶ This section is the basis or the foundation for Paul’s earlier discussion on justification in Romans.⁷ It explains why Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer and not faith itself and how faith is only receptive due to how all of mankind is represented by two heads: Adam or Jesus. The whole point of Romans 5:12–21 is to build the parallel between these two individuals and how their action of either sin or of righteousness affects the entire world.

⁵ A. L. Graebner, “Soteriology,” *Theological Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (October 1901), 196.

⁶ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 6.

⁷ Brian Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness Paul’s Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 114.

The key to understanding Romans 5:12–21 is how one interprets verse 12 with the critical phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον and how it ties it into verses 18 and 19. Cranfield in his commentary lists six main grammatical/theological interpretations of the phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον.⁸ The first three interpretations take the phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ as a prepositional phrase “in whom” instead of as a conjunction “because.”⁹ Augustine and John Andrew Quenstedt both held to ἐφ’ ᾧ being a prepositional phrase.¹⁰ The prepositional phrase interpretation suffers from several weaknesses. First, the antecedent to the prepositional phrase would be either “death” or “one man,” but the distance from the prepositional phrase to either proposed antecedent is too great.¹¹ Second, the phrase ἐφ’ ᾧ has the meaning of “because” elsewhere in Paul’s writings such as 2 Corinthians 5:4 and Philippians 3:12.¹²

The other three interpretations (four-six) take ἐφ’ ᾧ as the conjunction “because.” The fourth interpretation is “because all sinned” in the sense that each person commits actual sins in their person and thus all die. This is the interpretation of the Pelagians and has four defects with it. First, not all die due to committing actual sins in their person

⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans I–VIII* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 274–275.

⁹ Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1–8* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 417–418.

¹⁰ Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 418.

¹¹ Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 418.

¹² Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 322.

such as infants. Second, verses 13–14 speak against the Pelagian view because Paul writes that people are still sinful and die even though their sinning is not like Adam’s. Third, Paul throughout Romans 5:12–21 says that all are sinful and all die because of the one man, Adam. Fourth, the parallel running throughout Romans 5:12–21 between Adam and Christ would be nullified.¹³ Murray, says if the Pelagian exegesis was correct then everything that Paul taught earlier about how human works do not justify would be turned upside down.

What Paul has been controverting in the earlier part of the epistle is that men are justified by their own works. He is establishing the truth that men are justified and attain to life by what another has done, the one man Jesus Christ. How vacuous and contradictory would be any appeal to the parallel obtaining in the relation of Adam to the race if the Pelagian construction were that of Paul, namely, that men die simply because of their own sin and not at all on the ground of Adam’s sin! Paul’s doctrine of justification would be nullified if, at this point, the parallel he uses to illustrate and confirm it is after the pattern of the Pelagian construction. For it would mean that men are justified by their own voluntary action just as they come under condemnation solely by their own voluntary sin.¹⁴

Due to the parallelism in Romans 5:12–21 between sin and death to justification and life, to say people are sinners by their own actions would have to entail we are also justified by our own actions! This is exactly the opposite of what Paul has been writing since Romans 3:23 ff.

The fifth interpretation is that “because all sinned” is referring to how Adam, being the natural head of mankind has passed down sin. In other words, all sin in their

¹³ Murray, *The Imputation of Sin*, 10–11.

¹⁴ Murray, *The Imputation of Sin*, 11–12.

person because of the corrupt human nature they have inherited from Adam. This is the argument of Michael Middendorf in his commentary.¹⁵ The sixth interpretation is the phrase “because all sinned” means that Adam’s sin is imputed to all people. Everyone dies not because of their own actual sins but because God has imputed the one man’s sin to all people.¹⁶

Of the six interpretations the last one is the most likely. The first matter to point out is that the view of Adam’s sin being imputed does not deny that sin is also inherited from Adam. Original sin consists both of Adam’s sin being imputed to all and sin being inherited from him.¹⁷ Romans 5:12–21 is dealing with the former and not the latter. John Murray gives a good exegetical argument for Adam’s sin being imputed in Romans 5:12–21. First, Romans 5:12–21 is drawing a parallel between the one sin of Adam and the one righteous act of Christ.

If the relationship to Adam were simply that of seminal union, that of being in his loins, this would not provide any explanation why the sin imputed is the first sin *alone*. We were as much in his loins when he committed other sins. . . . Hence some additional factor is required to explain the restriction to the one sin of Adam.¹⁸

¹⁵ Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 421.

¹⁶ George Stoeckhardt, *Epistle to the Romans* trans. Erwin W. Koehlinger (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1980), 68. This is the interpretation of traditional Reformed theologians such as Charles Hodge, John Murray, etc. as well as Lutheran theologians such as John Andrew Quenstedt, Adolf Hoenecke, Francis Pieper, etc.

¹⁷ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, 37.

¹⁸ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, 38–39.

Murray's argument is that Romans 5:12–21 has to be about Adam's sin being imputed rather than inherited because why aren't all the other sins that Adam committed also inherited? Why is it just the one sin imputed? Second, the parallel passages to Romans 5:12–21 are 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45–49 which also show that God deals with mankind under “the two headships of the two Adams.”¹⁹ Third, the problem with taking Romans 5:12–21 to be about sin inherited from Adam is that it breaks the analogy between Adam and Christ. Adam as a type of Christ and how his sin affects the world is similar to how Christ's righteousness affects the world. But we know that Christ's righteousness is not inherited or infused into us in justification but is imputed. In the same way Adam's sin is imputed and not inherited in Romans 5:12–21. Inherited original sin is dealt with in a different manner and will be discussed in the next chapter. Thus, the parallelism between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12–21 demands “an identity of *modus operandi*” between Adam and Christ.²⁰

In contrast Michael Middendorf in his commentary on Romans gives four reasons against the view of Adam's sin being imputed instead of a sinful nature being inherited. First, ἥμαρτον is only used by Paul to refer to actual sins such as in Romans 2:12 and 3:23. Second, we do not see the idea of Adam's sin being imputed to others in rabbinic or other first century literature. Third, there are various Old Testament passages which teach that God does not punish people for their parents' sins, such as Ezekiel 18. Lastly,

¹⁹ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 39.

²⁰ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 40.

1 Corinthians 15:22 is not an exact parallel passage and cannot be used to defend the imputation of Adam's sin because 1 Corinthians 15:22 has a present tense verb whereas Romans 5:12 has a past tense verb.²¹

The problem with Middendorf's first critique is that it is similar to the "realist position" that all were in Adam seminally and thus all sinned (like Levi being in Abraham's loins in Hebrews). Both Middendorf's and the realist position set up two different ways by which people relate to these two heads of mankind. Brian Vickers gives a good summary on why the realist position and Middendorf's position do not fit the parallelism of Romans 5.

So the realist interpretation must connect humanity to Christ by some means other than that which connects humanity to Adam since the relationship to Christ cannot be seminal or through human nature. On one hand the link is existential but on the other forensic. Thus people are "sinners" because of their own actual sin, albeit in Adam, but "righteous" because of Christ's obedience—unless it is argued that being "made righteous" refers primarily to a transformation rather than a verdict.²²

Justification is forensic and not transformative nor inherited. The parallelism demands that ἡμαρτον be taken as "all sinned" because Adam sinned not because they sinned having a corrupt nature. The parallelism demands this because Paul doesn't finish the parallel in verse 12 until verses 18–19.²³

²¹ Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 419–420. Surprisingly, Middendorf uses some of the same arguments against the imputation of Christ's righteousness that Progressive Reformed exegetes use such as Robert Gundry in "Non-imputation," 27–29.

²² Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 130.

²³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 319. That is why translators put a long dash at the end of verse 12 in many English translations such as NASB, NRSV, ESV, etc.

At this juncture it is necessary to address how other Lutherans besides Middendorf have espoused the view that Romans 5:12–21 is about original sin being inherited from Adam instead of being imputed. Johann Gerhard in his *Theological Commonplaces* is one of them. Gerhard focuses on how original sin is inherited or passed down from Adam to his posterity.²⁴ He even cites Romans 5:12–21 as proof for this.²⁵ However, Gerhard does recognize that Adam’s sin is imputed. Yet, the imputation is always secondary to how sin is inherited by natural generation.²⁶ It is because Gerhard interprets Romans 5:12–21 in a realist fashion that he denies the idea of justification being for all people. Rather he limits Romans 5:18–19 to only believers.²⁷

²⁴ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces On Original Sin On Actual Sins On Free Choice*, trans. Richard J. Dinda and ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes and Heath R. Curtis (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 29, 31, 65.

