



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 19.7 – The Doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins

God Has Pronounced the Whole World Righteous in Christ

Since God demands perfect righteousness, and none of us is righteous, it is obvious that if we are going to have such a perfect righteousness, it will have to come from outside of ourselves. We do not have such righteousness, nor is there any way we can attain it by any strength or desire in us. The perfect righteousness that we need comes from God. The prophet Isaiah wrote: **“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness”** (Isaiah 61:10). The perfect righteousness we need can come to us only from God. When we are covered and clothed with this righteousness from God, then we are saved, then we have reason to be joyful. Even though we are not righteous, God, the just Judge, pronounces us righteous. He justifies us.

But how can God be a just Judge if He declares sinners like us righteous? The answer to this question demonstrates God’s love and God’s wisdom. This is God’s answer as summarized by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans: **“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood”** (Romans 3:23-25). How many have sinned? All. How many are justified (declared righteous)? All. On what basis does God justify them all? It is because of the redemption of Christ Jesus, because of the bloody sacrifice He made on the cross as the payment for all human sin of all ages and places. It was God’s undeserved love (**“grace”**) that led Him to do this. It was God’s wisdom that figured out the way for Him to be just and punish sin, and at the same time to love and save the sinner. Paul tells us that there was nothing in us that qualified us to be justified. He tells us clearly that God **“justifies the ungodly”** (Romans 4:5).

Perhaps the clearest presentation of God’s justification of all ungodly sinners occurs in the fifth chapter of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Here we have a grand comparison between Adam and Jesus Christ. This comparison begins at Romans 5:12 and continues to the end of the chapter. Here is Paul’s summary: **“As through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous”** (Romans 5:18-19). Adam’s offense in Genesis 3 brought about God’s judgment on the whole human race, resulting in condemnation for all human beings. But then came the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who was not disobedient like Adam but was perfectly obedient in all things, even to the point of death. Whereas Adam’s disobedience led to condemnation, Christ’s obedience led to the opposite of condemnation, namely, justification. How many were condemned through Adam’s disobedience? All. How many were justified (declared righteous) through Jesus’ obedience? All. Thus, God in fact has justified the whole world. God has declared or pronounced the whole world to be righteous because of Christ’s actions of obedience, which included His perfect obedience to the law of God throughout His life as well as His obedience to His Father’s will in allowing Himself to be punished on the cross for the sin of the world.

God has justified the whole world on the basis of Christ’s redemption of the whole world. There is no sin for which Jesus was not punished on the cross. For this reason, God is just in declaring all persons righteous in Christ. When Christ was punished for the sin of the world, all the sins of everyone were

punished. Therefore God is righteous in saying: "The sins of the whole world are forgiven. I declare all of you to be righteous and holy in Christ."

The prophet Jeremiah had foretold the coming of this perfect righteousness for the world: **"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, 'that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS'"** (Jeremiah 23:5-6). We are not righteous in ourselves, but the Lord Jesus, the Son of David, is our righteousness. Clothed in His robes and covered by His righteousness, we are holy, and this means also that our sins are forgiven.

Paul explained this to the Christians in Corinth like this: **"But of Him (God) you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord'"** (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). And again: **"For He (God) made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"** (2 Corinthians 5:21). All human sin went to Christ, and He was punished for it. All of Christ's righteousness then went to the sinful world. Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves that Jesus' sacrifice was satisfactory, and God could now freely declare the whole world to be righteous in Christ. Jesus **"was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification"** (Romans 4:25). **"Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him"** (Romans 5:9).

One of the confessions that is accepted by the Church of the Lutheran Confession is the *Brief Statement* of 1932, which states: *"Scripture teaches that God has already declared the whole world to be righteous in Christ"* (#17). All the world's sins were placed on Christ, and He was punished for them on the cross. When God raised Him from the dead, God declared Him righteous and the whole world righteous in Him. This justification of the whole world in Christ is called universal justification, because it applies to the whole world of sinners. It is also called objective justification, which means that it is a ready blessing for the whole world, whether it is believed or accepted by the sinner or not.

Questions

1. What kind of righteousness do we need in order to face the holy God?
2. What is the only righteousness that can come from within us?
3. Where must the righteousness that we need come from?
4. What is the basis for God's justification of the world?
5. What is universal justification?
6. Give the Scriptural proof for universal justification.
7. How does the comparison between Adam and Christ teach universal justification?
8. Why does the Bible say that God "justifies the ungodly"?
9. What does the resurrection of Christ have to do with justification?
10. Why can Jesus rightly be called "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"?