

# A Lutheran Response to Justification: Five Views

JORDAN COOPER



If one were asked to explain the distinctiveness of Lutheran theology within the church catholic, one word would likely come to mind: justification. If one aspect of doctrine defines Lutheran theology over against other theologies, it is the centrality of justification by faith alone. This issue, described by Luther as “the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls,” was the heart of the conservative Reformation and remains so within churches of the Augsburg Confession. This being the case, it is surprising that the recent volume *Justification: Five Views*,<sup>1</sup> neglects to include a Lutheran contributor. The editor explains that this is because Michael Horton’s confessional Reformed approach is thought to encapsulate confessional Lutheran approaches to the doctrine.<sup>2</sup> Despite the similarities however, Horton’s essay fails to display the uniquely Lutheran approach to justification as it is expounded upon in Luther’s Galatians commentary and explained and defended in the Lutheran Confessions. This article is an attempt to bring a Lutheran voice into this dialogue, offering a unique and biblical approach to Paul’s theological concerns in Galatians and Romans.

When reading through this volume on justification, a confessional Lutheran will find several points of both agreement and disagreement with all the contributors to this volume. First, Michael Horton outlines the traditional Reformed view. He frames his discussion of the doctrine of justification within the realm of Reformed federalism<sup>3</sup> and Vosian Biblical theology.<sup>4</sup> Christ comes to earth to fulfill the covenant of works that Adam broke, along with the nation of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Through this framework he defends *sola fide*, the imputation of Christ’s merit to the believer’s account, and the

vicarious substitutionary atonement of Christ. He approaches justification in a purely legal context.<sup>6</sup>

Michael Bird writes about what he labels a “modified Reformed” perspective. He approves of the soteriological context of justification contra the proponents of the New Perspective on Paul, while admitting that the Reformation tradition has not always grasped the broad scope of Paulinism. Bird (rightly, I think) demonstrates that the resurrection plays a more prominent role in Pauline theology than has been accepted in the West. In doing so, however, he denies the Reformed and Lutheran approaches to imputation by denying that Christ’s fulfillment of the law is imputed to believers. Forgiveness alone brings salvation.

The New Perspective on Paul is defended by James D.G. Dunn, one of the movement’s most able and prolific scholars. Dunn proposes that the New Perspective is not necessarily at odds with the old perspective on Paul but serves as a corrective of a minimalist approach taken by Lutheran interpreters who privilege the soteriological and existential aspects of justification over his other concerns. Dunn argues that Paul’s concern in the epistles of Galatians and Romans, wherein he expounds upon the notion of justification, is not merely that of individual salvation but of table fellowship. Paul was addressing the issue of covenant membership. Jewish Christians limited covenant membership to those who followed those laws that distinguished Jewish identity from the Gentiles. Thus Paul’s concern is for ethnic inclusivism in light of ethnocentric Judaism. The law refers not primarily to good works as such but to those aspects of the law defining one as a member of Abraham’s family according to the flesh.

Veli-Matti Karkkainen defends justification as *theosis*. Rather than using Eastern Orthodox sources, Karkkainen produces his approach to the issue primarily from his understanding of the new Finnish perspective on Luther popularized by Tuomo Mannermaa. For Luther, there is a real-ontic aspect of justification wherein one participates in deity through the indwelling of Christ. Karkkainen goes far beyond Mannermaa in this regard by outright denying the legal aspects of justification in Luther’s theology and asserting that the Lutheran Confessions take a fundamentally different approach to justification by distinguishing imputation from renewal.

For Karkkainen’s Luther there is no distinction between justification and sanctification. There is, rather, continuity between Luther and Roman Catholic dogma.