²⁵ Gerhard on Romans 5:12 and 19 realizes that Adam and Christ are paralleled and has difficulty with the parallel because Christ’s righteousness is not propagated by natural generation. So Gerhard makes the strange argument that Romans 5:12–21 is talking about regeneration instead of justification. Johann Gerhard, *On Sin and Free Choice*, 36.

²⁶ “The matter itself also teaches that this imputation cannot be excluded, for as soon as our first parents sinned, their transgression was considered the transgression of the entire human race. Surely, then, it has been imputed to all of us, and for this we were condemned before we were born.” Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces XIX On Justification Through Faith*, trans. Richard J. Dinda and ed. Joshua J. Hayes, Heath R. Curtis and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 26.

²⁷ “If the comparison of Adam and Christ is extended beyond the limits of the apostolic text, it could be inferred that the righteousness of Christ is propagated into all people without any respect to faith or unbelief just as the sin of Adam is propagated into us through natural generation.” Johann Gerhard, *On Justification through Faith*, 26. Gerhard would be correct if Romans 5:12–21 is taken in a realist fashion. If Romans 5:12–21 is teaching original sin as inherited then it would mean that Christ’s righteousness is somehow propagated into people irrespective of faith which makes no sense with what Paul and the rest of Scripture teaches. Yet if Romans 5:12–21 is not talking about propagation but imputation then Gerhard’s concern is addressed and the parallel in Romans 5:12–21 is kept intact without having to posit two separate ways that Adam the first head of mankind and Christ the second head of mankind relate to the world.

Charles Gieschen in his article “Original Sin in the New Testament” also takes a realist perspective on Romans 5:12–21. He flat out denies the imputation of Adam’s sin and argues that this passage has to be about original sin being inherited because sin has enslaved all of creation. Since all of creation is enslaved to sin, everyone who is born is automatically enslaved to sin. The concept of Adam’s sin having to be imputed is an unnecessary concept.²⁸ There are several problems with this line of reasoning. First, it is not a question whether the imputation of Adam’s sin is a “necessary” concept or not. Is the concept taught in Romans 5:12–21? Second, the imputation of Adam’s sin should not be set in opposition to sin enslaving creation. The enslavement of sin is addressed in Romans 6-8. This is Romans 5 which sets the foundation for the next three chapters. Why does sin enslave? Why is creation stuck in bondage? It was God’s choice to do so because He imputed Adam’s sin to all of mankind, thus putting all creation in bondage. Lastly, Gieschen is unable to explain why his interpretation does not break the parallel between Adam and Christ. If Romans 5:12–21 is talking about objective justification which is an imputation of Christ’s righteousness and a legal verdict upon all of mankind because of Christ (which Gieschen agrees it is) then why is Romans 5:12 not about the legal verdict of Adam’s sin being imputed unto all mankind? Gieschen runs into the

²⁸ “Furthermore, Paul speaks in 5:18 of sin’s enslavement of all creation which results in God’s universal condemnation of fallen man. The possibility of this condemnation was pronounced *before* the fall into sin...The moment Adam and Eve tore into the fruit, sin shackled the cosmos and God’s condemnation was effected upon all humanity. There, in Adam and Eve, all died. There all lost the image of God. Neither this sin nor God’s verdict against it need to be individually ‘imputed’ to sinners who are already dead and enslaved.” Charles A. Gieschen, “Original Sin in the New Testament,” *Concordia Journal* 31, no. 4 (October 2005): 369.

same problem as Gerhard except he does not go the route of Gerhard in saying Romans 5:12–21 is about regeneration instead of justification.

Concerning Middendorf’s second critique, even if the concept of representative head is not in extrabiblical literature, it is in 1 Corinthians 15. The question that Middendorf has to answer is this: If representative headship is not in Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Corinthians 15, why is Adam and not Eve or Satan picked for bringing sin and death into the world? The reason is that Adam, being the head of mankind, bears a greater responsibility than his wife or Satan for the fall into sin.²⁹ This leads to Middendorf’s critique that 1 Corinthians 15:22 is not a legitimate parallel passage because it has a present tense verb.³⁰ However, the present tense can be used to state a general truth (the general or gnomic present).³¹ This would make the most sense because 1 Corinthians 15:21 makes the general truth claim that by one man, Adam, has come death so through one man, Jesus, has come the resurrection of the dead. Thus, 1 Corinthians 15:22 is making the general truth that “for just as in Adam all die, so also all will certainly be made alive in Christ.”³² Which is true because both believes and

²⁹ David P. Kuske, *A Commentary on Romans 1–8* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2007), 265.

³⁰ “Fourth and finally, 1 Cor 15:22 is not an exact parallel as support for the interpretation that all sinned in or with Adam. There Paul states: ‘For just as in Adam all are dying’ . . . Note the present tense of ἀποθνήσκουσιν, ‘(they) are dying.’ Paul does *not* say: ‘All *died* in Adam.’ 1 Cor 15:22 could be understood then as expressing that all are in Adam, and as a result all sin, and throughout history, all people are continually dying.” Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 420.

³¹ Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 8–9.

³² The verb ζωοποιηθήσονται is a gnomic or logical future just as ἀποθνήσκουσιν is a gnomic present. See Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 36. It is in future tense

unbelievers will be made alive or resurrected on the Last Day. Believers will be resurrected to eternal life but unbelievers to eternal condemnation.

Lastly, Middendorf argues that Ezekiel 18 and other Old Testament passages state that the children are not punished for the sins of the parents. However, that same objection can be used against Middendorf's position. Why are all those who have descended from Adam punished by inheriting Adam's sin? The objection that it seems "unfair" or "unjust" that Adam's sin effects the entire world is addressed in chapter 6 on the section "The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Objective Justification and Personal Ontology" (6.5).

Therefore, Romans 5:12 sets the stage for the parallel between Adam and Christ which will be developed in the following verses. However, before finishing the parallel in verses 18–19, Paul makes two parenthetical thoughts. He makes these thoughts in order to avoid any misunderstandings which could arise. The first parenthesis is verses 13–14. In these verses Paul shows how people before Moses were still sinful and charged with Adam's sin even though they did not have the Mosaic Law. The second parenthesis is verses 15–17 which sets up the contrasts between Adam and Christ. There are four differences in the Adam-Christ parallel. In verse 15 the first difference is how Christ's gift of righteousness is superior in quality. What Christ has done is much greater than the sin which Adam has caused. The second difference is in verse 16 which has to

because it will certainly happen. This is the same as in Romans 5:19. In 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 all people, both believers and unbelievers, will be raised because of Christ's resurrection, believers to the resurrection of eternal life whereas unbelievers to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:28–29).

do with quantity. Christ's justification of the world covers not only Adam's first sin but all the sins that have followed it afterwards. The third difference is in verses 16–17 and has to do with the consequence of what each head of humanity has done. Adam's sin has the consequence of condemnation and death to all whereas Christ's one act of righteousness leads to the exact opposite: justification and life to all men.³³ The last difference is in verse 17 and has to do with faith. Paul writes that those who "receive" (λαμβάνοντες) the grace and the righteousness Christ earns will reign "in life." Jesus' one act has earned justification and life for everybody but only those who receive it (i.e. have faith in Christ) will rule with Christ in eternity. Those who reject the free gift offered will instead receive eternal condemnation.

After these two parenthetical explanations, Paul finishes the parallel he began in verse 12 with verses 18–19. Verse 18 begins with Ἄρα οὖν "Therefore then . . ." It is a marker of drawing the conclusion of what has been stated earlier.³⁴ Paul is restating and completing verse 12.³⁵ What is unique to verse 18 is how it has six prepositional phrases (three for Adam and three for Christ) with no subject or verb.³⁶ The parallel is set up with the construction of Ἄρα οὖν ("Therefore then") . . . οὕτως καὶ ("thus also") . . . The

³³ Harold Bult, *Notes on the Epistle to the Romans I–VIII* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1988), 66.

³⁴ BDAG, 127.

³⁵ Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 146.

