

GOD'S RECONCILIATION IS A FACT BEFORE PEOPLE BECOME BELIEVERS

The teaching of reconciliation can be presented in various ways: forgiveness of sins, justification before God, redemption, or sonship. These are all ways of declaring the same fact and act of God in Christ. Different comparisons come into play, but the heart of the matter remains the same. None of them should be used exclusively. The nature and richness of the Gospel are probably best preserved where each is used for the special emphasis it contributes.

God's act of justification is complete and perfect in itself (Rm 5:9,10). But it has to be brought to human beings, which is done by God's means for this purpose: the Gospel and the Sacraments, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and people must accept it for themselves and make it their possession. Faith is the act that the Holy Spirit works, and faith receives the saving gift of reconciliation. Faith is pure reception and cannot be regarded in any way as causing God's reconciling act. The sinner is reconciled by faith.

Reconciliation, redemption, sonship, and justification aren't different parts of the same plan. They are different ways of presenting the same message. Writers of the New Testament like John and Peter don't use the verb "justify" at all. Actually, "forgiveness" is simply the obverse of "justification", the other side of the same coin. My forgiveness means that my sins are not reckoned against me, and I receive that through faith. Justification means that God reckons the righteousness of my Saviour to me, and I receive that by faith. Both may be used either objectively or subjectively. I may say both "God has justified the whole world" and "Forgiveness must be preached to all nations." I may also say both "The sinner who is justified through faith will live", and "Through his name, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness for his sins." It should be enough to examine several Scriptural passages, In Romans 5:9-10 "justification" and "reconciliation" are parallel. They are varied ways of speaking about the same truth:

9 Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!

One of the notes in the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* is quite useful here in showing the parallelism:

To reconcile is "to put an end to hostility", and is closely related to the term 'justify', as the parallelism in vv, 9-10 indicates:

v.9

*we have been justified
by His blood
we shall be saved*

v.10

*we were reconciled
through the death of his Son
we shall be saved*

Another example, 2 Cor 5:18-20:

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you in Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Here again, "reconciled" is parallel to "not imputing." The one is another way of saying the other. "Not imputing" is another way of saying, "justifying" for St Paul. Compare verbs in Romans 4:4-8:

"credited", "justifies", "credited", "credits", "forgiven", and "not count." Again, in 2 Cor 5:18 the language is at first objective, as the references to "the world" and "men" indicate. It becomes personal and subjective at the end of verse 20: "Be reconciled" is a second-person verb. Paul uses the word "reconcile" in a subjective way in v.20. The appeal to individual people to receive God's objective reconciliation (being reconciled) is based on the objective action of God in Christ once for all. When the Saviour died, God's justice was satisfied. His anger was appeased. God was reconciled to the whole world. This does not mean, however, that the entire world has received the benefits of Christ's atoning sacrifice, The sinner enjoys peace with God only when he comes to faith.