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JORDAN COOPER is a student in the Ph.D. program at the London School of Theology

1. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy et al, *Justification: Five Views* (Westmont, IL: IVP, 2011). Contributors to the volume of essays include Michael S. Horton, Michael F. Bird, James D.G. Dunn, Veli-Matti Karkkainen, Gerald O’Collins, and Oliver Rafferty.
2. “Horton’s traditional Reformed view is functionally identical in all the significant theological aspects to the traditional Lutheran view.” *Justification*, 10.
3. Or alternatively known as “covenant theology.” Michael Horton has an excellent introduction to Reformed federal theology in his *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).
4. That is, Horton is in line with the “Biblical Theology” movement within conservative Reformed churches stemming from the work of Gerhardus Vos in *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1975).
5. Horton affirms the concept of republication, wherein the covenant of works in the garden is reconstituted to the nation of Israel. He draws heavily from Meredith Kline on this point.

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6. Horton is willing to place sanctification as an effect of justification, rather than twin benefits of union with Christ that have no direct connection with one another. He uses speech-act theory to defend this in his book, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

Finally, the Roman Catholic view is discussed by two authors: Gerard O'Collins and Oliver Rafferty. The latter offers a historical overview of the discussion of justification. Rafferty correctly reminds the reader that the Roman Catholic view of justification depends on grace. All humans are sinners, and need grace to be freed from this state. He affirms that God alone brings about justification through grace, yet this act of justification is a process wherein one merits grace. However, Rafferty is quick to point out that, according to Augustine, these works themselves are gifts. Gerard O'Collins writes of his personal journey dealing with the issue of justification within the development of his theology. Though a fascinating article that should be commended to the reader, it does not directly pertain to the issue at hand.

### AN ALTERNATE PROPOSAL

Though I appreciate the Reformation heritage of Horton's perspective, the bold resurrection theology of Michael Bird, the scholarly acumen of James Dunn, the interaction with Patristic soteriological concepts in Karkkainen, and the in-depth historical treatment of Rafferty, it is apparent to me that Paul's full-orbed doctrine of justification has not been rightly expounded in this volume. The five-hundred year old voice of Martin Luther continues to speak to our church, and this is an effort to allow him once again to shine the bright light of the Lutheran Reformation into contemporary dialogue regarding this central issue.

### DEFINING JUSTIFICATION

The first confessional statement of the Reformation on justification comes from the Augsburg Confession:

Our Churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight. (AC IV [McCain, 33])<sup>7</sup>

Justification is not defined per se in the above quotation but several realities are affirmed: first, that justification comes through faith alone; second, that it involves an imputing of righteousness; and third, that it is a result of Christ's death.

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther gives a more straightforward definition of the term "justification":

I do not know how to change in the least what I have previously and constantly taught about justification. Namely, that through faith, as St. Peter says, we have a new and clean heart, and God will and does account us entirely righteous and holy for the sake of Christ our Mediator. Although sin in the flesh has not yet been completely removed or become

dead, yet He will not punish or remember it. (SA III, XIII, 1 [McCain, 283])

Note that Luther's definition of justification contains two aspects, the legal and the ontological. On the one hand, Luther confesses that we are imputed as entirely righteous through the alien righteousness of Jesus Christ, and on the other, he confesses that through the means of faith, we receive a new heart. Both are subsumed under the term "justification" in this article.

In his essay, Horton presents a Reformed approach in upholding a purely legal understanding of the term justification. It includes imputation of righteousness and forgiveness. Though I admire the desire to distinguish the Reformation approach to justification from that of Rome and various Eastern theologies, a mere legal understanding fails to do justice to the exegetical witness, as well as Luther's exposition of the issue.

When the protestant scholastic age began in the early seventeenth century, there was a desire to clearly distinguish various theologies from one another. Lutheran theology was defined in a polemical context, which though often beneficial to the church, sometimes resulted in the loss of Luther's own theology. This is the unfortunate case with the doctrine of justification. Lutheran theologians followed the Reformed tradition in defining justification. In a typical explanation of the scholastic approach, Hoenecke writes, "Justification is a judicial act of God, since out of grace he declares sinful human beings, who have fallen into eternal punishment on account of sin, to be righteous for Christ's sake without any merit on their part."<sup>8</sup> Though theologically wise as a means of distinguishing imputation and transformation, this scholastic approach has not always captured the uniqueness of Luther's doctrine.