³⁶ Kuske, *A Commentary on Romans 1–8*, 283.

first three prepositional phrases are Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι' ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα “Therefore then, as through one trespass resulted in condemnation to all men . . .” The first preposition is δία with the genitive and is a marker of means.³⁷ The second preposition is εἰς and it is dealing with extent- “all men.” The third preposition is εἰς again and it describes the result- “resulted in condemnation.”³⁸ These three prepositional phrases are mirrored in the second half of the verse: οὕτως καὶ δι' ἑνὸς δικαίωματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς “thus also through one act of righteousness results in justification which is life to all.” The δία is again a marker of means with the first εἰς being extent and the second describing the result.

There are three more points of translation that need to be worked out. First, the word δικαίωματος means “right action.” This is different than how it is translated in verse 16 as “justification.” David Kuske gives a good reason why this is the case.

The “right action” Paul is referring to is Christ’s saving work viewed as one collective act (cf. comments on ὑπακοῆς in v19). Back in verse 16, δικαίωμα meant “a declaration of acquittal” since it was the antonym of κατάκριμα. Here it has the other of its two meanings since it is the antonym of παράπτωμα.³⁹

³⁷ Kuske, *A Commentary on Romans 1–8*, 282.

³⁸ Middendorf, *Romans 1–8*, 431.

³⁹ Kuske, *A Commentary on Romans 1–8*, 283.

Christ's one right action as we will see from verse 19 is His entire obedience of fulfilling the Law and His obedient death on the cross.⁴⁰ Secondly, the word δικαίωσιν is translated as "justification" as discussed in the previous section on Romans 4:25. Lastly, the noun ζωῆς is an epexegetical genitive and should be translated "justification which is life."⁴¹ Justification is life for the sinner because it is how we are reconciled to God. Therefore verse 18 should be translated as follows: "Therefore then, as through one trespass results in condemnation to all so also through one act of righteousness results in justification which is life to all."

Verse 19 is an explanation to verse 18 which is why it begins with the conjunction γὰρ "for." Verse 19 is translated as follows: "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were established as sinners so also through the obedience of the one man the many are certainly established as righteous."⁴² The point of verse 19 is to help clarify verse 18 and strengthen the parallel between Adam and Christ.

Paul uses ὡςπερ instead of ὡς as he did in verse 18 to make the point of equality between the two clauses even more emphatic. Paul uses a slightly different sentence structure to help us understand the two parts of verse 18 better. There are two changes: (1) The people affected are made the subject of the verb in verse

⁴⁰ This is the same word as used in Romans 8:4. John Piper writes, "This suggests that in Paul's mind the 'one act of righteousness' that resulted in our justification may well refer to the entire obedience of Jesus viewed as a single whole . . ." John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ Should we Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 112.

⁴¹ Max Zerwick, and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2007), 471. For a different perspective on what type of genitive ζωῆς is see Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 341.

⁴² Romans 5:19 ὡςπερ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί.

19 instead of the object of the preposition εἰς; and (2) Passive verbs and predicate nominatives express the results instead of εἰς result clauses.⁴³

Paul completes the parallel. Adam’s “one trespass” or “the disobedience of the one” is imputed to the whole world because he was the representative head of mankind. In the same way, Christ being the New Adam, the second representative head of mankind has his “one act of righteousness” or “the obedience of the one” imputed to the world.

There are three other exegetical points to make concerning verse 19. First, the word “many” πολλοί means “all” due to verse 18.⁴⁴ Secondly, the verb κατασταθήσονται is future tense. This could be a durative future which then would mean that this is an enduring condition.⁴⁵ Or it could be a logical or gnomic future which is stating a general truth that is certain. Thus, just as Adam’s sin is truly counted to all so Christ’s righteousness is also certainly counted to all.⁴⁶ Either the durative or the logical future would fit the parallel between Adam and Christ.⁴⁷ Lastly, there has been some debate on the verb that Paul uses in this verse to describe the effects of Adam’s disobedience and Christ’s obedience. The verb καθίστημι can mean “to assign someone a position of

⁴³ Kuske, *Romans 1–8*, 284.

⁴⁴ “As in verse 16, Paul is merely using ‘the multitudes’ to remind us that ‘all mankind’ is a tremendous number of people.” Kuske, *Romans 1–8*, 284.

⁴⁵ Kuske, *Romans 1–8*, 286.

⁴⁶ Edward W. A. Koehler, “Objective Justification,” in *Selected Articles on Objective Justification*, ed. Robert D. Preus (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 223). Douglas Moo also takes this as a logical future, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 345.

⁴⁷ I have opted for the logical future as reflected in the translation above, although either translation would work for understanding this verse to be about objective justification.

authority *appoint, put in charge*” or to “cause someone to experience someth., *make, cause . . .*”⁴⁸ Even though the dictionary definition of καθίστημι means “to make” or “to establish,” what is being referred to in Romans 5:19 is not a transformative making but rather a making of a legal status.⁴⁹ In other words, due to the context of how Paul speaks of justification in Romans and in this chapter, καθίστημι is forensic.⁵⁰ Therefore, καθίστημι is being used synonymously for λογίζομαι.⁵¹ Due to Adam’s one sin, the world is imputed or given the status of unrighteous and in the same way by Christ’s one act of righteousness the world is imputed or given the the status of righteous.

5.4 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 and Objective Justification

The last major text on objective justification is 2 Corinthians 5:16–21. Paul is defending his ministry in this section and bases his ministry on the message of reconciliation which he preaches. Before examining 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 it is important to look at how Paul uses the word “reconciliation” elsewhere in his epistles. In Romans 5 the word “reconciliation” is used by Paul interchangeably with “justification.” In Romans 5:9 Paul writes that the ungodly world, while still being God’s enemy was “justified” by Christ’s blood. Paul uses an aorist passive participle δικαιοθέντες “have

⁴⁸ BDAG, 492.

⁴⁹ Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness*, 122.

⁵⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 345.

⁵¹ On this point I agree with Robert Gundry, “The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” in *Justification What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 26.

been justified.” The participial phrase “have been justified” is referring to the previous verse on how Jesus showed His love for the world by sacrificially dying for it.

Beforehand, the world had the status of being sinners, but after Christ’s death the world now has the status of forgiven and justified.⁵² In verse 10 Paul summarizes what he was teaching in verses 6–9, but instead of using the word “justification” he uses the word “reconciliation” (κατηλλάγημεν) as a synonym. Therefore, the word “justification” in verse 9 is the same as “reconciliation” in verse 10.⁵³ This is important because of how Paul uses the word “reconciliation” in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 we read, “Now all these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation, because as God has (ἦν) reconciled (καταλλάσσω) the world to Himself in Christ, not counting (λογιζόμενος) to them (αὐτοῖς) their trespasses and appointing to us the message of reconciliation.”⁵⁴ In these two verses the verb ἦν (was) goes with the participle “reconciling” (καταλλάσσω). This is a periphrastic imperfect construction which should be translated past tense (“in Christ God has reconciled the world”).⁵⁵ The participle

⁵² John P. Meyer, “Objective Justification,” in *Our Great Heritage*, vol. 3, ed. Lyle W. Lange (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), 42.

⁵³ Meyer, “Objective Justification,” 43.

⁵⁴ My translation of 2 Corinthians 5:18–19. τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἑαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ καὶ δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς, ὡς ὅτι θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμον καταλλάσσων ἑαυτῷ, μὴ λογιζόμενος αὐτοῖς τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν καὶ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς.

⁵⁵ It is also possible that θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ is a sentence by itself with καταλλάσσων not attached to ἦν instead of being a periphrastic imperfect. If that is the case, it still would not make sense to translate the present tense participle καταλλάσσων as present time because it would not make sense. “For what

λογιζόμενος (“counting”) also gets its tense from the main verb ἦν and should be translated as past tense. The reason λογιζόμενος is a present tense participle is that the past action is timeless and its effect continues (i.e. durative).⁵⁶ The word λογιζόμενος “counting” is referring to the fact that because of Christ’s universal reconciliation or justification God continues to no longer impute the world’s sin to it.

The direct object of the participle λογιζόμενος is αὐτοῖς (“them”). The antecedent of the pronoun αὐτοῖς is “the world.”⁵⁷ It is the world’s sin that is not being imputed any longer. Therefore, Paul is not referring to subjective justification. Furthermore, we learn in Romans 4:6–8 Paul uses justification, being counted righteous, synonymously with forgiveness or the non-imputation of sin. Therefore, 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 shows that God is reconciled to the entire world because the whole world’s sins are not imputed, i.e. the entire world is justified.

