

TEXT: Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Dear Justified Friends in Christ,

We have been looking at the work of Christ using the many different pictures that God gives us in the Holy Scriptures. Two weeks ago we looked at that work through the picture of redemption, that is, Christ paid a ransom to free us from sin, death and hell. Last Sunday we considered that work through the picture of atonement. Christ covered all of our sins with his holy, precious blood. This morning, our text reminds us of what Christ's active and passive obedience, that is, his perfect life and innocent suffering and death accomplished through another picture, a picture that comes to mind with the word justification in our text. Paul teaches us through this picture that **WE ARE JUSTIFIED!**

The word justify is a judicial word. It looks at the work of Christ from the standpoint of a courtroom. In a criminal proceeding the accused is brought before the judge. At the end of the proceeding the judge issues a verdict. Paul has this picture in mind in our text this morning. The whole world has been brought into God's courtroom. The verdict pronounced therefore, is a universal one; every man from the time of Adam and Eve down to the last individual to be born before the Last Day, Judgment Day, is there in that courtroom. You and I are also in that courtroom. The verdict that God declares is called *objective* because the entire world and each individual in that world is the object of that verdict to be pronounced by the judge, whether any of them like it or not, believe it or not, or even know about it or not. God is the only one in the courtroom who acts, and his actions are not affected in the least by what any mere mortal thinks or does or might say. The accused is either declared guilty and condemned or pardoned and thus in effect pronounced innocent, not guilty.

Paul tells us that the whole world is guilty of sin and deserves death. Everyone from Adam on to the end of the world has disobeyed God. Everyone inherited Adam's sinful nature when they were conceived and born in sin. Everyone sins daily by either failing to do what God wants him to do or by doing what God has forbidden him to do. God tells us in the Bible that "**There is no one who does good, no, not one.**" So this is a cut and dry case, isn't it. We deserve God's judgment for our sin. For God in his Word tells us that "**the soul that sins will die.**" We deserve the verdict of guilty in God's courtroom because of our sin. We deserve to be separated from God in hell forever. Yes, Paul says that the **result of even one trespass, sin, was condemnation for all men, through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.** Adam's disobedience of God's command did not just have consequences for Adam. His sin affected us all because through Adam all of us became sinners who deserve condemnation in God's courtroom.

But this courtroom produces a most startling verdict. That verdict is called justification. This word means *to declare not guilty, to declare innocent*. Certainly that verdict is impossible in this court case where the whole world of sinners stands before God accused of undeniable sin. God should come down with a "Guilty" verdict right? All the evidence supports that verdict! But what does God declare? He declares, "Not Guilty!" Paul tells us why. "**the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men... through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.**" Who is Paul talking about with the word

“**one man**” and what act is he referring to with the words “**one act?**” Paul is talking about Jesus the Christ when he talks about the “**one**” who through his obedience made the many righteous. Paul is talking about Christ’s willing, substitutionary righteous life and innocent death with the words, “**one act of righteousness.**” Christ’s active and passive obedience to God’s will is what swung the verdict to “not guilty.” We are justified! God declares us “Not guilty!” Who is the us? Paul says that Christ’s work brought justification “**that brings life for all men.**” All were justified! And if all were justified, you and I were also justified in God’s court of law. Paul says that through Jesus’ obedience “the many will be made righteous.” What does Paul mean when he says “**the many?**” The answer is clear with a closer look at the verses surrounding that verse. We look at what Paul said in Romans 3:22- 24. “**There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**”

So if all have been declared justified, not guilty, why do some still go to hell? This answer Paul also gives in chapter 3:25. “**God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. Through the shedding of his blood, to be received by faith.**” Even though Christ redeemed all people and all were atoned by his blood, some did not believe this and therefore did not receive the blessing of Christ’s work. They enter God’s courtroom without Christ as their Advocate pleading not his merit, but their own. They lose their case because apart from the righteousness of Christ there is no righteousness on man’s part. Alone, he is unrighteous before God; he has done nothing right in God’s eyes. The Bible says that even his “good” works are like filthy rags in God’s eyes because they are imperfect. So when we talk about justification we must always remember that it is like a coin with two sides. On the one side we see that God justified the whole world through Christ. We call this *objective justification*. On the other side of the coin where we look at the justification of the individual we see from Scripture that it is by faith that each person who believes receives that verdict so that they receive the blessings of justification. Faith is the receiving hand of God’s work through Christ, the forgiveness of sins. We call this side of the coin *subjective justification*.

And what blessings do we receive through God’s verdict. Well, obviously, joy! We know we are guilty and in no way deserve the verdict “not guilty.” When we hear what God has declared it’s unbelievable. Yes, but it is true! And even though we are shocked, we rejoice! We have a new lease on life now. We want to use our whole life to praise the God who has through his Son given us the “Not Guilty!” verdict.

We also have peace with God! God’s wrath and judgment has been turned away by Christ. Oh the relief we now have as we approach the end of the world or the end of our days in this world before we die physically. Paul said as much in Romans, “**Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**” (Romans 5:1 and 8:1)

We have confidence concerning the future! As God’s dearly loved and believing children we know that nothing can separate us from his love. Paul reveals that confidence in Romans 8 when he says, “³¹ **What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³² **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** ³³ **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.** ³⁴ **Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** ³⁵ **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?** ³⁶ **As it is written:**

**“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^[a]**

³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** ³⁸ **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

Can the verdict be reversed on God’s part and we lose the blessings of freedom from the punishment our sins justly deserve? We can only lose the joy, the peace and forgiveness we have if we reject God’s gracious gift by faith. Jesus said it clearly. **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** Unbelief can still condemn us to hell even though God does not want it that way. He want us to repent, believe and be saved. Do not think that you can continue to willfully sin and live any way you want to and still get to heaven without faith in Jesus. One who truly believes in Jesus is one who wants and struggles to live a new life in accordance with God’s Word. Jesus said, “Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and obey it.” A believer is one who trusts in Jesus alone for forgiveness of sins, eternal life in heaven with Jesus and salvation and his faith produces good fruit.

So let’s summarize what we have learned the past three weeks about the Work of God using the pictures that God gives us in his Holy Word. God had declared the whole world justified, that is, forgiven. He made this declaration prompted by grace alone (*prompting cause*) and alone because of the work of Christ in his active and passive obedience as our substitute (*meritorious cause*). The personal benefit of this universal justification becomes our own through faith alone; God gives faith or trust in the promise of the gospel through the proclamation of the gospel in Word and sacraments (*effecting cause*). Those who believe the gospel and who die in saving faith (*instrumental cause*) believe it not by accident or coincidence, not by some decision that they made of themselves or by some natural ability in themselves, but because already in eternity God in his free grace elected them and then in time ruled over all history so that they would hear the gospel, believe it, and die in saving faith and so enter heaven. This is our confidence because God has declared us “Not guilty!” Justified! Amen.