Not only in the Smalcald Articles, but also in Melancthon's Apology, justification is seen as a regenerative work with ontological implications. "We have shown that through faith alone we are justified, that is, unrighteous people are made righteous, or regenerated" (Ap IV, 117). This is not to say, however, that an effective change in the heart is ever the cause of imputation. Rather, imputation is the cause of regeneration and a renewed life. As Schlink states, "the 'making righteous' must be understood exclusively in the light of the 'pronouncing righteous'; the 'pronouncing righteous' is not to be understood in the light of the 'making righteous.'"<sup>9</sup> Justification is an act of imputation and declaration that has a true ontological effect.

### JUSTIFICATION AS GOD'S EFFECTIVE SPEECH

To gain an understanding of the relationship between imputation and renewal, one need not go directly to Paul but to the beginning of the Bible. "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:3). God is a God who speaks with power. He does not speak descriptively but as a divine potentate giving a command that is then brought into reality. Whereas human speech either describes, questions, or gives commands, God's pronouncements enact what they proclaim. God says that it is so, and it is so.

7. References to the Lutheran Confessions are from Paul T. McCain et al, eds., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, a Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord. Second Edition* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006). All references to Holy Scripture are from the ESV.

8. Adolph Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics Volume III* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2003), 318. This of course is theologically correct as far as it goes.

9. Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1961), 95. Schlink states this in relation to Melancthon's Apology.

When God justifies the sinner, he is declared righteous, and consequently *is* righteous. God's word is a life-giving word, a creative word. As God declares the sinner to be justified, life is brought from death; a new man is created *ex nihilo*. This is the point Paul makes in Romans 4,

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Rom 4:16-25)

Abraham had faith that God's promise to give an offspring would come to pass in spite of Sarah's barren womb. Abraham was aware of the biological fact that having a child with a barren woman is impossible. However, Abraham knew that God's word is powerful and brings to pass what it declares, despite what human reason might speculate. In the Pauline argument, Abraham's faith in God's creative power is analogous to the new life that Christ brings to those of faith. Those who have faith are pronounced righteous and consequently a resurrection occurs. A new man is created in place of the old. As God's act, it occurs monergistically. Our justification, our rebirth, is solely the result of God's omnipotence as displayed in the act of creation *ex nihilo*.

At this point, I must express my appreciation for the attention drawn to the event of the resurrection in Michael Bird's essay. In the text above, Paul writes, Jesus was “delivered for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” This oft-ignored statement of Paul's connects justification not with Christ's merit, nor his death, but with his resurrection. Protestant Orthodoxy has typically connected justification with Christ's active obedience in fulfilling the law and his passive obedience in taking sin's penalty upon himself on the cross. The resurrection is often viewed as the proof of Christ's deity or as testimony that the cross is efficacious. However, Paul's theological conception (as well as Luther's) is much bigger.<sup>10</sup>

Paul describes the cross as the antidote to our trespasses. Man's sins were done away with on the cross when Christ became sin for us. We no longer have a debt owed to God because it has been wiped out.

He then describes the resurrection as the instrument of righteousness. Through Christ's resurrection, our righteousness is sealed before God and our resurrection is enacted. Through the resurrection of Christ, God proclaims us righteous, causing our resurrection. Our justification is union with Christ's resurrection, wherein his victory is imputed to us and God creates spiritual life from death. God's creative word is an eschatological word. Expounding upon Galatians 1:1, Luther writes,

Thus at the very outset Paul explodes with the entire issue he intends to set forth in this epistle. He refers to the resurrection of Christ, who rose again for our justification (Rom 4:25). His victory is a victory over the Law, sin, our flesh, the world, the devil, death, hell, an all evils; and this victory of His He has given to us. Even though these tyrants, our enemies, accuse us and terrify us, they cannot drive us into despair or condemn us. For Christ, whom God the Father raised from the dead, is the Victor over them, and He is our righteousness. Therefore “thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” 1 Cor 15:57). Amen. (AE 26: 21-22)<sup>11</sup>

Our eschatological vindication and resurrection has invaded the present age, bringing us into the kingdom of God. This, for Paul and for Luther, is all part of justification.