Paul summarizes his defense of the Gospel message he was proclaiming as God’s ambassador with verse 21: “Who did not know sin was made sin on our behalf, in order

would be the sense of the statement: God *was* in Christ, reconciling, *at the present time*, the world?” Th. Engelder, *Objective Justification: A Series of Three Articles from Concordia Theological Monthly* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1981), 665.

⁵⁶ Engelder, *Objective Justification*, 666.

⁵⁷ “The antecedent of αὐτοῖς is κόσμος...The reason why the apostle did not repeat the κόσμος or rather did not use the personal pronoun in the singular, but used the form αὐτοῖς need not concern us here. Very likely he is impressing upon us that the object of the reconciliation is not the world as a hazy abstract, but the world as made up of individuals. Every single individual should know that the objective reconciliation includes him.” Engelder, *Objective Justification*, 574.

that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”⁵⁸ What does it mean that Christ was “made sin on our behalf”? Jesus could not become sin in the sense of essence or substance but rather that He was “in some way identified with sin.”⁵⁹ The only way Christ could be “made sin” is by Christ being a sacrifice for the sin of the world.⁶⁰ The sin of the world was thus imputed or counted to Him and in this sense Christ was “made sin.”

The phrase “become the righteousness of God” is crucial in determining if Christ’s righteousness is imputed. The Progressive Reformed want to understand this phrase to mean God’s salvific power in saving sinners. There are two arguments against this interpretation. Earlier, in verse 19, the non-imputation of sins was a forensic action of God, and Christ being made sin is also a forensic imputation of guilt. Therefore, it would make more sense that we “become the righteousness of God” in a forensic manner by imputation. Just as Christ did not remove sin in a transformative sense, so we do not become righteous in a transformative sense either. Secondly, the entire context of this passage is about the reconciliation which Christ has earned. This reconciliation is synonymous with justification, a forensic action as we have seen with Paul’s synonymous usage of the terms reconciliation and justification in Romans 5:9–10 and in 2 Corinthians

⁵⁸ My translation of 2 Corinthians 5:21. τὸν μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ.

⁵⁹ Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness*, 160.

⁶⁰ Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness*, 166–167.

5:18–19. Thus, it would make more sense to interpret 2 Corinthians 5:21 not in a transformative righteousness of God but rather as a legal status which is given because of Christ.⁶¹ N. T. Wright wants to interpret the phrase “the righteousness of God” as God’s covenantal faithfulness. Such an interpretation also does not make sense in 2 Corinthians 5:21 because it is not possible for a person to become God’s faithfulness to His covenant.⁶² The context of 2 Corinthians 5 argues for verse 21 to be a forensic parallel between Christ and the sinful world. Just as Christ has the world’s sins imputed to Him being the perfect sacrifice for the world so also we “become the righteousness of God” in the sense of Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us. The verb γίνομαι in verse 21 is being used synonymously with the verb λογίζομαι just as in Romans 5:19 the verb καθίστημι was used synonymously with λογίζομαι.

In summary, 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 and 21 are referring to objective justification. God has reconciled or justified the world through Christ in not counting the world’s sins against it and counting Christ’s righteousness to it. What is interesting though, is how verse 21 has the phrase “in Him” which is referring to Christ. The connection of imputation to union with Christ is an important part of the Traditional Reformed structure to justification and will be covered in the next chapter.

⁶¹ Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness*, 173.

⁶² “How does one *become* God’s faithfulness to his covenant? Even if one argues that believers are living proof of such faithfulness, it is still not the same things as *being* God’s covenantal faithfulness. The forensic element of 2 Corinthians 5:21 argues forcefully against the covenantal faithfulness view. The righteousness of God in judging the sin of the world is clearly evident in this text.” Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness*, 182.

5.5 Conclusion to Chapter Five

In chapters three and four it was shown that the doctrine of the imputation ties together Christology, atonement, and justification. In this chapter we have looked at how in objective justification the righteousness of Christ is imputed or counted to the world. Faith apprehends or receives Christ's righteousness which is subjective justification. Faith itself is not counted as righteousness but Christ's redemptive work that He accomplishes in His universal atonement for the world. The universal atonement of Christ is the legal foundation to objective justification. Christ's righteousness is imputed or counted to the world, and the sin of the world is imputed or counted to Christ. The reason for this is because Christ is the new head or representative of the whole world.

This is a significant point because some Lutheran theologians have held that the imputation of Christ's righteousness only happens in subjective justification and not objective justification. Robert Preus argues this in his book, *Justification and Rome*.

When does the imputation of Christ's righteousness take place? It did not take place when Christ, by doing and suffering, finished His work of atonement and reconciled the world to God. Then and there, when the sins of the world were imputed to Him and He took them, Christ became our righteousness and procured for us remission of sins, justification and eternal life. . . . But the imputation of His righteousness to us takes place when we are brought to faith.⁶³

Robert Preus quotes John Andrew Quenstedt in support of his position. Quenstedt writes, "The righteousness of Christ is the effect of His office. The imputation is the application

⁶³ Robert Preus, *Justification and Rome* (St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 1997), 72.

of the effect of his office.”⁶⁴ What Preus and Quenstedt write is true depending on how one defines the imputation. If the imputation is the application or conferral of Christ’s righteousness then the imputation must be reserved for subjective justification alone. The distinction between the acquisition and the appropriation of righteousness is a critical one in distinguishing between subjective and objective justification.⁶⁵ However, in the previous chapter we looked at how the word “impute” means “to count.” The idea is that of someone taking someone else’s place or paying a debt on behalf of another and that being counted to the one who could not pay. In Romans 5:12-21 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 we also saw that Christ is the New Adam or New Head of mankind whose actions “count” for all of mankind as their substitute. Thus, imputation can be taken in the sense not of conferral but of someone doing something on behalf of another. But that person who is being represented can reject such a substitute and the payment made on their behalf. This is why Paul makes his parenthetical comments in Romans 5:15-17 in which he says that the benefits of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the world is only received through faith. Therefore, the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is to the whole world. Imputation not in the sense that Preus and Quenstedt meant it as a conferral but imputation in the sense of a counting or a judgment on someone’s behalf.

⁶⁴ John Andrew Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica, sive Systema Theologicum*, Par. III, Cap. 8, S. 2, q. 5, *Observatio* 19 (II, 787) translated and quoted by Robert Preus, *Justification and Rome*, 73.

⁶⁵ “Speaking according to the acquisition of salvation, He is wroth with no man any longer, but speaking according to the appropriation (Zueignung), He is wroth with everyone who is not in Christ.” *Justification—Objective and Subjective: A Translation*, trans. Kurt Marquardt (Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1982), 10.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS AND OBJECTIVE JUSTIFICATION

6.1. Introduction to Chapter Six

Chapter Six deals with the third part of the central thesis that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the core of objective justification. This chapter describes five aspects of the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification. First, that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the essence of justification. The imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is the same thing as the forgiveness of sins. Second, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is by grace and is immediate. This section discusses how there are two types of imputation (by works or by grace) and two modes of imputation (immediate or mediate). Third, the imputation in subjective and objective justification is the same imputation of Christ's righteousness. There are not two separate imputations, one for the world and the other for individuals when they come to faith. Fourth, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification (and also in subjective justification) is based on personal or relational ontology. In Scripture there are different ontologies as Johann Gerhard shows in his discussion on persons and the Trinity. This distinction in ontology helps answer the question of the imputation of Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness to the world being "unfair" or "unjust." Last, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification should be seen in the context of union with Christ. There are two types of union with Christ: the mystical union and representational union. The mystical union

follows subjective justification and cannot be the context for objective justification.

Representational union on the other hand is the best way of viewing the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification.

6.2 The Essence of Justification: The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness and the Forgiveness of Sins

6.2.1 The Traditional Reformed Position of Dividing Justification into Two Parts

The Traditional Reformed view in the imputation controversy consistently followed their theological tradition of separating justification into two parts: the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of sins. They did so in an attempt to defend the doctrine of Christ's righteousness being imputed contra to the Progressive Reformed and New Perspective which denied it.⁶⁶ John Piper in his book *The Future of Justification* divides justification into two parts in order to show that it is not enough to say that sinners are forgiven but that they also have to have a positive righteousness.⁶⁷ Michael Horton takes the same approach in defending the imputation of Christ's righteousness arguing that forgiveness alone is not enough on judgment day but

⁶⁶ For the terms "Traditional Reformed view," "Progressive Reformed view," and "New Perspective" see Chapter One Section 1.3 "Status of the Controversy Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness." These views are taken from *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011).