### THE PLACE OF JUSTIFICATION IN THE *ORDO SALUTIS*

Protestant scholasticism made a distinction between the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis*. The *historia salutis* is the order of God's redemption worked out in history. Thus the fall, the giving of the law, the exile, and the incarnation all belong on the *historia salutis*. The *ordo salutis* describes the personal aspect of redemption. It describes the order in which the benefits of Christ are applied to the believer. A typical Reformed approach to the *ordo* might include: election, effectual call, regeneration, illumination, union with Christ, definitive sanctification, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, progressive sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. The Orthodox Lutheran approach to the *ordo* often includes: calling, illumination, repentance, faith, justification, mystical union, sanctification, and preservation. Though distinguishing redemptive benefits to an extent can be helpful, ultimately, the systematization of salvation in such a manner obscures Luther's understanding of Paulinism.

For example, the divorce between justification and union with Christ has caused confusion among proponents of the New Perspective on Paul. N.T. Wright criticizes the Lutheran approach to imputation of righteousness by saying,

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

10. N.T. Wright has also brought the resurrection into central focus in his Pauline interpretation. See his *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

11. See also SA II, I, 1 (McCain, 263): “The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification...”

substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.<sup>12</sup>

This criticism depends upon a system in which the logical order of the application of salvation includes an imputation of Christ's righteousness prior to Christ's giving himself to the believer and dwelling in the believer's heart. Wright envisions a Christ who hands the defendant in a courtroom his attribute of righteousness, as if it is something that can be passed from one person to another. However, in Luther's own theology, Christ's righteousness is nothing less than Christ himself. Through faith we possess Christ, not a mere attribute or a pure legal verdict, but the second Person of the Trinity. As Luther states,

But so far as justification is concerned, Christ and I must be so closely attached that He lives in me and I in Him. What a marvelous way of speaking! Because He lives in me, whatever grace, righteousness, life, peace, and salvation there is in me is all Christ's; nevertheless, it is mine as well, by the cementing and attachment that are through faith, by which we become as one body in the Spirit. (AE 26: 167-168)

The resurrected and exalted Christ gives *himself* as our righteousness.

This is why the common assertion that Luther's doctrine of justification is a "legal fiction" is itself a fiction. The Christ we possess is real, and his righteousness is real. The union between two persons that occurs through faith is real, and God's declarative word is real. Nothing approaches the impersonal courtroom verdict Luther is commonly accused of. It is not a mere exchange in the heavenly courts without any effect upon those for whom redemption is a reality.

A fear of Osiandrian doctrine caused Lutherans in the seventeenth century to become more cautious about Luther's wording of Christ dwelling in us through faith, causing this indwelling to be placed solely under the rubric of the mystical union that is subsequent to justification. Andreas Osiander, a sixteenth century Lutheran theologian, contended that justification is not a legal term caused by the objective death and resurrection of Christ in history, but describes the process whereby the Christian becomes righteous through the indwelling of divinity. The greatness and vast nature of divinity swallows up and defeats sin, causing both forgiveness and growth in righteousness. This approach is condemned in Article III of the Formula of Concord.

Several of the contentions of the new Finnish interpretation of Luther have often been accused of Osiandrian tendencies. While it is my fear that Karkkainen's approach to deification essentially is a modified Osiandrianism, not all the proponents of this school of thought adopt such a radical approach. Mannermaa is quick to distinguish his approach to Luther's view of Christ's indwelling from that of Osiander. Whereas Osiander limits salvation to the divine nature of Christ, Mannermaa confesses that the Christ who indwells the Christian through faith brings salvation as a divine and human person. Mannermaa justifies this in part by the following quote:

Christian faith is not an idle quality or an empty husk in the heart, which may exist in a state of mortal sin until love comes along to make it alive. But if it is true faith, it is a sure trust and firm acceptance in the heart. It takes hold of Christ in such a way that Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in the faith itself. Thus faith is a sort of knowledge or darkness that nothing can see. Yet the Christ of whom faith takes hold is sitting in this darkness as God sat in the midst of darkness on Sinai and in the temple. Therefore our "formal righteousness" is not a love that informs faith; but it is faith itself, a cloud in our hearts, that is, trust in a thing we do not see, in Christ, who is present especially when He cannot be seen. Therefore faith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the present Christ. (AE 26: 129-130)

For Luther, Christ gives himself, both human and divine, to the one who has faith. In receiving the God-Man, one receives all that is his: his righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, sonship, and immortality. In turn, Christ takes unto himself all that is wicked in the believer.

This indwelling is only effective through the objective life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ in history. For Luther, it has to be the resurrected Christ who dwells in faith. As Luther states, "For those who maintain that righteousness comes by works deny Christ's resurrection and even ridicule it" (AE 27: 167-168). Christ's resurrection is essential for God's justifying act.

The reason that this understanding has often been lost is because of the predominance of a Reformed perspective on Christ's two natures. A Christ who is confined to heaven is not capable of bringing himself down to creation to unite and give himself to sinful humans through faith. Thus, the heavens—the realm of Christ's confined human nature—is where justification must occur. The Spirit serves as a mediating party, bringing Christ's righteousness as a verdict to those on earth who are covenantally, or representatively, united to him. I affirm with Karkkainen, a real-ontic union, as opposed to a pure legal and representative union often represented in Reformed theology.

Another unfortunate result of the clear distinctions of the *ordo salutis*, is that justification is described as a pure transfer term. This perspective has been debated among the interpreters of Paul in recent years. Does justification in Paul serve as a transfer term, a term of identification, eschatological vindication, or perhaps all three? In Reformed, and often Lutheran, Orthodoxy, justification is an initial one-time event wherein the believer is imputed righteous and forgiven. In essence, it is a transfer term and constitutes the beginning of the Christian life. The Christian life is then an ongoing process of sanctification wherein the Christian is gradually made intrinsically righteous as he grows in holiness.

In Luther's theology, good works never become the essence of the Christian life. Faith is continually the means by which man's standing before God is evaluated, secured, and renewed. As Luther confesses, "For so long as I go on living in the flesh, there is certainly sin in me. But meanwhile Christ protects me under the shadow of His wings and spreads over me the wide heaven of the forgiveness of sins, under which I live in safety" (AE 26: 231-232). God's declaration of justification is not a one-time event but is continual. As Christ gives himself as the resurrected and ascended eschatological Son of God in the Eucharist, the Christian receives this verdict of justification again. This union is strengthened, and alien righteousness is continually

12. N.T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 98.

imputed as the means by which man's relationship to God is mediated. When a pastor proclaims absolution to the penitent sinner, this human's words become, sacramentally, God's own declarative word by which he imparts life, forgiveness, and the righteousness of Christ.

God's creative act in us and for us is a continual act. It is not simply a gradual sanctification that continues after a one-time justification, but is a life of justification, not as a process, but of continual imputation and recreation. Every time the verdict of justification is placed on the sinner, he is again resurrected; he again participates in the eschatological life of Christ.