⁶⁷ "With this in mind, we return to the law-court and the meaning of justification. If an *omniscient* and *just* judge found a person guilty as charged, the court would not say that clemency or forgiveness gives rise to the declaration of a *status of righteous*. Forgiveness and clemency can commute a sentence, but they cannot mean the judge *finds in the defendant's favor*." John Piper, *The Future of Justification A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 76.

the sinner also needs a positive righteousness given to him.⁶⁸ D. A. Carson writes justification cannot be “reduced to imputation.”⁶⁹ The Traditional Reformed consistently see justification as being broken up into two different but related parts: the forgiveness of sin and the imputation of righteousness.

6.2.3 The Lutheran Position on the Essence of Justification

The Lutheran theological tradition, on the other hand, has consistently taught that the essence of justification is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.⁷⁰ The forgiveness of sin and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness are not two parts to justification but simply two different ways of describing the same action of God.⁷¹ Lutheran theologians argued that to be forgiven is the same as to be declared righteous, basing their claim on Romans 4:5–8 where Paul equates being imputed righteous by God as the same as one’s sins being forgiven or not imputed. The *Book of Concord* defines justification as being the forgiveness of sins and being counted as righteous. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* says, “To acquire the remission of sins is to be justified. . . .”⁷² The *Formula*

⁶⁸ Michael Horton, “Traditional Reformed View,” in *Justification Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2011), 101.

⁶⁹ D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation,” in *Justification What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2004), 77.

⁷⁰ Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatic*, vol. 3, trans. James Langebartels (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 330.

⁷¹ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*. vol. 3, 337.

⁷² Consequi remissionem peccatorum est iustificari... AP IV (II). 76. Friedrich Bente, W. H. T. Dau, and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Concordia Triglotta: Die Symbolischen Bücher Der*

of Concord *The Solid Declaration* says the same thing, “. . . Scripture teaches us, the righteousness of faith before God merely consists in only mercy and certainly free reconciliation or remission of sins. . . .”⁷³

Johann Gerhard in his *Commonplaces* refutes the polemic that Lutherans could not agree on the formal cause or essence of justification and says that justification is not to be divided into two parts but that righteousness and forgiveness are the same. Gerhard uses the illustration of putting on clothing. To be clothed means the same as to cover one’s nakedness. So also, to say that I am imputed as righteous for Christ’s sake is the same as to say that I am forgiven.⁷⁴ Adolf Hoenecke in his dogmatics gives the argument from the Lutheran theologian Friedrich Adolph Philippi that being forgiven is the same as being imputed righteous. Philippi writes that the forgiveness of sins includes both sins of commission and sins of omission. The sins of omission are the righteous acts that the sinner failed to do. If the sins of omission are also forgiven, then he is considered to have fulfilled God’s Law and thus is righteous.⁷⁵ Therefore, to be forgiven is to be imputed as

Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche, Deutsch-Lateinisch Englisch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 142.

⁷³ . . . docet nos Scriptura, iustitiam fidei coram Deo tantummodo consistere in sola clementi et quidem gratuita reconciliatione seu remissione peccatorum. . . .” FC SD III. 30 *Concordia Triglotta*, 924.

⁷⁴ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces XIX On Justification Through Faith*, trans. Richard J. Dinda and ed. Joshua J. Hayes, Heath R. Curtis and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019), 380–381.

⁷⁵ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 332.

righteous for Christ's sake. They are just two different ways of describing how God saves sinners.

What would be the consequence of having justification consist in two parts instead of one? Some later Lutheran dogmaticians did divide justification into two parts as the Traditional Reformed do. Johann Wilhelm Baier was one of those dogmaticians. He argued that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the sinner first, and then the believer has his sins forgiven. He based the forgiveness of sin upon the righteousness of Christ being imputed to the believer.⁷⁶ Francis Pieper exposes the problem with dividing justification into two parts like Baier does: it creates two different objects of faith. If justification is kept as being only one action, there is only one object of faith. However, when it is divided it ends up creating two different objects of faith, and ultimately one of those object's becomes the believer's faith.

While Scripture and the Confessions thus know of only one object of justifying faith and use the terms "Christ," "Christ's righteousness," "Christ's obedience," "Christ's suffering," "Christ's merit," "forgiveness," "justification," etc., . . . as synonyms, some later Lutheran dogmaticians differentiated, as to the object of faith, between Christ's merit as the thing that justifies (*bonum iustificum res iustificata*) and justification, or remission of sins, itself, presenting only Christ or Christ's merit (the *bonum iustificum*) and not the forgiveness of sins, or justification itself, as the object of faith. . . . If this distinction were consistently applied—which happily is not always the case—one could no longer believe in the forgiveness of sins, or justification, on the basis of the gracious promise in the objective means of grace, but would have to deduce the fact that one is justified from the fact that one truly believes. In other words, when the sinner smitten by the Law asks: Does God forgive me my sins? he could not be directed to the forgiveness of sins pronounced in the Gospel, but would have to be instructed first of all to examine himself whether he has faith in the "*bonum iustificum*." Thus

⁷⁶ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 3, 334–336.

justifying faith would be based not on the objective promise of grace in the means of grace, but on itself...⁷⁷

To divide justification into two separate parts, if logically followed through, creates two different objects of faith. The sinner if in doubt of his forgiveness, cannot look to the righteousness of Christ given in the means of grace but instead has to first trust that he has the righteousness of Christ applied to himself. He has to look inward first at his own faith in Christ and from that conclude that he is indeed truly forgiven. This of course defeats the whole purpose of justification being an external action by God given through the means of grace to give sinners certainty of their salvation.

What this means for the doctrine of objective justification and the imputation of Christ's righteousness is that the non-imputation of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness are the same action. They are the same thing and are not two different acts. When Christ declared the world righteous (objective justification) by rising from the grave, showing that the payment for sin in His atoning sacrifice was sufficient, the world was both imputed righteous and forgiven at the same time. Therefore, in objective justification the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the same as the forgiveness of sins.

6.3 The Two Types and Two Modes of Imputation

There are two overarching ways of imputing or counting something in Scripture according to Paul in Romans 4:4–5. The one type of imputing something is due to wages

⁷⁷ Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 539–540.

or what someone is inherently due. The other type of imputing is by God's grace as a gift. Martin Chemnitz in his *Loci Theologici* discusses the two different ways things are imputed or counted to someone. When it comes to God imputing sin to the sinner the basis for that imputation is in the sinner himself. The imputing of sin to the ungodly is just and an inherent imputation. The imputation of righteousness to the ungodly is the exact opposite. This imputation has no basis in the sinner whatsoever and its sole basis is in Christ and His work freely given. Therefore, when guilt is imputed to the sinner it is just because of what the sinner inherently is. On the other hand, when a sinner is imputed Christ's righteousness it is a free gift not based on anything he has done or inherently is.⁷⁸ In objective justification the imputation of Christ's righteousness is of the type which is by grace.

While there are two types of imputation there are also two modes of imputation: mediate and immediate. How is Adam's sin imputed and how is Christ's righteousness imputed? The individual's own sins are imputed to him, but as we saw earlier in Romans 5:12–21, Adam's sin is also imputed. John Murray gives a good description of the difference between mediate and immediate imputation in regards to Adam's sin.

Looking at how Adam's sin is imputed will help in understanding the how or the mode of Christ's righteousness being imputed.

Immediate and antecedent imputation . . . must be distinguished from mediate and consequent. The former takes place immediately and is not mediated by hereditary corruption; the latter takes places mediately and is mediated by this

⁷⁸ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Volume II*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1989), 529.

corruption. In the former case the imputation of Adam's first sin precedes corruption in the order of nature and is reckoned to be the cause of corruption; in the latter case the imputation of the first sin follows hereditary corruption and is reckoned to be the effect.⁷⁹

Immediate imputation of Adam's sin is that Adam's sin is directly imputed or counted to every individual sinner whereas mediate imputation of Adam's sin is that Adam's sin is imputed to the individual sinner because the individual sinner has inherited a sinful nature. Murray gives four excellent reasons why Romans 5:12–21 is not speaking of a mediate imputation but an immediate imputation of Adam's sin. First, there is an “immediate conjunction of the sin of Adam and the death of all” (verses 12, 15 and 17).⁸⁰ Second, there is an “immediate conjunction of the sin of Adam and the condemnation of all” (verses 16 and 18).⁸¹ Third, there is an “immediate conjunction of the sin of Adam and the sin of all” (verses 12 and 19).⁸² Lastly, the parallelism between Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12–21 supports an immediate imputation rather than mediate. Just as Christ's righteousness is imputed not through the medium of receiving Christ's divine nature nor through a transfusion of righteousness but as a direct, external act, so is Adam's sin imputed not through receiving a sinful nature from our parents but as a direct

⁷⁹ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), 43.

⁸⁰ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 65.

⁸¹ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 67.

⁸² Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 68.

external act by God.⁸³ God imputes directly and immediately Adam's sin to every individual sinner just as He imputes directly and immediately Christ's righteousness to every individual sinner in objective justification.

Francis Pieper discusses the division of original sin into hereditary guilt and hereditary corruption. Hereditary guilt is the imputation of Adam's original sin to all of mankind and hereditary corruption is how sin "... by imputation of Adam's guilt is transmitted to all his descendants through the natural descent from the first fallen pair."⁸⁴ The basis of receiving the sinful nature is due to Adam's sin being imputed. Adolf Hoenecke writes the same thing in his dogmatics. Adam as the head of mankind has his first sin imputed to all, and because of the immediate imputation of his sin there is also a mediate imputation of an inherited sinful nature.⁸⁵

Therefore, in Scripture there are two modes of imputation: mediate and immediate. Adam's first sin is imputed immediately to all people. The sinful nature is imputed mediately to the individual and is based on the immediate imputation of Adam's sin. Christ's righteousness in objective justification is not imputed mediately but immediately. It is not imputed mediately because it would destroy the very definition of justification being a forensic declaration which is outside of the sinner and not based on anything in him or anything he can do.

⁸³ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 70.

⁸⁴ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:538.

⁸⁵ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics* vol. 2, 399–400.

6.4 The Imputation in Subjective and Objective Justification Being the Same Imputation of Righteousness

There is a two-fold symmetry to the doctrine of imputation. First, just as Adam's sin is imputed to the world so Christ's righteousness is imputed to the world. Second, just as the Christ's righteousness is imputed to all men so also the sins of all men including Adam's first sin is imputed to Christ. This second symmetry is not two separate acts but one. Similar to how the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of sins are two ways of describing the same act of God in Christ. Therefore, saying that the world's sins are imputed to Christ is the equivalent of saying the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the world. This is most clearly seen in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and how Christ has the world's sins imputed to Him so that His righteousness can be imputed to the world. It is by Adam's sin and all the sins that have been committed since (Romans 5:16) being imputed to Christ that His righteousness is imputed to the world.

The above symmetry of the world's sin being imputed to Christ and Christ's righteousness being imputed to the world is describing objective justification. Is the imputation of Christ's righteousness in subjective justification different than the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification? No, there is only one righteousness that Christ has earned not multiple. Theodore Engelder explains that there are not two justifications, two different types of forgiveness, but only one justification, one righteousness of Christ and one forgiveness. The righteousness of Christ and the

forgiveness that the individual receives is the same one that Christ has earned by His death and resurrection.⁸⁶

Is there still need to spend time and words on the *actus simplex*? This expression is quoted from an article by G. Stoeckhardt in *Lehre und Wehre* (35, p. 218). It will be sufficient to quote his words: “We speak and think of this great, important matter according to our human mode of conception, thus: God forgives the sin again and again” (there you have an *actus multiplex*) “which He has forgiven long ago. But in reality that which we can conceive only as a composite act is the continued repetition of the same act, an *actus simplex*.”⁸⁷

The righteousness of Christ is daily imputed to the believer through faith. This righteousness is the same righteousness Christ imputes to the world. It daily becomes the possession of the believer through the instrument of faith. While from our vantage point as earthly creatures, it seems like forgiveness is an *actus multiplex* (numerous actions), it is really only numerous applications of the same one act of God declaring the world righteous because of what Christ has done. The imputation of Christ’s righteousness in objective justification is the same imputation believers in Christ receive in subjective justification through faith in Christ. It is an *actus simplex* (one act) which we experience as multiple acts in time when the believer apprehends Christ’s righteousness daily by faith through the means of grace.

⁸⁶ Th. Engelder, *Objective Justification: A Series of Three Articles from Concordia Theological Monthly* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1981), 516.

⁸⁷ Engelder, *Objective Justification*, 516.

6.5 The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in Objective Justification and Personal Ontology

A reoccurring issue in the Lutheran doctrine of justification is the charge of “legal fiction.” That there are two types of imputation: one inherent and/or earned and one external and/or unearned show that there are two types of ontology.⁸⁸ The Lutheran doctrine of justification has been charged with legal fiction because the believer is imputed with Christ's righteousness but is still inherently a sinner. Furthermore, with the concept of Adam's sin being imputed to all of mankind, does this not contradict Scripture passages such as Ezekiel 18 where God says that the children will not be punished for the sins of the fathers? Lastly, N. T. Wright argues that the whole idea of the judge giving righteousness to someone is impossible.⁸⁹ The best answer to these various objections is that there are two different types of ontology which correspond to the two types of imputation that Paul shows in Romans 4:4–5.

These two types of ontology I am calling essentialist ontology and relational ontology.⁹⁰ Paul shows in Romans 4:4–5 that there is an external imputation or counting

⁸⁸ Ontology is the doctrine concerning “being.”

⁸⁹ “Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.” N. T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said*, 98.

⁹⁰ I am using the word “essentialist ontology” as Jordan Cooper does in *Union with Christ Salvation as Participation*. Cooper writes, “The term *essentialism* is one which has been used more recently by philosophers such as Brian Ellis and David Oderberg to distinguish the older Greek view, which prioritizes essence, over modern philosophies which reject such a category altogether. Plato is an essentialist because he views essence as the foundational category in which one should explain that which is real. . . . Other Christian essentialists adopt an Aristotelian realism rather than a Platonic one. While Plato and Aristotle agree on the fact that there are real essences in which individuals participate, they differ regarding several aspects of how precisely these essences cohere with physical reality.” Jordan Cooper, *Union with Christ Salvation as Participation* (Monee: Just and Sinner, 2021), 93. Cooper rightly points out

that is not based on the subject's actions or inner qualities. It is a real imputation or counting of something to someone. I call this a relational ontology. The second type of ontology is essentialist ontology and is the foundation to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox conception of justification being transformative rather than forensic. Johann Gerhard in defending Lutheran Christology shows that there are multiple ontologies in theology.

*From the undermining of the personal union [of Christ's two natures]. "If we attribute the attributes of divinity to the flesh essentially, we introduce Eutychianism; if accidentally, Nestorianism; and both of these undermine the personal union." We respond. We say that they are communicated to the assumed flesh neither essentially nor accidentally. . . . there is necessarily a third [possibility], something that can be proved from the article of the Trinity. "Begetting" is predicated about the Father, "being born" about the Son, "proceeding" about the Holy Spirit, and these are predicated neither essentially nor accidentally. Not the former, because that would be common to all the persons; not the latter, because accidents do not belong to God. Therefore they are predicated personally.*⁹¹

Gerhard exposes the weakness of essentialist ontology by using the doctrine of the Trinity. The Son is truly begotten but His being begotten is not done essentially otherwise He would be a separate God nor accidentally since then He would not be another Person (nor are there accidents in God). Thus, there is a personal or relational ontology

that essentialist ontology is used in the *Formula of Concord Solid Declaration* on the article "Original Sin" which speaks of original sin being an accident and not a substance or essence of our human nature (FC SD I. 54 and 56). Cooper writes, "The Formula of Concord affirms, unabashedly, that an essentialist metaphysic is indeed true." Cooper, *Union with Christ*, 8. Yet, Cooper goes too far in tying all forms of relational ontology to modern philosophy and to the "Radical Lutherans" such as Gerhard Forde and Oswald Bayer and thus arguing that such a concept of relational ontology is wrong and theologically suspect. Cooper, *Union with Christ* 61–78.