The continuous aspect of justification can be demonstrated from the two examples of Old Testament saints that Paul discusses in Romans 4 to defend his concept of justification apart from works. First Paul uses Abraham, citing the book of Genesis, "For what does the Scripture say? 'For Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness'" (Rom 4:3). It is worthy to note that Genesis 15 is not the beginning of Abraham's life of faith. It is in Genesis 12 that Abraham is called out of paganism, places his faith in God, and is promised to become a great nation. Surely Abraham was justified already in Genesis 12, but Paul is willing to place justification in Genesis 15. In Pauline theology, justification is not only a transfer term, denoting one's transition from wrath to grace (though it certainly is that), but encapsulates the whole life of faith. This strengthens Paul's point that "God justifies the ungodly" because it is not only that the pagan Abraham is ungodly; rather, the Abraham of Genesis 15 who had already abandoned everything he knew solely to follow God's command is ungodly. Even after his good deeds, Paul writes that Abraham is one who "does not work." Even after walking in faith, performing seemingly righteous actions, it is solely God's gracious imputation through faith that establishes Abraham's righteousness before God. This is a clear demonstration of *simul iustus et peccator*.

The second example given by Paul is that of David. Paul writes, "David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin'" (Rom 4:6-8). David does not speak in Psalm 32 about his initial conversion to a life of faith. He is not discussing his circumcision or his entrance into the national blessings given to Israel. Neither is he speaking of table fellowship and ethnocentric Judaism, as the New Perspective places the discussion of justification. David is describing himself in a state of confession and repentance. As David, after having ruled as a righteous king over Israel for some time, confessed his sin to God, his sins are forgiven and covered. As Paul states, God counted David righteous without regarding his works. David's justification, throughout life, rests solely on God's gracious imputation through faith. In his argument in the book of Romans, Paul significantly is pointing to two of the most venerated and righteous figures of the Old Testament. Abraham was given the promise that he would become a great nation, and David was promised that a descendant of his would continually reign on the throne; yet Paul is willing to call both of these saints "ungodly," and righteous apart from works. Paul is as patent as Luther in declaring the righteous and sinful nature of believers.

A common criticism to the Lutheran approach to justification is that the centrality of this single benefit of the *ordo salutis* neglects the rich Pauline conception of salvation. However, it has been shown

that justification is not an isolated soteric benefit, but encapsulates imputation, forgiveness, God's act of spiritual resurrection, and a real union with Christ that occurs through faith. Justification is also connected with what has been an oft-neglected teaching in some communities: adoption. Melancthon, in his Apology, freely interchanges the concept of justification and adoption. "Since we receive forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit through faith alone, faith justifies. For those reconciled are counted as righteous and as God's children" (Ap IV, 86 [McCain, 95]).

In line with Melancthon's Apology, Paul freely interchanges the two concepts in his Epistle to the Galatians:

Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Gal 3:4-9)

For Paul, the strict theological categories that developed in seventeenth-century scholasticism are not to be separated. Imputation, forgiveness, regeneration, and adoption are all encapsulated in the same reality that God saves sinners by grace alone, through faith alone.

The charge that Lutherans privilege one aspect of salvation, namely imputed righteousness, over all others, thus making it the sole criteria of Christian orthodoxy, is unfounded. When Luther claims that justification is the *praecipuus articulus christianae doctrinae* (the principal doctrine of the Christian faith), his precise meaning is not simply the importance of imputed righteousness, but that *Christ for us* always has precedence over *Christ in us*. God's work for sinners is at the heart of the Christian faith. This is why the common proof text used by Lutheran theologians for the centrality of justification is 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The text doesn't state directly that Paul was preaching imputed righteousness only but God's work for fallen humanity in the cross of Jesus Christ for salvation. This includes our imputation, forgiveness, regeneration, adoption, and redemption. This is why Chemnitz, while admitting that Augustine did not have a legal understanding of the doctrine of justification, still claims that Augustine understood the heart of the Christian message:

Thus Augustine describes 'righteousness' as the new obedience, 'grace' as the aid of the Holy Spirit, and 'to justify' as making an unrighteous man righteous. But on the real substance of the matter he is one with us in holding that the new obedience is never perfect in this life, and that thus there is only one hope for all the godly, namely, that they have an Advocate with the Father, who is the Propitiation for their sins.<sup>13</sup>

13. Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Part I*, trans. J.A.O Preus (St Louis: Concordia, 1989), 31.



## JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Though not an article on sanctification, the issue of justification cannot be addressed properly without discussing the issue of good works in the Christian life. In Reformed theology, justification and sanctification are described as separate benefits. Though one cannot be justified and not sanctified, nor be sanctified without justification preceding, there is no causal relationship between the two aspects of Christian existence. Justification is not the result of sanctification, nor is sanctification the result of justification. They are both simultaneous benefits of the reality of covenantal union with Christ. Justification is a monergistic act, wherein God imputes the sinner righteous through the merit of Christ through faith; sanctification is a work of cooperation between the regenerate man and God's renewing grace.

For Lutheran theology, sanctification and justification have an intimate connection that cannot be severed. Sanctification is the effect of justification. It is not a separate benefit of union with Christ but is the declarative reality of righteousness (in justification) becoming an effective intrinsic reality. Sanctification is thus the "working out" of justification.

Resurrection is thoroughly intertwined with the Pauline concept of sanctification, as it is with justification. In encouraging good works in the Christian life, Paul states, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11). Sanctification is a result of the resurrecting act of God through the declarative act of justification. As God's declarative word is continually given through preaching, Holy Communion, and absolution, the verdict of justification is efficacious unto sanctification. The resurrection life of Christ grows in us. Paul also uses this language as a motivation to perform good works in writing to the Colossians:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Col 3:1-4)

It is God's monergistic act of spiritual resurrection that sanctifies the Christian. His good works do not sanctify, nor does the law. God alone sanctifies through the means of grace. This does not mean, however, that the Christian is idle. Through God's act of sanctification, as the Christian participates in the resurrection life of Christ, he joyfully and freely performs good works. As Luther writes, "O, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever" (AE 35: 370). Yet these works are not to be identified as sanctification, but as the *result* of sanctification.

Sanctification comes, as well as justification, through the alien righteousness of Christ. Luther states this clearly: "There is a double life: my own, which is natural or animate; and an alien life, that of Christ in me. So far as my animate life is concerned, I am dead and am now living an alien life" (AE 26: 170). Though the Reformed

perspective on sanctification is one of synergism, salvation for Luther is monergistic from beginning to end. It is all an alien work, the work of one *extra nos*. For the Lutheran Reformation, both justification and sanctification are contained under the rubric of gospel rather than law. "For the Gospel contains the promise of the Spirit of renewal, who writes the Law into the heart of believers, Jer. 31:33. It also teaches how the beginnings of obedience, although imperfect and contaminated in many ways, are pleasing to God in those who are righteous for the sake of Christ."<sup>14</sup> This is a perspective that is not represented by any of the contributions to *Justification: Five Views*; sanctification is a monergistic act which is the continuation of justification through participation in Christ's resurrection.

## CONCLUSION

The differences between Luther's approach to justification and these five views have been made apparent. The Lutheran Reformation affirms the imputation of Christ's alien righteousness contra Bird, Dunn, and Rafferty. The Lutheran Confessions also accept a legal view of justification as is denied by Karkkainen. However, justification is not limited to a bare legal declaration, as is the case in the standard Reformed approach, but is a reality that encompasses legal and ontological dimensions. Luther's approach shares various similarities with Horton's perspective. However, Horton misses the sacramental context for Lutheran doctrine. There is no justification with an absent Christ, or without one baptism for the remission of sins, or Christ's true body and blood coming to his church through the Eucharist. Horton also divides justification from the other benefits of the *ordo salutis* in a manner incommensurate with the Book of Concord. None of the authors accept the unique perspective of Luther on sanctification as a monergistic act effected through God's justifying word, although Horton seems close to Luther. As the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation approaches, I pray that the dialogue on this essential issue will continue, as Luther's voice once again resounds to the church.

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14. Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici Vol II-III*, trans. J.A.O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 826.