⁹¹ Johann Gerhard, *Theological Commonplaces: Exegesis IV On Christ*, trans. Richard J. Dinda, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 261.

which is not reducible to substance/essence or accidents. The concept of a personal or relational ontology would make sense of an external imputation of Christ's righteousness. The imputation of Christ's righteousness in justification is the giving of a legal status. It is how God will now relate to that person. The imputation of Christ's righteousness fits under personal or relational ontology instead of essentialist ontology. This answers both the charge of legal fiction and N. T. Wright's argument that righteousness is not a substance that is given. A person is righteous not essentially but relationally because of Christ. Furthermore, righteousness is not a substance as N. T. Wright mockingly claimed but is a legal status given to the sinner which tells him how God now relates to him.

The idea of two types of ontology help answer the objection of the imputation of Adam's sin to the world. The imputation of Adam's sin to all men is a key part in parallel between Adam and Christ's objective justification in Romans 5:12-21. Michael Middendorf in his commentary on Romans denies the imputation of Adam's sin because he doesn't recognize how there are different types of ontology.⁹² He along with others also use the argument from Ezekiel 18 to argue against the idea of representative headship of Adam.⁹³ John Murray gives a good answer to this objection of the imputation of Adam's sin by critiquing Charles Hodge, a fellow Traditional Reformed theologian, and his answer will help further understand justification and ontology.

⁹² Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 1-8* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), 422 and 433.

⁹³ Middendorf, *Romans 1-8*, 420.

John Murray disagrees with the definition that Hodge provides of Adam's sin being imputed. Hodge defines Adam's sin which is imputed to all people the "obligation to satisfy justice" which was not fulfilled.⁹⁴ In other words, it is not the guilt or the punishment which is imputed but the failure in keeping God's Law.⁹⁵ Murray gives several arguments on why more than just the failure of keeping the "obligation to satisfy justice" is imputed to the world. His first argument is that Romans 5:12 and 19 do not have such a restricted sense when they describe all being sinners due to Adam's sin. Furthermore, Paul speaks not only of death and condemnation coming to all people in Romans 5:12–19 but of all people being actual sinners.⁹⁶ Then Murray makes his last and strongest argument which is the parallel between Adam and Christ does not allow for only the judicial consequence being imputed and not the sin itself.

In justification, according to Reformed theology and Dr. Hodge's own position, it is not merely the *judicial benefit* of Christ's righteousness or obedience that is imputed to believers but the righteousness itself. It would be to evacuate Paul's doctrine of justification of its most precious and central significance to reduce the imputation to the judicial consequence. The judicial consequence flows from the imputation of the righteousness itself, and the two may not be equated. We should expect this same distinction and sequence to obtain on the other side of the parallel, namely, the imputation of Adam's sin.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 73.

⁹⁵ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 74.

⁹⁶ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 74–75.

⁹⁷ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 76.

To summarize, when Adam's sin is imputed to the world it is not just the judicial punishment. That is part of the complaint in Ezekiel 18. God is unfair in punishing us because our fathers committed the sin and we are being given the judicial consequence. In Romans 5 it is not just the judicial consequence or punishment that is imputed but the actual sin itself. All people are just as guilty as Adam because they have that first sin imputed to them not in essentialist ontological sense but in a relational or personal ontological sense. The objection that Ezekiel 18 would undermine the imputation of Adam's sin in Romans 5 does not hold up because when Adam's sin is imputed we are actually sinful in a relational manner. On the flip side, when Christ's righteousness is imputed to the world it is not just the judicial benefit of it but the actual righteousness of Christ. The world has a status or relationship of being in Christ which the next section in the thesis will explain more fully.

The discussion of the two ontologies and how Adam's sin is imputed is important in understanding the doctrines of original sin, justification and sanctification (sanctification in the narrow sense of the Christian's life following justification). Adolf Hoenecke writes that imputation of Adam's sin is both immediate (direct) and mediate (through means). Adam's sin is directly imputed to the entire world (immediate imputation) as the moral head of humanity. Since he is also the physical or natural head of humanity, everyone receives a sinful nature inhering in them. The mediate imputation (inheriting the sinful flesh) is based on the immediate imputation.⁹⁸ The immediate

⁹⁸ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol 2, 399–400.

imputation of Adam's sin is given a priority and is the cause of the mediate imputation.⁹⁹

The division of immediate and mediate imputation means that there are two parts of original sin: hereditary guilt and hereditary corruption. Hereditary guilt is the immediate imputation of Adam's sin and the hereditary corruption is the mediate imputation of the sinful nature.¹⁰⁰ This distinction in original sin corresponds to the two types of imputation or two ontologies. The immediate imputation or hereditary guilt is external (but still deserved) and fits under relational or personal ontology whereas the mediate imputation or hereditary guilt is inherent and fits under essentialist ontology.

The two parts of original sin with two different ontologies correspond to justification and sanctification which also have two different ontologies. Justification is an external imputation of Christ's righteousness and is based on the personal/relational ontology whereby a person is given a status of being righteous. This corresponds to the immediate imputation of Adam's sin along with all other sins that the individual commits himself. The person even though he still has the hereditary guilt or sinful nature is fully and wholly righteous because of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Also, just like the immediate imputation is primary and the foundation to the mediate imputation so also justification is primary and the foundation to sanctification. Sanctification is the Holy Spirit working in the Christian to live a Christian or holy life. It fits under essentialist ontology of how something is inherently. This work of the Holy Spirit in the believer is

⁹⁹ Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 400.

¹⁰⁰ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:538.

internal and is a life-long fight of the hereditary corruption that still inheres in the believer. The Holy Spirit's work of moving and guiding the believer in his fight against sin is only completed on the Last Day when the believer will then be completely inherently righteous.

6.6 Justification and Union with Christ

6.6.1 The Traditional Reformed Structure of Placing the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness in the Model of Union with Christ

As discussed earlier in Chapter Two, the Traditional Reformed place the imputation of Christ's righteousness into an overarching structure of union with Christ and covenant theology.¹⁰¹ However, the Traditional Reformed tradition has not always agreed exactly on what union with Christ means. There are basically two views on what union with Christ means as the foundation for justification. The first is that union with Christ is the mystical union where Christ dwells in the believer's heart by faith and thus the believer is imputed with Christ's righteousness. This was the earlier view of the Traditional Reformed held by theologians such as John Calvin and John Owen.¹⁰² A later view that has arisen in the Traditional Reformed tradition is that union with Christ is a much broader category and is both representative and mystical. This second view is what was used to defend the imputation of Christ's righteousness during the imputation

¹⁰¹ The covenant theology of the Traditional Reformed in relation to justification will not be covered in this thesis because in the Imputation Controversy the doctrine of union with Christ was emphasized in defending the imputation of Christ's righteousness and because interacting with the Reformed covenant theology would exceed the parameters of this thesis.

¹⁰² See Chapter 2 for the brief discussion on their views.

controversy. John Murray in his book *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* discusses how union with Christ has a two-fold meaning.

Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ. Indeed the whole process of salvation has its origin in one phase of union with Christ and salvation has in view the realization of other phases of union of Christ. This can be readily seen if we remember that brief expression which is so common in the New Testament, namely, “in Christ.” It is that which is meant by “in Christ.” It is quite apparent that the Scripture applies the expression “in Christ” to much more than the application of redemption. A certain aspect of union with Christ, it is true, belongs strictly to the application of redemption.¹⁰³

John Murray sees union with Christ to be an over-arching structure of viewing all of the steps of the *ordo salutis*. Union with Christ for him is the foundation to each step and this union is representative. Christ is the representative head of the church or the elect.¹⁰⁴ In his book on Romans 5:12–21 and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and Adam’s sin Murray argues that the parallelism in this section teaches that union with Christ is the same as union with Adam in that it is a representative union. Adam and Christ are the representative and legal heads of those under them.¹⁰⁵ Yet in Murray’s view, Adam

¹⁰³ John Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), 201–202.

¹⁰⁴ “Union with Christ is a very inclusive subject. It embraces the wide span of salvation from its ultimate source in the eternal election of God to its final fruition in the glorification of the elect. It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption; it underlies every aspect of redemption both in its accomplishment and in its application. Union with Christ bind all together and insures that to all for whom Christ has purchased redemption he effectively applies and communicates the same.” Murray, *Redemption—Accomplished and Applied*, 205.

¹⁰⁵ “In the relation of Adam to posterity we must posit more than natural headship, for the simple reason that, as we found above, this kind of union provides no analogy to the union that exists between Christ and his people...In the case of Christ and the justified we know that the union is that of vicarious representation.” Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, 40.

represents the world and his sin is imputed to the world, but Christ represents only believers or the elect and thus His righteousness is imputed only to them.¹⁰⁶ Murray loses the twofold symmetry in the imputation of Christ's righteousness and of Adam's/the world's sin in justification.

To summarize, union with Christ in the Traditional Reformed View is that Christ represents all the elect or believers in every stage of His ministry and work on earth (representational/corporate union). The believer receives the benefits of Christ's historical work including the imputation of His righteousness by then being joined to Christ through faith (mystical union). The representational or corporate union with Christ is what was used by the Traditional Reformed theologians to defend the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Horton in defending the imputation of Christ's righteousness against N. T. Wright says that union with Christ is what keeps justification from becoming "abstract or legal fiction."¹⁰⁷ John Piper in his defense against Robert Gundry and the Progressive Reformed also bases the imputation of Christ's righteousness on union with Christ.¹⁰⁸ Brian Vickers who gives the most detailed exegetical defense of the imputation of Christ's righteousness creates a synthesis of three Pauline texts

¹⁰⁶ Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, 89.

¹⁰⁷ "The Reformers and their heirs labored the point that it is Christ's successful fulfillment of the trial of the covenantal representative that is imputed or credited to all who believe. This is what keeps justification from being abstract or a legal fiction, since the justified do in fact possess 'in Christ' the status of those who have perfectly fulfilled all righteousness." Horton, *Five Views of Justification*, 94.

¹⁰⁸ See John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ Should we Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 50, 62–63 and 84–85.

(Romans 4; Romans 5:19 and 2 Corinthians 5:21) that deal with the imputation of Christ's righteousness, coming up with four overarching themes. One of these themes is union with Christ which he says is a representative union.¹⁰⁹

Finally, Paul speaks of being justified only insofar as the believers are identified in Christ. There is nothing the believer has that he does not have in Christ. In regard to justification, we saw that union primarily refers to being incorporated into Christ as the covenantal head of God's promised new creation. As the second Adam, Christ's obedience in life and in death establishes the standing of all those united with him. It is extraordinarily difficult to locate the believer's standing before God anywhere else than on the basis of Christ's righteousness.¹¹⁰ All these considerations argue for the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Vickers uses the representational union that Christ has with those He represents as the basis and defense of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. For Vickers this union is only with believers or the elect (this is the same as Horton and all the Traditional Reformed theologians going back to John Calvin's doctrine of limited atonement). Vicker's argument is convincing. If Christ represents believers, then whatever He does would "count" to them as well. The question for the next section is where does "union with Christ" fit in Lutheran theology and is there anything we can learn from the Traditional Reformed in using union with Christ as an argument for the imputation of Christ's righteousness?

¹⁰⁹ Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 195.

¹¹⁰ Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 216.

6.6.2 Union with Christ in Lutheran Theology

In Lutheran theology justification is not based on the mystical union. Rather the mystical union is an effect of justification according to the *Formula of Concord*. The *Formula of Concord* makes a distinction between the righteousness of faith and the mystical union which is the indwelling of God in the believer. Faith receives the righteousness of Christ and thereby the believer is justified. Then God dwells in the believer as a temple of the Triune God.¹¹¹ Lutherans agree with the Traditional Reformed that there is a mystical union with Christ, but Lutherans place this after justification and not before. The danger of placing the mystical union first and basing justification on it is that it goes against the imputation of Christ's righteousness being undeserved and not being based on anything inherently in the sinner. Also basing the imputation of Christ's righteousness on the mystical union would mean the imputation would no longer be located in the realm of relational ontology but in essentialist ontology. To base justification off the mystical union would again cause an individual to look inward for their assurance of justification instead of outward to what Christ has done for the world.

Besides the mystical union there is another type of union with Christ which the Traditional Reformed used in the imputation controversy and that is representational union (as described above). The *Book of Concord* does not place justification into the structure of representational union with Christ as the Traditional Reformed do.

¹¹¹ FC SD III. 54

Nevertheless, just because the *Book of Concord* is silent on representational union does not mean that such a concept is wrong nor unnecessary. In fact, such a structure makes sense of the exegetical passages on objective justification and the imputation of Adam's sin which were discussed earlier in Chapter Four. The Adam-Christ parallel in Romans 5:12–21 is clearly a representational union. The only problem with the Traditional Reformed structure of representational union is that it takes union with Christ to be only for believers or the elect. This is due to their doctrine of limited atonement. However, since atonement is universal and is the legal basis for the universal or objective justification of the world, there is no basis to make such a limitation to this type of union with Christ.

Therefore, objective justification fits the concept of union with Christ being a representational union whereby Christ represents the entire world. Christ is united with the world in being the Second Adam or New Head of humanity. The union of Christ with the world would be the overarching setting for Christ's universal atonement and for the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world (objective justification). The universal atonement of Christ and the imputation of His righteousness which He earns as mankind's substitute and head is received by faith- subjective justification. After being justified by faith the believer also experiences the added gift of the mystical union which is the indwelling of the Triune God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The imputation controversy between the Traditional Reformed, Progressive Reformed and New Perspective on Paul is an insightful debate which helps us Missouri Synod Lutherans to understand better the relationship between the imputation of Christ's righteousness and objective justification as well as defend both doctrines. From looking at the controversy and comparing it to our Lutheran theology drawn from Scripture and summarized in the Confessions we see that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the core of objective justification. This was demonstrated in three ways.

First, the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness unites Christology, atonement and justification giving justification its Christological center. This was demonstrated in chapters three and four which defined what the doctrine of the righteousness of God means in the Bible. It is true that the righteousness of God can be an attribute of God or an activity of God but in justification it is a status which is given. The basis for this status being given to the sinner is the righteousness that Christ earned in His perfect life and obedient death. Christ's death is a universal atonement for the whole world which expiates sin and propitiates God. Justification is a forensic action where the righteousness of Christ is imputed. Thus, the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the strand which unites Christology, atonement and justification.

Second, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the world. This was demonstrated in chapter five. In that chapter key passages from Romans and 2 Corinthians were explored showing how Adam's sin is imputed to the entire world and Christ's righteousness is also imputed to the entire world. Chapter five was the exegetical heart of the thesis in demonstrating objective justification is a Scriptural doctrine. The dogmatic implications from the exegetical work in chapter five is that the imputation of Christ's righteousness should not be limited to subjective justification only. The imputation of Christ's righteousness is in both objective and subjective justification. The word "impute" means "to count." It does not necessarily mean confer or apply. The application or conferral of Christ's righteousness happens in subjective justification. In objective justification, Christ represents the entire world as its new head and earns a complete righteousness for it. God imputes to the world Christ's righteousness that He earned as the world's representative and substitute in His perfect life and atonement upon the cross. A person receives this imputation through God's Word and Sacraments creating faith in them.

Lastly, the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the core of objective justification was demonstrated in chapter six with five aspects of the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification. First, was that the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the essence of justification meaning that the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of sins are the same act. The second aspect had to do with the two types and two modes of imputation. The imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification is by grace (type) and is immediate (mode).

Third, the imputation in subjective and objective justification is the same imputation of Christ's righteousness. There are not two separate imputations, one for the world and the other for individuals when they come to faith. Fourth, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification (and in subjective justification) is based on personal or relational ontology. This helped answer the question of how the imputation of Adam's sin and Christ's righteousness to the world is not "unfair" or "unjust." Last, the imputation of Christ's righteousness in objective justification should be in the context of a representational union with Christ. There are two types of union with Christ. The mystical union and a representational union. The mystical union is Christ dwelling in the believer's heart after they come to faith. The mystical union is not a proper context for objective justification. Some of the early Traditional Reformed theologians placed justification in the context of the mystical union. However, the mystical union in Scripture and in the *Book of Concord* always occurs after justification through faith (subjective justification). The other type of union with Christ is a representational union which means Christ is the representative or head of the world. Everything that Christ does, He does not for His own person but as a substitute for sinners. This is the proper context to view objective justification and how everything Christ does is counted or imputed to sinners.

Therefore, the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the core of the doctrine of objective justification. It gives justification its Christological center. To paraphrase C. F. W. Walther, what gives Christ all glory in justification gives sinners all comfort.

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